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# A Reformulated Model of Narrative Mediation of Emerging Culture Conflict

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## Abstract

*This article describes the theory and practice of narrative mediation as a primary resource in the engagement and resolution of communal cultural violence by military and development advisors operating in under-governed conflict zone. The praxis adopts the narrative therapy practice of Michael White and the narrative mediation model of Winslade & Monk to create an approach to engage rural, tribal communities caught in cycles of violence as perpetrators, victims and bystanders. Because the praxis is employed cross-culturally in sociocentric communities, I have added elements of conflict story discovery and joint mediation therapy to the existing model of deconstruction, externalization and restorying – thus creating a reformulated model. The employment of this narrative therapy and mediation approach was done through my practical field application during 20 years of violent, intra-state conflict in Sudan, Niger, Iraq and Colombia. The implications of continuing narrative mediation as a primary resource would serve to advance the larger praxis of conflict resolution in cultural and ethnic violence.*

**Keywords:** Narrative mediation, ethnic and cultural conflict, psychoanalysis of communal violence, peacekeeping.

## 1 Introduction and Purpose

This essay describes the use of narrative mediation as an important resource in military and diplomatic engagements of communal conflict. This type of communal conflict involves culturally bounded communities that are participating in extended violence as victims, perpetrators or bystanders in under-governed spaces of troubled political states. Normatively, the communities that I am referring to are attempting to emerge or transition from geographical isolation, post-colonialism or failing political systems. The emergence of these communities out of isolation, chaotic governance and pedagogies of oppression and victimization

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are often accompanied by varying levels of conflict and violence as they attempt to adapt their ancient societies to a rapidly changing global world (Burton, 1984). In 20 years of fieldwork, I have found that most of the conflict and violence that I dealt with presented issues of real or perceived challenges to the group identity, cultural expression and cognitive imprinting of these tribal societies.[1] While common pool resources and political power-sharing are obvious headline issues, I have found that they are often made intractable by conflicts within and between historical narratives. From this context, I draw the phrase 'emerging culture conflict' to describe a specific set of conflicts that involve intra-state violence and that are associated with failing states beset by insurgency and political terrorism. I have found that the most efficacious way to relieve these conflicts is through the mediating engagement of the conflict parties at the family, clan and tribal levels of sociocultural organization.

From July of 2004 to February of 2005, I served as a mediator-advisor to the African Union's Ceasefire Commission in Darfur, Sudan (AUCFC), helping mediate the violent conflict between the Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit and Rizeigat tribes. Out of necessity, I began using the narrative therapy work of family psychotherapist Michael White, which John Winslade and Gerald Monk applied to conflict resolution as a new model of (narrative) mediation. During our efforts to mediate the ceasefire and prevent ongoing attacks, we found that the conflict dynamics were deeply embedded in the historical narratives of the various parties involved in the conflict. We found that their historical narratives had become embroiled in a set of conflict stories that challenged the underlying basis for each other's existential identity, cultural expression and sociological construction (Christian, 2013a). The existing indigenous means of resolving disputes have always been an integral part of survival for these cultures, as they inhabited common geographical spaces (Gaines, 1992). But in Darfur, we found that environmental changes such as desertification, social changes such as population growth, and politico-religious changes in the definition of the Muslim community created unresolvable existential threats to the psychological organization and sociological structure.

Existential conflict requires mediation on a level commensurate with the depth of the conflict: totalizing in nature and intractable from the existing perspective of the cultures in conflict. Because there is no sanctuary in flight for either side of an existential conflict, the conflict story must be changed in a communal act of 'restorying' those elements of the larger narrative that are in dispute

1 My experience with narrative mediation as a primary engagement resource has been in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

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(Winslade and Monk, 2000).[2] In a sense, it is those conflict elements (or stories) within the historical narrative that are actually mediated with the owning community speaking for the communal narrative. This helps explain the potential for violence in emerging culture conflict. In such encounters, violent as they must be when the psychological or physical survival of the group is at stake, the extent of each side's resistance and attack may take on genocidal dimensions (Adelman, 1997: 1-28). Narrative mediation offers relief from the dynamic of power and force that is used to decide which culture's narrative lives or dies, as well as the mirrored physical survival or extinction of the human beings who so desperately fight to maintain the generational memory and identity embedded within that narrative. The participants are shown how to reconstruct conflict-free narratives that are based on what is possible rather than what is past (Winslade and Monk, 2000).

