

## Narrative, political violence and social change

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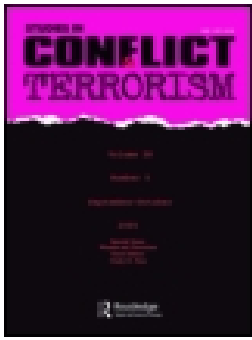
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## **Narrative, Political Violence and Social Change**

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### **Abstract**

This special issue is concerned with the development of the study of narratives of political violence and terrorism. While the concept of narrative has become increasingly popular among scholars in the field over the past two decades, this has not been accompanied by an active and critical engagement with its full ontological, epistemological and methodological implications. This issue proposes to view the extant work through a basic framework of three modes of narrative – as lens, as data, and as tool – in order to take stock of the progress that has been made to date and to facilitate the identification of remaining research gaps. Building on this framework, the six contributions in this issue demonstrate how the study of narratives of political violence and terrorism may be advanced. This is done, in particular, through a focus on narrative's value for understanding social and political change, as well as an emphasis on developing interdisciplinary and methodologically innovative approaches.

**Keywords:** narrative, political violence, terrorism, social change

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## **Narrative, Political Violence and Social Change**

The constructivist and narrative turns in the social sciences in the mid-1990s, both of which emphasise ‘the contextual construction of meaning and the possibility of multiple perspectives on reality,’<sup>1</sup> have had considerable influence on the study of political violence and terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Building on structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to narrative as a cross- and interdisciplinary concept, detached from its original ties to the study of the novel,<sup>3</sup> scholars are increasingly interested in how narratives (or stories) as a ‘basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change’<sup>4</sup> affect perpetrators’, victims’ and (other) audiences’ understandings of and responses to violent action and events. Since the ‘political’ refers to the power struggle involved in establishing, maintaining and developing a specific social order, narratives of political violence contribute to negotiating the normative boundaries of a political entity, including (but not limited to) the nation state. They configure perceptions of belonging and identity in relation to this entity by shaping the relationship between individuals and the collective, between in-groups and out-groups.

More often than not, story-telling has serious socio-political repercussions.<sup>5</sup> The powerful stories surrounding the events of 9/11 concocted by the Bush administration are perhaps the most striking example: they legitimised the invasion of Iraq as a patriotic duty, labelled dissenting voices as ‘anti-American’, and stigmatised migrant communities as perpetual suspects.<sup>6</sup> Very recently, in an article included in a special issue of this journal on the victim-perpetrator complex in terrorism, Pemberton and Aarten have reiterated the stance that the concept of narrative can ‘contribute to theory and research into phenomena of terrorism, political violence, and radicalization, offering new means to further develop key constructs’ such as identity, emotion and culture.<sup>7</sup>

An understanding of political violence and terrorism as narrative phenomena is thus by no means a new development. A cursory view of the literature, however, shows that this is often limited to a general perception of these phenomena as social constructs. Overall progress towards more critical and detailed engagements with the full ontological, epistemological and methodological implications of narrative has been slow in the field. Hundreds of articles published in the three key journals – *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Critical Studies on Terrorism* – for instance, contain the words ‘narrative’ or ‘story’. But only 29 of them mention them in their title. This includes Pemberton’s and Aarten’s contribution mentioned above, in which the authors express their hope that their initial exploration of the ‘cross-fertilization between narrative approaches and the topic of terrorism and political violence’ may not be the final word.<sup>8</sup>

This special issue responds to this call for further debate. It aims to expand the literature on narrative and political violence by bringing together contributions that actively reflect on and engage with ‘narrative’ on a conceptual and analytical level. They also show how such an engagement can benefit from interdisciplinary and methodological innovation, as well as an explicit focus on processes of social and political change. A narrative approach is thereby shown to be particularly apt to deal productively with the temporal, spatial and contextual dynamics of political violence and terrorism.

The remainder of this introduction provides a basic framework that the editors believe can help to take stock of and categorise extant work on narratives of political violence and terrorism, and facilitate the identification of research gaps. This framework builds on the specifics and interlinkages between three modes in which narrative may be conceived of: as a *lens* to view the social world; as *data* that provides insights into that world; and as a *tool* for analysing this data in a systematic and coherent manner. This is followed by a presentation of

the six articles contained in this issue and the contribution they make to the advancement of studying narratives of political violence and terrorism.

