

# **Dealing with Complexities of Identity Conflict: Contentious Narratives and Possibilities of Their Transformation**

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*Current challenges to peace require a new language and practice of security. In this paper, human security will be seen through the lenses of conflict analysis and resolution as an ultimate goal that can only be accomplished through sustainable and just solutions despite the intricacy and complexity of today's conflicts. The need for complex research and practical approaches has received prominence in conflict analysis and resolution field as a consequence of increasing complexities of modern conflict situations that require new types of interventions and theoretical approaches. This article discusses ways of dealing with and embracing complexity as an aspect of human security and an integral part of theoretical and practical approaches to conflict resolution with a special emphasis on the exploration of contentious narratives and their transformation.*

## **I. Introduction**

Standard discourse in the field of conflict resolution has been founded on theories and interventions that seek commonalities among parties and consensus building. This trend started at the inception of the field and works of scholars and practitioners such as John Burton, who further developed Abraham Maslow's basic human needs

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theory<sup>2</sup> that was reinforced through practice of interactive conflict resolution.<sup>3</sup> While these invaluable contributions marked the beginning of the field, conflict resolution has entered a stage of maturity marked by a constant need to revisit and re-examine theories and practices. Intractable and protracted identity conflicts resist most of the traditional approaches, which can be seen in the fact that the antagonisms as well as complex dynamics among parties persist long after agreements are signed and direct violence stopped. Agreements imply reduction of hostilities though simplification of conflict complexities on the ground, whereby so-called common and shared interests and goals tend to be extensions of discourses and policies of the powerful intervening parties that often lead to conflict intractability and impede sustainable solutions. It is not rare that such interventions clash with local conditions and understandings, which deem them inefficient and even harmful. To deal with current threats to human security such as intractable identity conflicts and to prevent their reemergence, we need both theoretical and practical approaches that go beyond agreements, shared paradigms and common interests and embrace complexity on the ground as a departure point for treating deep-rooted causes that persist through generations. I argue for the importance of exploring contentious narratives, through which threats, perceptions and meanings that reinforce or undermine human security circulate. In this paper, narrative inquiry is seen as a tool for understanding and dealing with the complexities that challenge human security and provide avenues for transformation and change in today's conflicts. My particular focus will be narratives generated within the context of identity conflict with emphasis on "negative peace" that tends to persist in the aftermath of such conflicts. "Negative peace", as defined by Galtung, refers to the "absence of direct violence"<sup>4</sup> while other factors such as restoration of relationships and creation of social systems that serve the needs of people are lacking, which significantly affects human security.

## II. Narratives as Loci for Understanding Human Security

While more narrow definitions of human security concentrate on impact of direct, armed violence on individuals and groups, broad definitions go further to encompass "freedom from fear and want", thus emphasizing not only basic human needs but also economic, ecological and political factors that contribute to human insecurity.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, human security will be looked at through the prism of its broad

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<sup>2</sup> Maslow, Abraham Harold, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Psychological Review (Issue 50), 1943, pp. 370-396.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, J. Ronald, *Interactive Conflict Resolution in Peacemaking*, in: Zartman, I. William and Lewis J. Rasmussen (eds.), *International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, 1997, pp. 239-272.

<sup>4</sup> Galtung, Johan, *Peace: Research, Education, Action: Essays in Peace Research*, Journal of Peace Research (Volume 5), Christian Ejlertsen, Copenhagen, 1975, at p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Schnabel, Albrecht, *The Human Security Approach to Direct and Structural Violence*, in: SIPRI Yearbook 2008, Appendix 2C, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, at p. 90.

definition. I argue that stopping or preventing direct violence and war is a critical step towards peace and human security, but such actions do not necessarily guarantee more secure and humane societies in the long run. Therefore, the approach to human security in this paper will focus on threats that are the consequence of “negative peace and structural violence”<sup>6</sup> such as lack of structural integration, willing interethnic cooperation and relationship restoration that are expressed through narratives, which will be the main loci for exploration of such threats to human security.