The type of conflict that the mediator encounters in emerging cultures is unlike that found in the domestic situations of advanced societies. Instead of days and weeks of domestic conflict, emerging culture conflict has often lasted decades and generations. Instead of individuals and families involved in domestic conflict, emerging culture conflict involves families, clans, tribes and tribal collectives. Where domestic conflict involves injury, death or possible incarceration of individual offenders acting in roles of individual agency, emerging conflict involves wholesale killings of entire villages in genocidal rages driven by "religious ritual of self-purification in terms of a reified image of the self-divorced from the Other" (Adelman, 1997: 14). But there are no prisons or psychiatric holding facilities for entire cultures at murderous war with each other. There are only the mediators, armed with fragile tactics and strategies little tested in the ungoverned reaches of deserts, jungles and mountains where such conflict rages.

Below I describe a narrative mediation model that I have developed and employed during my years of experience practicing tribal engagement, a primary US Army Special Forces function used in countering violent extremism and community conflict in under-governed regions of states experiencing communal conflict.

## 2 The Model

This model of narrative mediation begins with the three elements of Winslade & Monk's narrative mediation practice – deconstruction, externalization and restorying. To this methodology, I have added an element of discovery at the

2 I distinguish between the historical narrative and the conflict story to separate the dense, generational narrative of a collective from the micro-stories that bring glory and trauma into the larger narrative. Where the larger collective narrative carries group identity and projects cultural expression, the micro-stories of glory and trauma serve as markers of cognition and emotion. While the existence of the collective narrative may be non-negotiable, the micro-stories that bring the narrative into conflict can be mediated. The communal act of restorying is meant as an action verb, something that is consciously and wilfully done by the community in order to establish ownership. As many emerging cultures are, for all practical purposes, oral societies, the word 'restory' fits better then 'rewrite'.

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beginning and one of joint mediation at the end to reflect the cross-cultural arena of practice in tribal conflict. The model builds on the work developed by Winslade and Monk and adheres to the psychological and emotional principles used by Michael White. I sought to expand its application to my work by including other emerging mediation techniques from field practitioners and theorists such as Robert Benjamin and John Burton, among others. Ultimately, each practitioner must build his or her own model suitable to those they would help and the complexities of their situation. For now, I offer these five elements of mediation as steps towards helping understand and resolve violent communal conflict.

### *2.1 Discovering the Conflict Story*

*Sociocentric society and the call to position in group identity definition and sustainment*. Unlike the constructed societies of the developed world, emerging cultures remain, for the most part, bounded by blood and marriage and possess a sociocentric psychological organization (Lindholm, 2008). Sociocentric societies are characterized by an external locus of member control that uses complex schemas of inclusion and alienation as powerful methods of group coherence and belonging (Kaufman, 1996). Family members in sociocentric households tend to develop less of an individual agency function and a greater ethos-laden collective-centric group identity and action that builds shared context for communication and the making of meaning (Linger, 2007).

Within the sociocentric family structure, there is far more of the 'we' than the 'I' mentality found in the egocentric family (Tajfel, 1982).[3] This reality drives how the mediator must work to discover the conflict story within: collectively rather than individually. Because the collective is bound with greater member dependency for their own individual psychosocial and emotional health, serious damage or destabilization of the sociocentric narrative will incur greater sequelae in any resulting psychological devolution or sociological disintegration (Elsass, 1992; 1997).