### **Three Modes of Narrative**

#### *Narrative as Lens: Approaching Social Reality*

Approaching the social world as a narrative world means to acknowledge that we live in a storied reality, i.e. that narrative is an ontological condition of life.<sup>9</sup> By organising and synthesising multiple and scattered events in time and space, human beings ‘come to know, understand and make sense of the world’ around them, and constitute their social identities.<sup>10</sup> That is, individual events acquire their meaning only in relation to other events through a process of *emplotment* that creates syntagmatic (i.e. discursive) links between isolated episodes. This process results in discursive totalities – narratives – that reconfigure the relation between past, present and future. Hence, narratives are tools to understand, negotiate and make sense of situations we encounter. They are ‘equipments for living.’<sup>11</sup> Consequently, to explore political violence and terrorism as narrative phenomena means to study how and why individual and collective actors (try to) create coherent stories out of the complex and messy reality of human life, as well as the impact they have on political agency and, ultimately, the construction of social orders.

The process of narration is necessarily selective, because there is always more than one story to tell. Both individuals and groups, but also institutions such as the media, choose from among the myriad of events that they encounter on a daily basis in particular ways by drawing on limited narrative resources. These are primarily afforded by our multiple social identities (e.g. mother, journalist, left-wing activist) and the public narratives of the

communities in which they are embedded (e.g. family, ethnic group, nation).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, from a postmodern perspective, our narrative selves are ‘multiple and multivocal,’ because individuals always exist in relation to others. That is, the narrative self is co-constructed through dialogue, interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of those who surround us. It is ‘composed of discourses,’ and hence fluid.<sup>13</sup>

It is this co-constructed and dynamic nature of storytelling that drives social and political change by enabling human beings to not only shape and imagine the world around them and their position in it, but also to *re*-shape and *re*-imagine it. The direction of change is a function of the narrative competition that socio-political actors – including perpetrators, victims and (other) audiences of violent action and events – engage in to gain definitional power, both with their own multiple selves and with each other. In other words, social and political change is connected to actors’ struggle to formulate and tell their stories and, perhaps even more importantly, to have them heard.

Temporality and contextuality, selectivity and multiplicity can thus be identified as key elements of viewing political violence and terrorism through a narrative lens. While these themes serve as a backdrop to many studies of narratives of political violence, scholars have only recently begun to reflect on them in more explicit ways. As Ó Dochartaig and Bosi point out, research on political violence still relies on ‘atemporal’ and ‘tenseless’ conceptions of time and neglects the role played by spatial contexts and territorial boundaries on the local, regional and national levels, including the penetration of digital and physical space through new technologies.<sup>14</sup> Surely, time and space are not exclusive to narrative approaches to the ‘heterogeneous repertoire of [harmful] actions’ that constitute political violence.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the edited collection in which Ó Dochartaig and Bosi make their observations primarily addresses questions relating to the factors that determine when and where politically violent conflicts occur, or when they end. In other cases, a narrative perspective is integrated into

broader understandings of political violence as discourse. Jarvis, in his thesis-based, ground-breaking work on the War on Terror as a fluid ‘discursive totality’ produced by the Bush administration’s ‘writings of time,’ draws on a combination of Ernesto Laclau’s discourse theory, Paul Ricœur’s narrative hermeneutics and framing theory to highlight specific ‘representations’ of terrorism.<sup>16</sup> His analytical focus thus lies in *discourses of time*, rather than *narrative discourse*.

Jarvis himself, as well as many other scholars, often working within a Critical Terrorism Studies paradigm, have since developed a particular interest in the use of concepts of memory, remembering and forgetting for the study of political violence.<sup>17</sup> This coincides with the emergence of a new discipline of Memory Studies whose flagship journal *Memory Studies* was established in 2008. However, as occasionally happens in Memory Studies itself, the narrative underpinnings of memories of political violence often remain underexplored. One may look at Hearty’s recent study on competing narratives of ‘Violent Dissident Irish Republican’ (VDR) activity as a welcome exception to this trend. Drawing on James Wertsch’ prominent work on collective memory, it zooms in on political practices of remembering and forgetting the Northern Irish past of ‘armed struggle’ through narrative templates, i.e. ‘account[s] of the collective past where the general plot remains constant even though specific actors and dates change.’<sup>18</sup> This represents a promising avenue for further research by linking an elaborate concept of remembering to the empirical study of political violence. It also points toward the usefulness of a narrative lens for studying that which is invisible or in danger of being silenced. Argomaniz, for example, has recently drawn attention to the fact that Spanish victim organisations are campaigning for their stories of ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*) violence to be heard in the international arena in order to sustain its delegitimised status and prevent new generations from using violence as a political tool.<sup>19</sup>