Social and structural conditions as well as power relations in a particular society are reflected in narratives that are tools for both perpetuation and change of status quo. Narratives are stories that create and give expression to personal and group identity as they “encode a body of shared knowledge to which persons are intellectually and emotionally committed”.<sup>7</sup> They enable the formation and interpretation of human conditions and actions through constant renegotiation of meaning and making sense of these conditions. As Barthes has suggested, stories are “*omnipresent and transcultural*”<sup>8</sup>, they give us insight into the meaning systems of individuals and groups. The powerful forces that challenge human security whether they are played out in social, economic, political or environmental levels are underpinned by the struggle over meaning. Struggle over meaning in the form of contentious narratives clearly reflects the struggle for access to power, human rights, resources and legitimation of current and past action on the ground that takes place at all societal levels. Access to the process of meaning-making in conflicting societies can feed social inequalities and insecurity through legitimation of certain individual and groups’ stories while silencing the others. Hence, narratives can be seen as key loci for understanding how contentious meanings can be renegotiated, which would subsequently contribute to transformation and change.

### III. Contentious Narratives and the Issue of Power

Following Foucault’s idea about power circulating through discourses, which legitimizes knowledge<sup>9</sup> and determines what is considered “truth”, we can look at power as both a force that can foster social inequality<sup>10</sup> or be an agent of progressive change. In Croatia, for example, the struggle for legitimacy and access to power has shifted from direct violence to the sphere of discourses. Croats and Serbs in Croatia still hold on to their different versions of history and present,

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<sup>6</sup> Galtung, Johan, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, pp. 167-191, at p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> Senehi, Jessica, *Constructive Storytelling: Building Community, Building Peace*. *Peace and Conflict Studies Journal* (Volume 9), 2002, pp. 41-63, at p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Herman, David, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, at p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981, pp. 92-102.

<sup>10</sup> Luke, Allan, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, in: Keeves, John P. and Gabriele Lakomski (eds.), *Issues in Education Research*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 161-173.

which has produced separate socio-cultural entities that exist as binary opposites to each other. The binary opposite meaning systems have become part of their identity, which is evident in their private and public narratives. Those systems have at its core the idea of positive, morally pure and superior «us» and evil, vicious and negative «them».<sup>11</sup> Thus the challenge to enduring human security in Croatia today is that both major ethnic groups, Croats and Serbs, seek legitimation of their own narratives and views of the past and present, through which they would position themselves on the higher moral grounds in relation to the 'Other'.

The narratives about human conditions, security and peace are significantly influenced by power relations, rank and status of groups and individuals. For example, Galtung argues that the very concept of peace in contemporary world is the Roman "pax"<sup>12</sup>, which serves the interest of the powerful to maintain status quo. In case of Croatia, the two major groups have different narratives of peace and human conditions, reflecting significant differences in power relations and status. Serbian version suggests rank disequilibrium, economic and political inequalities and cultural ghettoization stressing the need for expanded view of human security and peace that would encompass cultural and structural emancipation of minorities. Croatian version focuses on a narrower view of human security and peace portraying current absence of interethnic violence and cessation of open hostilities as a success story that implies perpetuation of current power relations and status quo. In this context, one can argue that the narratives can be powerful tools of political activity and distribution of power, which can either open or close the window of opportunities for certain groups.

During the 1990s war in Croatia, we saw how the shifts in power, structurally enforced from the outside in the form of Germany and Vatican's early recognition of the new state of Croatia, had been subtly instrumentalized through the discourse of freedom and right to self-determination, while the narrative related to the old order of Federal country and sovereign nation state of Yugoslavia had been pushed aside. Shifting order of power legitimizes knowledge and action, and determines what is considered truth and what will be silenced. However, the shifting global order of power does not mean that the local ethnocentric narratives related to past atrocities and war will cease to exist and that their complexity will be subsumed under a common narrative of European integrations. Ethnocentric narratives about

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<sup>11</sup> Rothbart, Daniel and Karina Korostelina, *The Enemy and the Innocent in Violent Conflicts*, in: Sandole, Dennis J.D., Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi (eds.), *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, Routledge, London and New York 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Galtung, Johan, *Social Cosmology and the Concept of Peace*, in: *Journal of Peace Research* (Volume 18), 1981, pp. 183-199.

victimhood and past glory of all nations in Yugoslavia have persisted side by side of the state-promoted unifying narrative and that is why they were so easily mobilized by nationalist leaders in the wake of Yugoslavia's dissolution.