The intimate group interaction that creates the historical narrative also inculcates the group's archaic typologies (archetypes) to each new generation of membership (Jung, 1981). These archaic typologies, in turn, serve as standard-bearers for the development of each generation's prototypes and their requirements for receiving eulogy and heroic acclaim (Stein, 1994b). These archaic typologies, be they in the form of warrior, saviour, survivor, fertility, caregiving and the like, create strong cognitive–psychological and subconscious–emotional drives to fulfil prototypical roles within the group historical narrative (Edinger, 1992). Individual and group collectives act out prototypical behaviours that serve physical daily needs as well as contribute to the deepening of the group narrative (Tilly, 2005).

The narrative is deepened when the prototypical behaviour meets accepted criteria for a heroic eulogy and inclusion into the shared cultural dreamwork that the group holds out as their ongoing narrative containing the collective existential identity and its multifaceted emotional conjugate (Stein, 1994a). If we think

3 For a deeper explanation of internal identities and external locus of control in sociocentric families, see SWJ September 2013 article by Christian (2013b).

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of the group narrative and its existential identity as the center of a shared dream life of the family, clan and tribe, then any threats to that dream life would result in increased activity to protect, define and or sustain it. This by itself creates what Winslade and Monk (2000) refer to as 'calls to position' among the members that can result in the creation of individual acts or stories by the membership designed to preserve the interior life of the whole. For conflict participants, the preservation of their group narrative may seem to be inseparable from their enactment of their ongoing conflict story. It is the task of the mediator to help them separate the negotiable conflict story from the non-negotiable historical narrative.

*Opening psychological and emotional space to discover the conflict story*. By the time that I become involved in mediating tribal or militia conflict, the calls to position within the conflict parties have long hardened. Psychological pain from survivor guilt, loss of loved ones and traumatization of communal reality had closed down the psychological and emotional space between the conflict parties; all either side could see was their own pain and suffering. All they could think of doing was to continue the endless cycle of perpetrating more pain, followed by the victimization of retaliation by the hated other (Krystal, 1978). It is at this point that the mediator has to commit himself to empathy with community members who are at once victims and perpetrators caught in a cycle of victimization–retaliation–victimization.

The commitment to empathy is a verb, not an adjective; it is more a physical than an emotional change in that the mediator listens with a cognitive attentiveness and "emotional alertness" that creates "cultural space" between the mediator and the client victim and the client perpetrator (Stein, 1994: 2-3). This deep listening on the part of the mediator can elicit the deeper, profoundly painful conflict story that has caught the victim-perpetrator in a harrowing nightmare of alienation. Such alienation creates overwhelming shame that results in uncontrolled rage, turning the victim back into the perpetrator (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991).[4] This first step between mediator and conflict party is about building an emotional and empathetic relationship as a basis for cognitive trust, without which the conflict story cannot be discovered.

The conflict stories of intra-state conflicts are often violent, brutal affairs. In my current work in northern Niger, my team and I work to understand and mediate tribal conflict that takes the lives of men, women, children and the livestock they depend on to survive. In the past several weeks, a number of related Tuareg and Fulani clans have lost 17 dead and 20 have been wounded in violence that affected every family in the clan and tribe. In such communal violence the discovery of the conflict story must become a journey grounded in trust and willingness of the mediator to share (com) the pain (passion) of those whom he would help.

My inquiries constitute a request for access to places of loss and suffering protected by defensive boundaries against casual memory. Words and expressions that casually invoke memory without descent into sharing leave the rela-

4 This is one sequelae cycle of communal conflict used for example purposes, and all violent cultural mediation cases are individual and meant to be approached with valid perspectives drawn from in-depth research and analysis.

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tionship between mediator and participant wounded and bleeding. Such words become charity from unequal positions of respect, dignity and right of survival. The dialogue demeans the relationship to one of participant subservience rather than mediator sharing. The mediator then forfeits his right to inquire, to share in that secret place of pain – the conflict story. Events, information and actions that have the deepest emotional, psychological or spiritual impact on people are not casually shared, discussed or evaluated without demeaning them (Nathanson, 1987). The descent into sharing must be authorized, guided and based on equality at an intrinsic level of suffering.