In a similar way, the complex cultural resources that underlie the creation of stories of political violence and the related dynamics of narrative competition, also discussed by Hearty, have begun to attract scholars' attention. Argomaniz and Lynch, in their introduction to the special issue on victim-perpetrator relations mentioned earlier, note that the creation of narratives that integrate experiences of oppression, grievance and victimisation into coherent wholes are crucial in motivating individuals to resort to violence against a perceived enemy, often carrying over from one generation to the next.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, narratives of victimisation may also support counterterrorism efforts. This is because they are particularly trustworthy and 'expose the pain and suffering that emerges from the use of violence for a political cause' and 'promote through their stories tolerance, nonviolence, the sanctity of human life, and other fundamental values.'<sup>21</sup> The emotional appeal of stories of victimisation, specifically by ETA violence, and the role that trust plays for narratives of counterterrorism are also discussed by Gantxegi, Bilbao and Bernudez, and Braddock and Morrison in this issue.

A second aspect relating to resources and competition concerns the often conflicting narratives of perpetrators and audiences of political violence. Sandberg, Oksanen, Berntzen and Kiilakoski, drawing on cultural and narrative criminology, argue that Breivik's terrorist attack in Oslo and Utoya in Norway in July 2011 should – as terrorist violence in general – be understood as a 'cultural bricolage'. The perpetrator, they emphasise, was not only – as he himself wanted the public to believe – influenced by the scripts of previous terrorist attacks, but also that of school shootings. The authors thereby illustrate that violent action can tell a story of its own. But perpetrators, victims and (other) audiences may tell this story differently, and scholars need to engage critically with the mechanisms behind this process as they often have tangible socio-political consequences.<sup>22</sup> In this issue, Tellidis illustrates the political implications of competing for stories of conflict in the Basque country, and shows a

way forward for how politically violent conflicts may be prevented. The notion of ‘bricolage’ also points to the constructed nature of the very notion of *political* violence itself. This aspect has been implicit in much of the literature,<sup>23</sup> but has not yet been developed conceptually or empirically. This process may be facilitated by taking a narrative approach that casts new light on the storied nature of categorisations of violence.

### *Narrative as Data: ‘Finding’ Stories*

The studies cited in the previous section gain their insights into narrative worlds through different forms of narrative data. These include policy documents, police reports, court files, psychiatric evaluations, written material produced by activists, as well as interviews with key actors – perpetrators, victims, witnesses and officials – collected by the researchers themselves. The list may be expanded to include, among others, news media and literary texts, films, posters, photographs, and social media comments. Whether they are oral, textual or visual, all of these are discursive units that operate as sense-making tools through a process of narration, thereby becoming available to interpretation.<sup>24</sup>

As cultural products, they are created in particular social and political contexts. That is, while all of them tell stories by establishing temporal and spatial relations between multiple, heterogeneous events, the process of narration and its appropriation by the reader, listener or viewer is shaped by the particular characteristics of their narrative genre. As Deciu Ritivoi points out, the ‘sphere of application’ matters for our understanding of narrative. It makes a difference if we apply the concept to, say, the study of literature, history, life story interviews or social media conversations, because it implies fundamentally different understandings of narrative as an art form, a precondition for everyday existence and lived experience, or the mere representation of past events.<sup>25</sup>

Generally speaking, government records, media texts (both print and online) and interviews are (still) the dominant source of data for students of discourses of political violence and terrorism. Government records are of particular interest because the state's response to political violence<sup>26</sup> often requires considerable public resources and puts citizens' lives at risk in military conflicts. The public therefore needs to be convinced that the measures taken are reasonable, justified and necessary. This consensus is achieved through the creation of a discursive reality that normalises the state's counter-terrorism, thereby exercising power.<sup>27</sup>

The utilization of such records as narrative data specifically coincides with a growing scholarly interest in narrative as a sense-making practice in the political realm and a strategic tool for legitimising particular policy initiatives.<sup>28</sup> To give but one example of using such an approach in an effective manner, Gad approaches parliamentary debates and policy reports as narrative texts that perform collective identities, in order to show how Danish post-9/11 counter-terrorism initiatives construct 'Muslims' as helpful or threatening Others. Taking inspiration from the idea, developed in literary criticism, that a good story consists of more than a 'good self' and the 'evil other', he finds that 'average Middle Eastern Muslims' serve to complement the cast of characters by being constructed as 'less-than-radical Others' who are implicated in counterterrorism efforts. This allows the author to conclude that 'Muslims have not been offered thoroughly de-securitised positions in relation to Danish identity', with negative implications for the effectiveness of Danish counter-terrorism policy.<sup>29</sup> This demonstrates that an in-depth engagement with elements of narrative theory helps to uncover the narrative features inherent in speeches, policy documents and other official records relating to political violence and terrorism.