The issue of Armenian genocide is another example of how contentious narratives related to major historical events could be seen as detrimental to human security, as parties struggle for legitimacy, and as shifts in power relationships pose recurrent threats to security. The narratives about the Armenian genocide are a key element of ongoing tensions between Turks and Armenians that have escalated in the wake of Soviet Union disintegration in 1991 Nagorno-Karabakh war. This war can be characterized as a protracted ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan, an ethnically Turkic state, and ethnic majority Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, backed by Armenia, who sought secession from Azerbaijan. The conflict resulted in many atrocities and massive ethnic cleansing by both sides. The peace brokered by the OSCE Minsk Group only stopped the direct violence while arms race, intermittent border clashes and hostile discourses continue to feed negative peace that can very easily escalate in a new open violent conflict. In the meantime, narratives of victimhood in relation to genocide serve to both sides as justifications for perpetuation of hostilities<sup>13</sup>, while the struggle for power shifts and repositioning continues until a change in *status quo* takes place.

#### **IV. Narrative Exclusivity, Simplifications and Binary Opposites**

Contentious narratives maintain divisions, exclusiveness and justification of violent actions through the use of key rhetorical acts such as defining a group as 'an enemy' or 'a threat' to the community.<sup>14</sup> Once opposing narratives of "us" versus "them" are developed into melodramas or simplified dramatic oppositions, conflict becomes polarized, personalized and overly simplified, which continually escalates the rhetoric of conflict and the actions of those involved as the conflict evolves.<sup>15</sup> As the

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<sup>13</sup> While the atrocities committed against Armenians by the Turks were recognized as genocide by the International Center for Transitional Justice, the Association of Genocide Scholars and the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Turks have constantly disputed that the genocide had happened. See: <http://www.ictj.org/en/news/coverage/article/935.html> (All websites used in this article were last checked on 3 November 2010). Turks have even presented some documentation about the genocide committed by Armenians against Turks such as Binark Ismet, *Archive Documents about the Atrocities and Genocide Inflicted upon Turks by Armenians*, Ankara 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Hogan, J. Michael and Glen L. Williams, *Defining the Enemy in Revolutionary America: From the Rhetoric of Protest to the Rhetoric of War*, in: *The Southern Communication Journal* (Volume 61), 1996, pp. 272-288.

<sup>15</sup> Osborne, Michael and John Bakke. *The Melodramas of Memphis: Contending Narratives During the Sanitation Strike of 1968*, in: *The Southern Communication Journal* (Volume 63),

conflict and rhetoric escalate, the importance of locations, images and attachments contained within narratives increase<sup>16</sup>, which deepens polarization and insecurity. Jewish migration to Jerusalem, for example, increased the emotional significance of its holy sites for Muslims, which in response raised the significance of places in the old city for Jews.<sup>17</sup> Thus the escalation on the ground resulted in escalation of more exclusive and simplified contentious narratives.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was not only a culmination of atrocities perpetrated throughout the history between Tutsis and Hutus, but it was also the result of perpetual repetition and political manipulation of mutually exclusive contentious narratives constructed by pre-colonial and colonial ideologies that promoted divisions based on class and race. Even fifteen years after the genocide, with a democratically elected government in power, truth and reconciliation commission, well decentralized government that allows inclusive participation in decision-making, similar narratives persist. They account for the continuing fleeing of Hutus from Rwanda into the Democratic Republic of Congo on claims of witch hunting from the Tutsi led government but are actually based on the underlying narrative of reestablished continuation of old unjust relationship between Hutus and Tutsis as inferior and superior. These narratives that have become an integral part of individual and group identities have been based on heightening the myth of the binary oppositions between these two groups such as the notion that Tutsis are “naturally” aristocratic as opposed to the “coarse” Hutus. As the narratives become more simplified, conflicts and violence are more likely to arise, which can be seen in reduction of complex ethno-cultural identities to simplified binary oppositions such as “noble Tutsis and servile Hutus”. These simplified contentious narratives lead to dehumanization, decrease in communication and interaction, and pave the way for further escalation of violence.

Narratives based on religious history are particularly mutually exclusive and divisive. Shia and Sunni centuries-long narratives about the right to leadership over the Muslim world, have informed and shaped political contexts, disputes and wars in the Middle East. Deeply divisive religious narrative of victimhood which ensued after the battle of Karbala and the massacre of Hussein, son of Ali, who was in Shia’s opinion the rightful heir of Mohammad, added a significant element of passion to the Shia psycho-cultural narrative, tradition and collective consciousness, analogous to the Christian worship of Christ’s passion and sacrifice on the cross. To the Shia, Hussein is a martyr of defiance in the face of oppression. As an often-persecuted minority throughout history, the Shia made the concept of victimhood

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1998, pp. 220-234.