The mediator's willingness to engage calmly and compassionately in order to learn their conflict story through sharing in its pain and loss allows the conflict members to open up and tell their side of the story from that deeply emotional place the mediator has helped them access. The practice of discovering the conflict story is not difficult when the mediator is prepared to listen patiently and without judgment. Often, after achieving rapport, the mediator begins the journey with the simplest but most heartfelt of questions while others are designed simply to open dialogue.

> Mediator: What is it that you have lost that was the most precious?[5] What is the most important thing that you would like to make clear to us about your community's relationship with the 'other'?

Cultural mediation uses questions and sensitive restatements of responses to deconstruct the positions and stances the conflict party has been using to satisfy their underlying human needs. Through a slow process of dialogue, the mediator works to bring these needs into the open so they can be objectively examined against the reality of day-to-day survival and viewed as a separate entity from the larger historical narrative. The questions and dialogue can be as simple as asking how they will survive.

> Mediator: How will you farm without water? Where will your children go during the next attack? Have you thought of asking your conflict partner to discuss how to use collective action to obtain assistance from the government?

### *2.2 Externalizing the Conflict Story and Mapping Its Effects*

*Separating conflict story from historical narrative*. Earlier in this essay, I stated that most conflict parties are unable to distinguish between the individual lines of stories that are in conflict and the larger historical narrative that encapsulates their lives and memories. He uses questions and dialogue to help the conflict party perceive that their narrative can flourish and continue without the presence of the intervening conflict story (Winslade and Monk, 2000). Once the conflict parties can begin participating in dialogue about their historical narrative separate from the conflict story, they are ready to begin the process of externalizing the conflict

5 Invariably, the answer to this question in emerging culture conflict that has turned violent will be the loss of family. Most poignantly, it will be the loss of their children.

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outside of the moral motives of each participant (White, 1989; 2008). In rural communal societies, survival is often a matter of trust between cultures cohabitating common lands. Communal conflict creates betrayal, an insidious form of emotional victimization that creates alienation, shame and rage (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991).

When loved ones are lost amidst alienating shame, the ability to mourn is interrupted with “dire consequences for individuals [and] families” (Stein, 1994: 58) because shame, as a primary emotion, cannot be shared (Wurmser, 1981). In the separation of conflict story from historical narrative, a safe place is created for the conflict party away from humiliation of victimization, allowing for mourning to commence and for nurturance from the healthy parts of the historical narrative. Doing so creates possibilities for the interruption of the shame–rage–revenge dynamic that drives communal conflict into downward spirals of psychological and emotional devolvement. The mediator uses questions and dialogue about love of children and preservation of memory to further separate the conflict parties from the humiliating elements of the conflict story as a condition of strengthening them for the remainder of their mediation journey.

> Mediator: What ways of living (or farming, working, learning) would do most to keep the memory of your grandfathers and their grandfathers alive in the memory of your children? What do you see in your children that most reminds you of your father and grandfather? How can you and your children grow or develop these elements of remembrance to strengthen their historical memory? How can we do this without losing one more son or daughter to this violent conflict?

The mediator frames questions that serve as position calls away from the conflict story and back towards the historical narrative in a form of what Vamik Volkan (1998) calls identity management. Such questions can be simple, but are laden with meaning for survival.

*Mapping conflict story damage on the present and the future generations*. As the conflict parties move from totalizing positions of alienating shame, rage and revenge within the conflict story to positions of reflective remembering within their historical narrative, the mediator moves to focus their attention on the damage of the conflict story from an emotional perspective (White, 2008). The mediator may well ask them about the possibilities for their own individual survival or the survival of their children and grandchildren, helping them to calmly evaluate the many aspects of communal and family life that have been negatively affected by the conflict or that the conflict threatens to terminate altogether. As part of these lines of questioning and dialogue, the mediator takes on the delicate task of reminding parties of the cost of the conflict.