The ways in which the news media cover acts of (violence as) political violence and terrorism has also received considerable scholarly attention. This is due to the long held view

that the media and ‘terrorists’ have a symbiotic relationship, in that the latter depend on the former to distribute their message, which in turn generates the public attention desired by the media.<sup>30</sup> The increasing importance of online communication, however, has gradually shifted the focus towards militants’ use of social networks and digital publications to reach their audience directly. This blurs the boundaries between narrators and their audience, of production and consumption, and poses a new set of challenges to countering terrorist messages.<sup>31</sup> While journalists’ role as story-tellers has long been acknowledged,<sup>32</sup> and social media communication, too, is seen as involving the creation of ‘small stories’,<sup>33</sup> empirical studies of media narratives of political violence and terrorism rarely approach texts as narrative texts. To the extent that they do, it is rarely made clear what it is that is specifically ‘narrative’ about these texts and how one may search for and identify the stories they present.<sup>34</sup>

There are exceptions, of course. One of them is da Silva’s and Crilley’s recent study of everyday narratives of British foreign fighters in Syria as reflected in online comments (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and discussion forums). It makes clear that these ‘miniature texts’ function as a narrative sense-making practice and contribute to the discursive environment in which counterterrorism policies are designed and legitimised.<sup>35</sup> Cobb’s work on narratives in processes of conflict resolution, to give another example, also draws extensively on the ideas of different narrative theorists and their conceptual inventory (plot, characters, voice, etc.), as well as a wide range of available sources, including radio programmes, but also policy documents and interviews with perpetrators. She thereby demonstrates how violent conflicts are sustained over time through the reduction of narrative complexity.<sup>36</sup> Sandberg also deals with a particularly complex narrative text: Breivik’s online Manifesto. It integrates essays written by other authors, plagiarised Manifestos from other violent perpetrators and a self-interview, as well as diary entries. Using different approaches to life story analysis

originating in narrative psychology, French structuralism, ethnomethodology and postmodernism, he explores the relationship between the text and his crimes, arguing that Breivik's self-narratives were a necessary (albeit not sufficient) pre-condition for his violent actions.<sup>37</sup> Contributors to this special issue also pay particular attention to the specifics of narrative media environments: Graef's article explores the implications of everyday storytelling in the print news media in relation to right-wing violence, while Braddock and Morrison emphasise how the structural characteristics of online platforms impact on the implementation of counter-narratives.

In relation to interviews as narrative data, one of the key challenges lies in dealing with the fact that doing narrative research means to do research *with* participants, rather than *about* them, with two spheres of expertise – that of the participant and that of the interpreter – interacting with each other.<sup>38</sup> Interviewees are not always aware of the multiple layers of meaning of their own stories and generally unfamiliar with the specific interpretative gaze of the researcher, who has her own aims, points of view and experiences. At the same time, as Josselson puts it, '[t]o whom the story is told shapes the telling by its calling out certain aspects of self.' The interview situation does not capture all of participants' experiences or their lives as a whole, but only a particular voice, itself subject to evolution. In short, the multilayeredness and multivocality of humans' narrative selves means that researchers co-create the texts that result from the interview process, and this needs to be taken into account when drawing on this kind of narrative data to gain insight into political violence as a social phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> There has been comparatively little reflection to date on the methodological challenges of employing interview techniques in the field, let alone narrative interviews specifically. This is not least because interviews, in particular with perpetrators of political violence, are still not a primary data source for researchers.<sup>40</sup> In this issue, da Silva et al. respond to this gap by demonstrating the value of a carefully constructed narrative interview

with a former left-wing militant for gaining insights into the complex processes of (dis)engagement and (de)radicalization.