<sup>16</sup> Ross, H. Marc, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, at p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Ross, H. Marc, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*, at p. 47.

central to their tradition and the key vehicle of the exclusive narrative about Shia's primacy to the leadership of the Muslim world, which generates conflicts in the region.

## V. Narrative Identity

The concept of narrative identity was developed by Paul Ricoeur, among other scholars, and is based on connectivity between narratives and temporality, history and personhood.<sup>18</sup> This concept is supposed to enable the social scientists to empirically study the phenomenological conceptualization of identity since narrative identity can be described as the story we tell ourselves in the present moment about our past, present and future selves and others. "Stories create and give expression to personal and group identity by encoding a body of shared knowledge to which persons are intellectually and emotionally committed".<sup>19</sup> The narrative theory of identity focuses on the underlying structure of personal histories or life-stories and considers the phenomenon of identity not as part of cognitive structures but as analyzable ingredient of personal histories that include narratives and overarching discourses about others and ourselves. People position themselves while telling stories to particular listeners in particular context and these stories vary due to these relationships.<sup>20</sup> A further implication is that narratives are products of our own view of history that is influenced by context, macrodiscourses and the listeners, so we can argue that they are constructs amenable to change and transformation. This is exactly echoed in Mamdani's article that shows the change in the content of identity given to Tutsi and Hutu categories that range from class to racial distinctions depending on the historical period.<sup>21</sup> Narratives are a mixture of master structural discourses such as discourses of occupation, domination and unity on one hand, and personal stories on the other. This mixture influences not only the development of personhood and identity of individuals and groups but also establishes certain kind of relationship that position those groups and individuals in a particular way.

Mahmoud Mamdani's excellent analysis of Tutsi/Hutu identities shows how these identities changed following the historical change in state structures and institutions<sup>22</sup> pointing to the fact that identities are socially constructed and influenced by context. Liisa Malkki points out that the stories about past atrocities

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<sup>18</sup> Ricoeur, Paul, *The Narrative Function*, in: Ricoeur, Paul, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Senehi, Jessica, *Constructive storytelling: Building Community, Building Peace*, at p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> Harré, Rom and Luk van Langenhove (eds.), *Positioning theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, at p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002, at p. 364.

<sup>22</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, at p. 364.

are particularly resilient and can become part of people's identity as "acutely meaningful themes ... which are incorporated into the overarching moral order expressed in the mythico-history".<sup>23</sup> Stories about historical atrocities contribute to the dehumanization and belittlement of the Other (the aggressor) and become part of the identity, moral order and everyday practices, which legitimize violence against the Other.

## VI. Imagined Realities and Dehumanization through Discourses

Dehumanization through discourses leads to simplification and generalization of the Other. Jasbir Puar, for example, argues that discourses in which the terrorists were portrayed as sexually perverse beings were important for justification of their abject treatment in Abu Ghraib.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the narratives of civilizing missions and rubber companies in the Putumayo region and Congo regularly presented natives as savages, cannibals – in one word "subhumans" - to justify the killing.<sup>25</sup> The circulating stories were stories of imagined reality, fabrications and constructions of natives' treachery, uprising and conspiracies and had a role to create a culture of terror and thereby become a "high powered tool for domination".<sup>26</sup> The "space of death" and terror is seen as "a space of transformation... loss of self and conformity to a new reality" of oppressors and oppressed.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the context in which torture and genocide have become an acceptable and common practice is shaped through the circulation of macrodiscourses that inhibit complex personal identities such as professional affiliations or gender and promote uniform collective identity based on simplistic dichotomy of "us" vs. "them". When collective identity becomes more salient than individual, it creates particular detachment and dissolution of responsibility, which enables individuals to participate in acts of murder and torture. This once again points to the power of discourse that produces imagination and inspiration for terror, which subsequently leads to action. Selectivity of information and manipulation of discourses is one of the most prevalent tools for social domination in our time. Imagined and fabricated stories based on subjective interpretations of enemy's cultural models embedded in liberal discourse proved to

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<sup>23</sup> Malkki, Lisa, *From Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, in: Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe I. Bourgois (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 2004, pp. 129-135, at p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Puar, K. Jasbir, *On Torture: Abu Ghraib*, *Radical History Review* (Volume 93), 2005, at pp. 13-38.