One example of this occurred in a conflict village in western Darfur where we asked both conflict parties to meet at our mediator team house after they had refused to meet in each other’s physical spaces. The individual gain that we were trying to accomplish with that particular session was twofold: First, we wanted to open psychological space among the parties for the presence of each other. Sec-

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ondly, we wanted to place a physical object between the two parties that represented both their past and future losses. We accomplished the former by asking each conflict party to begin the session with a public reading of the list of their dead and injured from the last attacks on each of their villages. The result was sobering. A hushed silence fell over the villagers in the room, and instead of angry denunciations, a mutual respect began to appear for the grief and suffering of both sides. While their faces and body language continued to radiate hushed rage and suffering borne of incalculable loss, the villagers quieted and accepted the presence of each other in a common physical space; they had made psychological room for the temporary existence of the other as a prelude to dialogue. It seemed as if the public suffering of their enemies in front of them had a profound effect on their ability to exclude their existence. Despite one's grief and suffering, the anguish of another calls out for recognition – even the anguish of one's enemy.[6]

### *2.3 Deconstructing the Conflict Story*

*Separating the negotiable story from the non-negotiable narrative.* The externalization of the violence and intent away from humans and onto the conflict story allows the participants to talk about the conflict from a position of psychological safety (Winslade and Monk, 2000). Removed from the immediacy of the conflict story's position calls, the participants can remain outside the pull of victimization, humiliation and tragic loss with all the attendant rage and pain associated with those positions (White, 2008). Even as the participants are outside of their conflict story, the position is temporary, in that the story cannot simply be thrown out or discarded. This is because the conflict story is embedded within the group's historical narrative that documents their existential origin, carries their generational memory and transmits their ascribed and constructed identity. Their narrative is their only known pathway as a group for a future destiny, and moment by moment, the conflict story calls them back into position, into action, into conflict.

While the participants cannot ignore or discard the existence of the conflict story, they can alter it with the mediators' assistance (White, 2007). Through questions and restatements, the mediator can help the participants identify the living tissue of their historical narrative from the conflict story and its calls to positions of alienation, shame, rage and violence. In individual, single conflict group or multiparty group sessions, the mediator uses evaluative questions leading to separating conflict story from existential narrative.

> Mediator: What parts of group social, economic, family or religious life create the most happiness for your family? What parts of your group life seem to involve violence and conflict? If you had to rank order these elements of group life from most to least important, how would you rank them?

The mediators' questions seek to help the conflict parties evaluate an intensely personal narrative that is essential to their being. Yet the conflict story within

6 See *Special Warfare Quarterly* (Christian, 2006).

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this narrative has placed them in harm's way through its compelling calls to position, where they are psychologically and emotionally induced to defend a story that is killing them (White, 2008).

The mediators use questions and restatements to help the parties grapple with answering questions about the nature of their conflict story.

> Mediator: Is the story changeable? Can we change the story without losing our identity and memory of our fathers? Will the other party allow us to change the story? How do we know what parts of our story to change and what parts of our story we must keep in order to survive as a culture? How do we preserve the good narrative without succumbing to the bad story of conflict?

All of these questions are major topics that the mediator helps the parties ask and answer by guiding them in self-review, searching for essential narrative tissue and separating it from conflict story tissue that the parties can cut away, changing their story (Winslade and Monk, 2000). As the mediator works with the conflict parties to evaluate the story, he continues to use psychosocial cultural analysis and framing to maintain the conflict parties' focus on the needs of their families in the present and requirements to balance past memory with future promise. In Niger and Sudan, for example, their environment cognitively and emotionally imprints the tribes we worked with, a perspective Stein (2008) refers to as psychogeography and that I add to with psychogeology.