*Narrative as Tool: Analysing Stories of Political Violence*

What happens with the narrative data that researchers of political violence and terrorism collect, what concrete steps do they take to analyse stories? If the literature, as discussed above, lacks clarity in terms of how the narrative concept is understood and how it applies to the visual, textual or oral records that scholars draw on for their empirical investigation, reflections on how to conduct analyses of narrative data are even more limited. To a certain extent, this is due to a general shortage of practically useful instructions for analysing non-literary narratives, in spite of the expansive literature on narrative inquiry and methods.<sup>41</sup> This poses a challenge especially to young social scientists with limited research experience. To the extent that guidance is available, it is generally restricted to stories collected by the researcher herself through observation or interviews, paying little attention to the other narrative genres discussed above, such as media texts or policy documents. While literary, media and film studies offer their own repertoire of narrative methods,<sup>42</sup> these approaches are highly complex in themselves and require considerable transfer work to apply them to study contexts outside these fields, especially those that are interested in how violent action shapes social orders and influences the relative distribution of power.

A cursory look at the empirical literature on narratives of political violence shows that the specific contributions and limits afforded by different forms of narrative analysis<sup>43</sup> vis-à-vis other forms of discourse analysis (all of which can be used with narrative data) are rarely made explicit. In his book on the role of discourse in creating the 'War on Terrorism', Jackson, for instance, seeks to 'explore the nature of the overarching narrative or story of the

‘war on terrorism’<sup>44</sup> and operates with these terms throughout his empirical analysis. However, he opts for critical discourse analysis to ‘shed light on the links between texts and societal practices and structures’ and how they contribute ‘to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups.’<sup>45</sup> While the construction of narrative is connected to questions of social and political power, and critical approaches to discourse overlap with narrative in many ways, this does not automatically imply that the researcher pays attention to processes of emplotment and temporal dynamics, both of which are key to narrative. Another example is a recent study by Richards, which considers narratives of Good and Evil as a method of persuasion and identifies a dialectic relationship between the terrorist communication of ISIS and the counter-terrorist rhetoric of Western governments as reflected in government reports, statements, speeches and audio-visual material. However, the author merely juxtaposes narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, thematic and documentary analysis, without clarifying their specific use for her exploration of texts.<sup>46</sup> Evidence that this pitfall can be avoided is provided by Baker, whose theoretically informed study explores how specific narrative devices and mechanisms in processes of translation influence the portrayal of certain communities as terrorist and extremist, based on a close reading of narrative material.<sup>47</sup> The framework of critical narrative theory developed by Cobb (see above) also offers an interesting way forward.

In summary, it is desirable that scholars make clear what the link is between their interest in stories of political violence and terrorism, and the way in which they approach their empirical data. Engaging actively with the different aspects of the narrative concept and its practical manifestations in various types of data can facilitate this process. Close readings, that is, a focus on the narrative patterns of a particular text, whether in the form of news articles, policy documents or interview transcripts, as presented by Colvin and PISOIU in this

issue, can help to emphasise the particular contribution that narrative analysis makes to the study of political violence and terrorism.

Last but not least, scholars should also reflect on the fact that much of their research findings are communicated in narrative form: the storied product of the analysis that researchers conduct, needs to be plausible and acceptable to the reader, like all (good) stories. The researcher herself becomes the narrator.<sup>48</sup>

### **Articles in this Issue**

Contributors were asked to submit work that considers the relevance of the three modes of narrative proposed above for the study of political violence and terrorism. Particular emphasis was placed on how individual and collective actors, through their stories, shape processes of social and political change in relation to different forms of such violence, and how interdisciplinary and methodologically innovative approaches can help to explore new ways of studying these processes.

The six articles included in this special issue are divided into three thematic sections: deradicalisation and counterterrorism, criminology and right-wing violence, and the legacy of the Basque conflict. Authors refer to different violent ideologies and bring in different disciplinary backgrounds, including social psychology, criminology, peace and conflict studies, literary criticism, and communication sciences. They provide in-depth analyses of the value of a narrative approach for the study of politically violent conflicts in Germany, the US, Portugal and Spain, as well as their social and political implications. The contribution of each article to the advancement of the study of narratives of political violence and terrorism is discussed below.



In the first section, da Silva et al.'s article addresses the under-researched area of processes of change relating to (de)radicalisation and (dis)engagement from politically violent groups. They do so by applying a dialogical-narrative perspective originating in psychology to the life story of a former militant of FP-25, a left-wing armed organisation active in Portugal during the 1980s. The authors illustrate how radicalization and engagement with violent groups may be conceived of as a limited pluralism of voices of the self, and argue convincingly that these dynamics can be countered by narratives that support the (re)emergence of more dialogical selves that are receptive to change. Combining dialogical self theory with narrative and political violence studies, the authors offer a fresh approach to (de)radicalization and (dis)engagement. It allows them to carve out the complex and dynamic interactions between psychological, social and political factors that shape militants' self-narratives and social identities in order to design methods for instigating behavioural change. They propose that researchers and practitioners should look for evidence of different identity positions in militants' self-narratives as a basis for developing effective counter-narratives. This approach may be particularly useful for working with foreign fighters that are expected to return to their European home countries following the military defeat of ISIS.<sup>49</sup>