<sup>25</sup> Taussig, Michael, *Culture of Terror – Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture*, in: Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe I. Bourgois (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace*, at p. 492.

<sup>26</sup> Taussig, Michael, *Culture of Terror – Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture*, at p. 492.

<sup>27</sup> Taussig, Michael, *Culture of Terror – Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture*, at p. 492.

be much more efficient in controlling the public opinion than showing the reality of war.

Discourses constitute reality even if they are distortions of that reality. Communities and their leaders interpret their past, present and future through narratives, myths and symbols that are adapted and remodeled to fit into the master discourse aimed at either polarization or integration of groups and individuals. Once these master narratives infiltrate individual narratives of the people, they become part of their reality and identity. This is where Mamdani's analysis becomes relevant as it shows how various elites throughout history used discourses to legitimize and delegitimize, give and take power to various groups on the ground in order to promote their own interests. Liisa H. Malkki pointed out how the physical differences between Hutu and Tutsi were kept categorically unambiguous and how their simplification and generalization led to public manipulation and war mongering. She argues that in the "*mythico-history... the markers of bodily difference were closely linked with and superimposed on moral and social difference. The body maps ... became symptoms and proofs for claims reaching far beyond the body*".<sup>28</sup> The notion about the difference in appearance between Tutsis and Hutus fueled the Hamitic myth despite the fact that throughout the centuries of coexistence the population mixed and majority of people could not fit into a single category based on their appearance.

## **VII. Transformation of Narratives**

It is my intention to illuminate possible ways of contentious narratives' transformation based on the belief that the human agency can disrupt those dominant master narratives that overwhelm individuals through larger structures invested with power, by renegotiating, deconstructing and externalizing their main premises. Deciphering narratives as socio-historical constructs that incorporate the root causes of conflict can open up the possibilities for acceptance of more complex, and thereby more inclusive narratives, that can subsequently influence change of exclusive identities and pave the way for positive peace. It is transformation of contentious narratives by means of narrative analysis and practice that makes it a major contribution to human security and its goal of addressing the root causes of conflict by promoting equitable relationships as well as better economic and political opportunities for all.

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<sup>28</sup> Malkki, Liisa, *From Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, at p. 130.

**A. *Complex Narratives as a Way of Dealing with the Past***

When social scientists approach contentious accounts about past conflicts, they are faced with a variety of problems, one of which is the selection bias when dealing with historical facts. Ian Lustick notes that the researcher should compile diverse accounts from which background narratives must be constructed which can help prevent serious theoretical and evidentiary errors.<sup>29</sup> Narrative theory overcomes this problem with its assumption that the narratives are considered as subjective interpretations of history, which is an advantage for researchers for whom narratives represent an invaluable source of rich data about person, context, time and history. In narrative workshops, we are not concerned with the validity or truth of the stated historical accounts, but with the creation of complexities, as opposed to contentious binary simplifications, out of which we can build a new narrative, acceptable to all parties. Complexity and diversity of views and subjective realities implies change while simplicity leads to entrenchment of positions and conflict.<sup>30</sup>

According to narrative theory, the past is seen as a continual and complex rather than linear process on both individual and collective levels where time collapse happens following particular turning points. The continuation of history and merging of the past and present is reflected in the stories and narratives that evoke past traumas of personal and collective plights that are relived in the present and have equal power over people's emotions and actions in the present as they did in the past. That is why I argue that narratives of the past cannot be disregarded in conflict analysis and resolution and narrative research may be the very tool for addressing that critical relationship between history and present, and how this relates to various aspects of human security. The aspects of human security that narrative research and practice deal with, such as relationships between adversaries, reframing of contentious issues to promote mutual understanding and better grasp of parties' needs and interests, are central in attaining more equitable distribution of power and resources. This is particularly relevant in the aftermath of armed conflicts and is key for improvements in overall social and political stability.<sup>31</sup>

**B. *Creating Space for the Marginalized***

The capacity of narrative approach to create space for marginalized groups or marginalized accounts can be seen in its focus on people's private narratives, whose

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<sup>29</sup> Lustick, S. Ian, *History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias*, in: *The American Political Science Review* (Volume 90, Number 3), 1996, at pp. 605-618.

<sup>30</sup> Cobb, Sara, *A Developmental Approach To Turning Points: "Irony" As An Ethics For Negotiation Pragmatics*, in: *Harvard Negotiation Law Review*, 11 (2006), at pp. 147-197.