These psychosocial perspectives have important implications for understanding, evaluating and reframing conflict stories for the mediator. One aspect of this psychosocial perspective is time orientation. In the desert, nothing moves quickly – neither farmer nor herder. What few time markers exist in the desert do so with the seasonal rains that determine whether a family survives or perishes. Time orientation and survival questions allow the mediator to focus the parties on the conflict issues and help connect the dots for restorying.

> Mediator: Will your farms provide all of the food and trade needed to meet the communities' annual demands? Are there efficiencies that can be gained from forming collective action cooperatives with other farmers and traders, even those from the other conflict party? Have you laid out forecasts for farm labor and compared the growing rates of birth for your future planning purposes? If you will have more or fewer community members than needed, have you thought about cross-community dialogue with other communities to meet those needs or employ excess community members?

Only because the mediator has already demonstrated to the conflict parties his understanding of the underlying life-and-death significance of these seemingly unobtrusive questions will his inquiries be listened to and answered from the depth of the conflict story. The parties must believe that the mediator is forming his questions from a position within the story that accounts for the cost they have already borne.

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### *2.4 Reimagining Identity-Meaning and Restorying the Conflict Narrative*

*Problematizing external violations and restorying the conflict elements.* Evaluating the conflict story is a step towards restorying, so the evaluative emphasis is balanced between elements that cause loss, pain and suffering, and elements that create joy, pride, positive memory and identity in non-violent cultural expression. In mediation, questions and restatements help the parties adapt past the negatives while maintaining attention on safeguarding and increasing the positive elements of their stories. How the parties view and understand the causative factors of the negatives is central to their willingness to adapt past them (Korostelina, 2014). For example, much of the conflict involving emerging cultures is rooted in failure to adapt to the demands of change (Beisser, 2006). Cultural elites and leaders of sociocentric communities fail to grasp the scope of change that has long since occurred in the world around them (Bhugra and Becker, 2005).

Possible mediation lines of effort might involve problematizing modernity as the cause of the conflict rather than another cultural group that has adapted faster or with more agility. If the conflict party accepts modernity as the problem rather than malicious intent of other groups, then a number of positive pathways open themselves for use by the mediator. Questions and dialogue can demonstrate that the evolutionary waves of modernity affect entire regions and that all cultures struggle to adapt. Open-ended questions with the parties about the effect that modernity has on communications, travel and transportation, for instance, can focus on the problematized issue that modernity restricts cultural groups' ability to maintain solidarity of inner group cohesion when such choices are presented all around them. Mediator questions then ask the parties to consider and discuss options for how they might preserve cultural heritage, linguistic nuances and generational memory in the face of such changes.

Ultimately, the questioning leads to methods of attraction versus methods of restriction in maintaining the sociocentric collective. Upon this platform of viewpoint change, the mediator introduces the possibilities of collective action. Once each side begins to open pathways forward to preserve themselves, they inadvertently place themselves on parallel courses rather than at right angles in collision (Winslade and Monk, 2000). This relational change in position opens the door for the mediator to ask how they can mutually support each other's existential preservation.

> Mediator: Can either of you imagine possibilities where you can use collective action to strengthen your individual abilities to preserve your language, culture and narrative history? Is modern change unavoidable? What actions can you take individually and collectively to adapt to those changes that are inevitable, while preserving generational memory of your fathers?

Such conversations not only open the door to restorying, but also serve to destabilize totalizing descriptions of conflict (White, 2008). For instance, if the conflict parties are groping towards agreement on the problematized effects of modernity, this opens the door for the mediator to question underlying assumptions regarding motives of the parties.

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> Mediator: Now that you have agreed on elements of modernity that must be dealt with mutually, can you accept that the other side really desires to preserve tradition, narrative identity and generational memory of their fathers? Can each of you accept that the challenges of change are based on realities outside of either of your control?

From destabilizing the parties' totalizing thoughts and descriptions of the conflict, the mediator can use questions to help build pre-stories of respect and collaboration.

> Mediator: Based upon your discussions of the coming changes, what ways can your two cultures work together to form a stronger coalition with which to negotiate the effects of the coming change with the outside world?