The article by Braddock and Morrison, in this section, also addresses prospects of reducing support for terrorism by using a narrative approach. Introducing the reader to the complex world of online counter-narratives of Islamist violence, the authors make suggestions for how the specific characteristics of different media genres – such as inter-user communication and hierarchical organisation of information – may be utilized to create trust in alternative stories of terrorist violence, while generating distrust in the narratives promoted by terrorist groups themselves. Bringing together psychological approaches to the notion of trust and communication science, they develop an innovative conceptual framework for increasing the source and content credibility of institutional online counter-narratives

targeting (potential) terrorism sympathisers. The results are presented in the form of sixteen preliminary, empirically testable guidelines that engage actively and critically with the possibilities and limits afforded by modern media.

The second section contains two articles that apply (narrative) criminology to the study of ideologically motivated violence. Colvin and PISOIU, in their paper, explore new ground by applying neutralization theory to self-narratives of German men convicted for right-wing violence. Based on a close analysis of interview transcripts, they challenge the literature on neutralization theory. Their argument is that justifying political violence through neutralization fulfils different functions, depending on the mode in which it is used. Narratives are 'encultured' if they accommodate mainstream norms and values, and excuse behaviour that is in opposition to it. They are 'subcultural' if they express a set of norms and values alternative or opposed to that of the mainstream. The third mode is a 'postnarrative' mode, relating to narratives that express immunity to norms and values altogether. They conclude that both the use of mainstream values to justify criminalized behaviour and the refusal to narratively account for violence altogether indicate an unsettling shift in the relationship between violent actors and the social mainstream, which scholars and practitioners need to address.

Graef's article engages with the recent discursive dynamics surrounding the right-wing extremist group *National Socialist Underground* (NSU) in Germany. It draws on insights from narrative criminology and adopts a hermeneutic approach to the news media coverage of the crimes attributed to the NSU both before and after the group's discovery in November 2011. The author shows that the story of the NSU as one of 'right-wing terrorism' whose violent campaign was not recognised as such for more than a decade, cannot be conceived of without the media's narrative work. Based on more than 1,000 news articles published over the period 2000 to 2012, her analysis demonstrates that the process of

narration evolves in three distinct phases and relies on the production and reproduction of images of stigmatised and absolute others, in particular immigrants. The interpretation of the events thus gradually changes from ‘crime within the foreign milieu’ to that of ‘right-wing terrorism’ and (hence) an ‘attack on all of us’, with tangible socio-political consequences. However, as she points out, not only is it difficult to ascribe political responsibility for the effects that such narrative dynamics have on individuals and communities, but the discursive environment that gave rise to them is also still in place and has not been sufficiently addressed.

In the third and final section, contributors draw on narrative approaches to re-consider the nature and consequences of the Basque conflict in northern Spain. Tellidis takes the perspective of Critical Peace Studies to argue that the Spanish state developed its own grand narrative of ‘terrorism’ in the Basque country in ignorance of the diversity in its civil society, which was comprised not only of violent actors, but also of anti-nationalist and anti-extremists, pro-amnesty and pro-independence movements, thereby hampering the success of peacebuilding efforts. Based on this discussion, he proposes a new agonistic framework for sustainable peace in ethno-nationalist conflicts, suggesting that – contrary to traditional views of human security – conflict needs to be acknowledged as a permanent feature of politics. He thereby shifts the focus from liberalism to agonism, and hence towards the ability to prevent violent political conflicts.

Gantxegi, Bilbao and Bermudez, in their article, address the still under-researched area of representations of terrorism in literary fiction. They make an important contribution to the limited number of studies that explore how the possible worlds created by literary narratives may affect real-world events. Based on a hermeneutic approach to narrative and an ethical perspective on education, they illustrate that literary narratives of victimisation by ETA, right-wing terrorist groups and the Spanish state invite readers’ reflection on the