<sup>31</sup> Schnabel, Albrecht, *The Human Security Approach to Direct and Structural Violence*, at pp. 87-95.

value is not in their presentation of historical facts because they are neither objective nor neutral, but in their complexity, subjectivity and alternative perspectives that had not been heard before. The narratives of the weak provide alternative perspectives of the reality as well as insight into the development of identity of their speakers and their complex relationship with the external world. Through discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, class and education, as social constructs, people are positioned in disputes in ways that grant them different entitlements and conflict arises when they perceive that others are encroaching on their entitlements.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, inquiry and intervention that focuses on narratives of the marginalized groups or individuals offers the possibility for position shifts, empowerment, deconstruction, disambiguation and change of social constructs that make up people's identities and at the same time promote unjust relationships and conflict.

When considering power relations between the dominant and marginalized within a society, positioning theory can help us explain power and powerlessness as relevant only through discourse where positions are taken, negotiated or challenged. Individuals either adopt discourses associated with their position, thus taking the passive receivers' positions, or they reject the dominant discourses and create their own reality, their own storylines as agents. Positions, marginalization and legitimacy shift through time and thus, according to narrative theory, power is seen as unstable, relational, constantly produced, reproduced and shifted in different contexts.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis in the narrative approach to power lies in its assumption that even the *marginalized* or *disadvantaged* can express resistance to existing power relations and make a difference by changing attitudes from passive to active.

The importance of turning the focus of research on the narratives of the marginalized, disenfranchised and silenced can be substantiated by Foucault's idea that the power should be explored in its extreme cases<sup>34</sup>; in cases where the weakest clash with power of the state in its basic sense and where their bodies consequently become property of the state whether they are exiled, ethnically cleansed, imprisoned, raped or killed. It is not only the state power that fails in such cases but the whole value-belief system based on norms that clash with basic proposition of human security that puts emphasis on the importance of valuing human life as such even when stripped of all legalistic, national and gender attributes. When power relationships that constitute unjust practices that contradict humanity in its basic form become clear and disambiguated, this sets the stage for change to emerge.

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<sup>32</sup> Winslade, John and Gerald Monk, *Narrative Mediation: A New Approach to Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 2000, at p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Winslade, John. and Gerald Monk, *Narrative Mediation: A New Approach to Conflict Resolution*, at p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Two Lectures*, from *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, 1972-1977, Random House, New York, 1981, at pp. 78-108.

Exploring and finding polar cases that, by its very existence, introduce complexity and disrupt the dominant narratives and practices is one way of creating the conditions necessary for change. For example, Urvashi Butalia, who wrote about private narratives in the wake of Partition of India, presents the case of Abdul Shudul, a Muslim officer, who decided to stay in Hindu India because of economic reasons and job in the army.<sup>35</sup> Shudul's story represents an exception from the dominant *Hindu vs. Muslim* political discourses constructed to justify war and subsequent separation of India and Pakistan. His narrative puts emphasis on individual values, free will, personal and professional identity that defy the dominant collective narratives and structures shaped by war and population resettlement.

### C. *Discourses as Everyday Practices*

I find Foucault's notion of exploring discourses not "*as groups of signs ...but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak,*" as relationships with "*... regulated ways (and describable as such) of practicing the possibilities of discourse, and as processes always of the "now," the ever-present, not the past*"<sup>36</sup> extremely relevant for narrative research related to conflict because it underlines the idea that past and present are often merged through repetition of certain practices within discourse. These practices can be a part of culture as exclusive customs or elements of mythology, symbolism and imagery that make the past relevant and meaningful in the present, which may be the very root of conflict. For example, it is Hindu/Sikh castes structure and the belief in their own superiority, purity as well as their exclusive dining practices that are particularly demeaning and disrespectful to the Muslims and might be one of the root causes of contention that resulted in the Partition.<sup>37</sup> Narrative inquiry deepens our context-specific understanding of local practices and provides valuable insights into the identity formation as well as the impact of complex historical processes, practices and socio-cultural contexts on individuals and groups. Possible narrative intervention should aim at identifying demeaning conflictual practices and processes incorporated within narratives and explore the ways of dealing with them, which has to go hand in hand with identifying and addressing other potential threats to human security such as institutionally promoted racial and ethnic discrimination.

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<sup>35</sup> Butalia, Urvashi, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2000, at p.76.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock Publications, London 1972, at pp. 49 and 70.