This type of dialogue allows the mediator to maintain the focus of discussion on what is best for the group or society rather than for individual needs and interests. For example, the mediator might use questions that move the conflict focus from present interests to future needs of transmitting generational memory.

> Mediator: If you agree that some change to your stories is required for survival, what elements of your stories do you think your fathers would most want preserved?

Questions and dialogue should promote a preferred storyline that is based on non-negotiable needs of memory group identity and that call forth new positions for both parties based on new realities rather than old stances and politics (Morăraşu, 2007).

When the mediator's questions bring the conflict parties past these stances that are instantly recognizable as meeting the deepest psychological and emotional needs, positive emotion and trust in the process begin to swell (White, 2008). The truthfulness of a mediator's questions when they touch upon basic underlying unmet needs transmits through the noise of the conflict conversation and registers on the participants. Such questions validate the psychological and emotional pain and dread that have been building during the life of the conflict. Open discourse and the willingness of the mediator and one conflict party to speak from the heart can melt the hate and bitterness that have fuelled the conflict. From the common need to survive and safeguard their existential memory and origination comes the genesis of emerging culture cooperation that is needed to begin the process of creating alternative non-problem-bound narratives in co-authorship with the other party. Most often, cultures in conflict want peace, but they do not know how to write that story or even where to begin. For this, the mediator can help, and all it takes is belief that the answer is there waiting to be found.

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### 2.5 *Joint Mediation as Theatre and Stagecraft*

*The three acts of cultural conflict.* "Most conflicts conform to the structure of the original passion play, recounting the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is a wrongful act alleged, a suffering endured and the dénouement in justice being served—either by righteous revenge or an act of God" (Benjamin, 2002). The cycle of wrongful act, suffering endured and dénouement of justice served is reflected in many of the earlier stories recounted in the Torah and the Quran. Conflicts that emerging cultures are engaged in are both physical and metaphysical with implications for failure that transcends mortality. Like the passion play, emerging cultural conflict is laden with meta-messages that presage the coming spectacle. Where the immediate image of the passion play is the bloody cross, the immediate image of emerging culture conflict is laden with symbols and meta-messages that inform participants and viewers what to think and calls them into position long before they even hear the storyline.

The type of violence that characterizes emerging culture conflict aims at destroying the outward manifestation of each other's cultural expression of interior identity. It murders the public face of the enemy (Adelman, 1997: 1-28). The rage that creates and sustains this murderous intent can only arise from shared discourses, or else betrayal, alienation, rejection and scorn would not be possible. This is why the story's underlying discourse that in turn undergirds the historical narrative that carries the psychological identity of the group must be grappled with the same way desperate writers anguish over the plots and verbiage of a play. The passion play of suffering and redemption, justice and revenge must not only be reimagined and rewritten, but the changed discourse must then be re-enacted to achieve redemption and justice and alleviate the cycle of revenge. It is in this re-enactment that mediation becomes theatre, albeit with the spectre of physical violence and loss replacing tomatoes and catcalls from a disbelieving audience (Benjamin, 2002). The new restoryed discourses must be written in each camp; sometimes alone and other times in mutual writing forums where select groups from both conflict parties join together to imagine new dialogue and test out new meanings of past pain and suffering.

*The theatre of joint mediation.* These new, restoryed discourses are as yet untested prior to the dénouement of the joint mediation sessions. The new material must be played out on the theatrical stage of the mediation process where protagonist and antagonist face off and reread their old discourse that was rewritten in single sessions and joint sessions by members of each conflict party. The audience to the theatre consists of heads of families – victims as they are to suffering and loss – and elders terrified that the new material will eliminate the memory of their long dead loved ones or maybe even themselves once they die. The audience participants are not mere spectators; they are the judges of process and product even as the drama unfolds. They provide input through emotive rejection or support that their spokesmen are attuned to from a lifetime of high context communication. Without release of pain and emotion, psychological space for forgiveness of themselves and each other is not created. Without some degree of containment of that pain and emotion, chaos erupts into a primal scream of anguish and revenge.