diverse personal experiences of the Basque conflict. The authors maintain that the genre of narrative fiction is not simply an art form, but stimulates readers' narrative imagination to immerse them in the experiences and memories of others, confronting and challenging their own views in the process. Echoing Argomaniz' emphasis on the use of victim testimony for the delegitimization of terrorism, the article offers a new perspective on how re-cognition of the victims of the Basque conflict *as* victims may be advanced through literary narratives. It also encourages the latter's use as an educational tool to sensitise readers for others' experiences of victimisation in politically violent conflicts.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This special issue is the result of the editors' frustration with the way in which narrative as a concept and as a social practice has been approached in political violence and terrorism studies over the past two decades – notwithstanding the important advances that critical approaches, in particular, have made in this respect. An initial exploration of narrative's ontological, epistemological and methodological implications and its potential for answering some of the key questions in the field – concerning, among others, processes of (de)radicalisation, audiences' competing and conflicting interpretations of violence, and the lasting social and political legacies of violent campaigns – has been offered through Pemberton's and Aarten's work, as well as that of other scholars touched upon above. This special issue is intended as another step in this direction. The framework of narrative as lens, data and tool may be a simple one, but can help to begin to structure the debate around narrative in the field. The articles included here show that the complex, multidisciplinary and travelling notion of narrative poses a number of challenges to scholars, but also offers important opportunities for opening up new perspectives – whether it refers to finding an

effective way of responding to radicalization processes with the help of tools developed by psychologists, the application of criminological approaches to ideologically motivated violence, or the prospect of preventing violent conflicts altogether by promoting the recognition of the naturally diverse makeup of protest movements. This requires that researchers are willing to face the messy and often irrational nature of human life head-on. Twenty years after the narrativist turn in the social sciences that contributed so much to our understanding of the complexities of human experience, it is time for a narrative turn in the study of political violence and terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> Stef Slembrouck, "The Role of the Researcher in Interview Narratives," in Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, eds., *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2005), pp. 239-254 (p. 240).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996); Lee Jarvis, *Times of Terror: Discourse, Temporality and the War on Terror* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> David Herman, "Introduction," in David Herman, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3-21 (pp. 4-5, p. 12); see also Martin Kreiswirth, "Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences," *New Literary History* 23(3) (1992), pp. 629-657; Matti Hyvärinen, Mari Hatavara, and Lars-Christer Hydén, eds., *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*, Studies in Narrative Ser. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Herman, "Introduction," p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Molly Andrews, Catarina Kinnvall, and Kristen Monroe, "Narratives of (In)Security: Nationhood, Culture, Religion and Gender," *Political Psychology* 36(2) (2015), pp. 141-149.

<sup>6</sup> See Molly Andrews, *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jarvis, *Times of Terror*.

<sup>7</sup> Antony Pemberton and Pauline G. M. Aarten, "Narrative in the Study of Victimological Processes in Terrorism and Political Violence: An Initial Exploration," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2017), online first, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), pp. 605-649 (p. 606).

<sup>11</sup> Tony E. Adams, "A Review of Narrative Ethics," *Qualitative Inquiry* 14 (2008), pp. 175-184 (p. 175).

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, *Shaping History*, p. 206; Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity," p. 619.

<sup>13</sup> Ruthellen Josselson, "'Bet You Think This Song Is About You': Whose Narrative Is It in Narrative Research?" *Narrative Works: Issues, Investigations, & Interventions* 1(1) (2011), pp. 33-51 (p. 37, p. 41).

<sup>14</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, "Political Violence in Time," in Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh and Daniela Pisiou, eds., *Political Violence in Context: Time, Space and Milieu* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015), pp. 15-21; Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "Spatial Contexts for Political Violence," in *Political Violence in Context*, pp. 115-124.

<sup>15</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, and Daniela Pisiou, "Contextualising Political Violence," in *Political Violence in Context*, pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Jack Holland and Lee Jarvis, "Night Fell on a Different World": Experiencing, Constructing and Remembering 9/11," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7(2) (2014), pp. 187-204; Charlotte Heath-Kelly, "Collective Memory and Terrorism", in Richard Jackson, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 287-297; Steven D. Brown and Andrew Hoskins, "Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology: Mediating and Remembering the 2005 London Bombings," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 2(2) (2010), pp. 87-107; It is worth noting that the terms 'remember' and 'memory' appear even less frequently in the titles of articles published in the three key journals of the field than 'narrative' and 'story': 4 times in total.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Hearty, "From 'Former Comrades' to 'Near Enemy': the Narrative Template of 'Armed Struggle' and Conflicting Discourses on Violent Dissident Irish Republican Activity," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9(2) (2016), pp. 269-291 (pp. 269-270).

<sup>19</sup> Javier Argomaniz, "A Battle of Narratives: Spanish Victims Organizations International Action to Delegitimize Terrorism and Political Violence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2017), online first.