<sup>37</sup> Butalia, Urvashi, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, pp. 76-88.

**D. Change of Language and Verbal Expression Can Lead to Change of Practices**

Language in postmodernist narrative theory plays a central role in constructing who we are and how we engage and or interact with others. Language is seen as a meaning-making activity and meaning cannot be chosen arbitrarily. The function of the language is the permitting and constraining options that might be available to us and by talking and verbally interacting with others, we are actually constructing experience.<sup>38</sup> The language has a performative function, which can be elaborated by Foucault's vision of language as action. Circulation of discourses is a process of social action, where relations are produced and reproduced and where change can take place. One can, therefore, argue that narratives can play a crucial role in conflict de-escalation and transformation of relationships towards peace when the change in verbal expressions and gestures towards the Other occur. Conflict mitigation can take place "when there are explicit connections made between inclusive cultural images and metaphors, and events on the ground".<sup>39</sup>

For example, it was when some white South Africans who saw the inevitability of the majority rule acknowledged the black majority and changed discourse towards them, that the space for change and possibilities for peace were created. And it was Nelson Mandela's discourse that spoke of unity and reconciliation epitomized in his statement, "We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world"<sup>40</sup>, that paved the way for non-violent process of relationship transformation.

However, some narratives are shaped to express ideas of peace and justice while they actually serve biased interests. It is necessary to distinguish between surface structures that underline prominent beliefs and syntactic organization or plots in narratives that can express the roles of social factors represented in biased models.<sup>41</sup> A fundamental mechanism of language change to build negative or positive associations is the use of metaphor. Metaphors of disease, sickness and filth are used to activate gut-level feelings of revulsion toward the outgroup<sup>42</sup> or its

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<sup>38</sup> Winslade, John and Gerald Monk, *Narrative Mediation: A New approach to Conflict Resolution*, at p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> Ross, H. Marc, *Cultural Contestation in Ethic Conflict*, at p. 315.

<sup>40</sup> *Nelson Mandela Inaugural Speech*, Pretoria, 10 May 1994. Available online at: <http://www.famous-speeches-and-speech-topics.info/famous-speeches/nelson-mandela-speech-inaugural-address.htm>.

<sup>41</sup> Van Dijk, A. Teun, *Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis*, in: Schaffner, Christina and Anita Wenden (eds.), *Language and Peace*, Dartmouth Publishing Company Ltd, Aldershot, 1995, pp. 17-33.

<sup>42</sup> Ruud, Kathryn, *Liberal Parasites And Other Creepers: Rush Limbaugh, Ken Hamblin, And The Discursive Construction Of Group Identities*, in: Nelson, Daniel and Dedaic,

ideology such as the use “vermin” in Hutu discourse to describe Tutsis or the use of “racial tuberculosis” to describe Marxism in Nazi discourse. Metaphors of peace and euphemisms are often used to justify military and political actions. Thus military intervention is called “humanitarian intervention”, and bombs are called “smart bombs”. The concept of “*waging war to make the world more democratic in order to have less war may strike more than a few as a grand paradox. Yet within such a looking glass, the discourse on peace and war is constructed and we are denied a way to talk about peace as peace and are left to contemplate what peace is not.*”<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, there have been attempts of using narratives and language to mitigate conflict and promote peaceful solutions as was evident in *Advertising for Peace* campaign, conceived by the Belfast agency of the American advertising multinational McCann-Erickson, that was aired on Ulster Television.<sup>44</sup> Different narratives and images were used to address the events on the ground and the goal was to raise awareness of shared heritage and social values. This was a new communicational approach to abate terrorist violence in the Northern Ireland province of Ulster, which contributed to an opening of public debate and communication and served as a stage in the gradual process of the change in relationships and positions. However, the issue of ethics in such campaigns, which are essentially based on the manipulation of the public, still provokes debate. We can conclude that in multi-ethnic states, the politicization of language means that linguistic nuances can become the front lines of peace and war,<sup>45</sup> which speaks to the relevance of narratives as loci where language is the main tool for shifts in meaning, positions, status and relationships.

### VIII. Conclusion

Identity conflicts are perpetuated through narratives of individuals who committed, facilitated or resisted acts of violence and oppression via their written or oral record, and they exist alongside official discourses. As opposed to narratives that resulted from organizational or labor conflicts, contentious narratives related to historical events and identity conflicts are more difficult to tackle because of their much wider scope, content and emotional load. Based on the literature mentioned in this article, it is evident that there is an explicit need for more studies that would look at potential of narratives and language for peace. As Nelson says, peace for all requires a different “*language that focuses not on capacities but on threat*

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Mirjana (eds.), *At War with Words*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, Berlin, 1999, at p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Nelson, Daniel N., *Conclusion: Word Peace*, in: Nelson Daniel and Mirjana Dedaic (eds.), *At War with Word*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, Berlin, 1999, at pp. 453-454.

<sup>44</sup> Dickason, Renée, *Advertising For Peace As Political Communication*, in: Nelson Daniel and Mirjana Dedaic (eds.), *At War with Words*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, Berlin, 2003, pp. 385-420.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson, N. Daniel, *Conclusion: Word Peace*, at pp. 453-454.

*abatement, not on defense and deterrence but on identity affirmation*"<sup>46</sup>.

Contentious narratives as part of a socio-cultural context and understanding of personhood that were repeated through longer periods of time cannot easily be changed. It would be naïve to think that differences in culture, historical experiences and political disagreement could be bridged simply.<sup>47</sup> The "chosen traumas"<sup>48</sup>, images of the self and the enemy, collective archetypes of identity embedded in narratives that persist through time perpetuate power relations of the people in a particular setting. The constructivist idea that informs narrative research which implies that truth or a perceived reality is relative is very difficult for the conflict parties to accept<sup>49</sup>. Narrative approaches, as I see them, do not attempt to change identities and narratives, but acknowledge the differences and through complexity, open up opportunities for renegotiation of positions and power asymmetries. It is crucial to understand that every narrator has a sense of entitlement as an agent, wherefore deconstruction of narratives poses a threat to entitlement and legitimacy and is ultimately counterproductive. As an alternative, one can facilitate reconstruction of a shared narrative in such a way that it provides a renewed sense of entitlement for all parties taking into consideration nuances and complexities of interaction. This means the creation of superordinate goals as incentives for the parties to work together towards their attainment. Membership in regional associations, such as the EU, that imply loose unity but not uniformity, can be part of the solution only if those associations recognize the complexity of identities, cultures, opinions and practices of the people under their umbrellas.

Freire<sup>50</sup> and Fairclough<sup>51</sup> are arguing for the need of conscientization and critical language awareness so that people can understand and fight the oppressive discursive practices and change society by taking control of their own processes in production of social relations. The need to explore narratives in order to address the threats to human security such as oppression, inequitable power and economic relationships and structures can be seen as an imperative for action. Exploration of narratives and *narrative turn* in social sciences can be interpreted as a need to get

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<sup>46</sup> Nelson, N. Daniel, *Conclusion: Word Peace*, at p. 454.

<sup>47</sup> Ross, H. Marc, *Cultural Contestation in Ethic Conflict*, at p. 320.

<sup>48</sup> Volkan, Vamik, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride To Ethnic Terrorism*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Weinberg, Oren, *Transformative Approach To Mediation: Radical Insight or Pie in the Sky?*, 2003, at p. 2. Available online at: <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/clearinghouse/drapapers/2003-dra/weinberg.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Freire, Paulo, *Educacao como practica de liberdade, Paz e Terra*, Rio de Janeiro, 1969. Translation by Myra Bergman Ramos published as "Education and the Practice of Freedom" in: *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Seabury, 1973, pp. 1-59.

<sup>51</sup> Fairclough, Norman, *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 12-240.

insight into the pain and suffering of the marginalized - victims and refugees, poor and discriminated - whose struggle to fit somewhere calls for re-examination of the concepts of identity and human security as well as new approaches to conflict resolution.

Despite the widespread influence of the uniform discourses such as that of globalization, recognition of complex reality embodied in local varieties, practices and identities that are deeply embedded in individual and collective narratives seems to be the only way to ensure security of each person with her/his own traits and particularities. Sociologists like Arthur Frank<sup>52</sup> argue that peoples' narratives express the local and contingent solutions they have found to the basic questions of meaning. These are of course the very kinds of fundamental questions that researchers must address, and find ways of how to incorporate local and contextual experience into their approaches to peace and human security.

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<sup>52</sup> Frank, Arthur W., *The Rhetoric of Self-Change: Illness Experience as Narrative*, in: *The Sociological Quarterly* (Volume 34, Issue 1), 1993, pp. 39-52.