<sup>20</sup> Javier Argomaniz and Orla Lynch, "Introduction to the Special Issue: The Complexity of Terrorism Victims, Perpetrators and Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, online first, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Sveinung Sandberg, Atte Oksanen, Lars Erik Berntzen and Tomi Kiilakoski, "Stories in Action: the Cultural Influences of School Shootings on the Terrorist Attacks in Norway," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7(2) (2014), pp. 277-296.

<sup>23</sup> see e.g. Joshua D. Freilich and Gary LaFree, "Criminology Theory and Terrorism: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27(1) (2015), pp. 1-8.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 1, transl. by Kathleen Blaney and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. x, pp. 64-66; Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, transl. and introd. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 278.

<sup>25</sup> Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, "Twists and Turns: The Circulation of Narrative Concepts across Disciplines and Cultures," in Hyvärinen, Hatavara, and Hydén, eds., *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*, pp. 287-301 (pp. 290-291).

<sup>26</sup> The literature on the state as an actor of illegitimate political violence and, in particular, terrorism is still relatively scarce, see Richard Jackson, "The Ghosts of State Terror: Knowledge, Politics and Terrorism Studies," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1(3) (2008), pp. 377-392.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> See Molly Patterson and Kristen Reawick Morroe, "Narrative in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998), pp. 315-331; Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Ulrik Pram Gad, "Concepts of Dialogue as Counterterrorism: Narrating the Self-reform of the Muslim Other," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5(2) (2012), pp. 159-178 (p. 175).

<sup>30</sup> Ralph E. Dowling, "Terrorism and the Media: A Rhetorical Genre," *Journal of Communication* 36(1) (1986), pp. 12-24; Mahmoud Eid, "The Media amid Terrorism and Counterterrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26(5) (2014), pp. 842-854; David L. Altheide, "The Mass Media and Terrorism," *Discourse & Communication* 1(3) (2007), pp. 287-308.

<sup>31</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006); Henry A. Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism: Global Uncertainty and the Challenge of the New Media* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Steve M. Earkin, "The Journalist as Storyteller," *American Journalism* 1(2) (1984), pp. 27-34; Barbie Zelizer, "Epilogue: Timing the Study of News Temporality," *Journalism* 19(1) (2018), pp. 111-121; Barbie Zelizer and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, eds., *Journalism and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Georgakopoulou, "Small Stories Research: A Narrative Paradigm for the Analysis of Social Media," in Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (London: Sage, 2017), pp. 266-281.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Victoria Davis, "Reading Anonymity: Narrative Difference and Framework Selection in the Claiming of Terrorist Violence," *Media, War & Conflict* 6(2) (2013), pp. 135-151; Stuart Croft and Cerwyn Moore, "The Evolution of Threat Narratives in the Age of Terror: Understanding Terrorist Threats in Britain," *International Affairs* 86(4) (2010), pp. 821-835.

<sup>35</sup> Raquel da Silva and Rhys Crilley, "Talk about Terror in Our Back Gardens": An Analysis of Online Comments about British Foreign Fighters in Syria," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10(1) (2017), pp. 162-186.

<sup>36</sup> Cobb, *Speaking of Violence*.

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<sup>37</sup> Sveinung Sandberg, "Are Self-narratives Strategic or Determined, Unified or Fragmented? Reading Breivik's Manifesto in Light of Narrative Criminology," *Acta Sociologica* 56(1) (2013), pp. 68-83.

<sup>38</sup> Josselson, "'Bet You Think This Song Is About You'," p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39 and p. 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> John Horgan, "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4(3) (2012), pp. 195-211.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Colette Daiute, *Narrative Inquiry: A Dynamic Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014); Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. David M. Boje, *Narrative Methods for Organizational & Communication Research* (London: Sage, 2011); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> This may focus on different elements on the complex process of narration, e.g. plot, characters, temporality, or narrative themes, see Daiute, *Narrative Inquiry*.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> Imogen Richards, "'Good and Evil' Narratives in Islamic State Media and Western Government Statements," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10(3) (2017), pp. 404-428.

<sup>47</sup> Mona Baker, "Narratives of Terrorism and Security: 'Accurate' Translations, Suspicious Frames," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3(3) (2010), pp. 347-364.

<sup>48</sup> Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8(1) (1995), pp. 5-23.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Speckhard, Ardian Shajkovci, and Ahmet S. Yayla, "What to Expect Following a Military Defeat in Syria and Iraq?," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 8(1) (2017), pp. 81-89.