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The outcomes of the theatre do not have to be logical or intellectually sensible to the conflict mediator; they do have to be emotionally and psychologically fulfilling, with clear senses of believability equal to the existing narrative story that remains after the restorying. The audience participates vicariously through their respective spokesmen elders, reliving and releasing emotion as their speaker tastes the new and untested discourse and watches the faces of the 'other' for reaction; acceptance or rejection on a visceral, emotional level of belief. The emotion of the unfolding drama, once started, is no longer solely in the control of the mediator, the parties or even the audience. It becomes a phenomenon with a life of its own as it is fed by and reflected back to the collective people assembled in mediation.

*The stagecraft of joint mediation.* Prior to the conflict party leaders meeting each other in an open session, the mediator team must plan for all contingencies. These include the security of weapons and fighters in zones of violent conflict, the mental and emotional states of the participants to the drama and the physical structure that the drama occurs in. Emerging culture mediation is often conducted while the violence is occurring, even during the moments and hours spent in dialogue with the conflict parties. Violence may also punctuate that mediation session as multiple larger events that occur before, during or after individual mediation sessions. There is often no police force or army present to provide security for the mediation team outside of whatever internal security they brought in.

The final joint mediation session may never occur in an individual mediator's cycle of involvement, but all the work is meant to lead to such an event. In some cases, the finale is nearly ceremonial, as inked agreements and hundreds of submediation events (single party and joint) have already brought the conflict from armed combat to one of political accommodation. But the body politic always seeks visible, emotional conclusions as part of the meaning-making process. As the stages of the mediation cycle progress from discovery of the conflict story to its deconstruction, externalization and restorying, the joint mediation sessions increase in number and duration as gains are made and violence decreases.

### *2.6 Implementation*

I have come to realize that the conflict story rarely erupts into violence as a sudden event. Instead, I invariably back-traced the conflict story lines generationally to the meanings and motives given to events as they unfolded. Just as the conflict story of every community that is caught up in violence as perpetrator, victim or bystander is unique, so too must be my implementation of a model of narrative mediation. I begin with the certainty that the conflict can be mediated and the larger narrative can be preserved for future generations. All that matters is my ability to understand and differentiate the conflict story from the historical narrative and begin a search for ways to deconstruct, re-evaluate, rewrite and restage the narrative and its conflict component (Volkan, 2005).

As the client is group rather than individual, I have to be prepared to operate in nearly all of the stages simultaneously as different community leaders may take longer or shorter periods of time to transition between these elements of

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mediation. Also, I have had to move back and forth through the elements of the model based on minute feedback from the conflict parties; rarely do we complete one element of the model without having to successively return based on the cognitive and emotional input from the clients. As in therapy, the conflict parties determine the pace and the outcomes of the mediation and only rarely in joint sessions between both sides. In Darfur, for instance, I found that deconstructing attitudes on race, slavery and ethnic prejudice within the Arab and African tribes had to begin within the hearts and minds of one side to the conflict at a time. This occurred only when the conflict had reached some point of ripeness for resolution based on loss and pain from trauma and extended violence. The traumatized communities were suffering, with victim and perpetrator seeking validation for the loss of their family. Both sought justice and longed for relief from the endless cycle of fighting they had been engaged in.

## 3 Past Performance

There is little successful past performance in resolving violent, communal conflict by the developed nations' defence, diplomatic or humanitarian institutions. Most violent communal conflict is resolved by the use of physical force employed by the larger community against the weaker, as in the case of the Turkish response to their Kurdish insurgency or by the break-up of the Westphalian state, with the most recent example being the creation of South Sudan. As conflicts in Libya, Syria, Somalia, Mali, Yemen and now Iraq suggest, interventions to alleviate intra-state violence require more nuanced approaches than simple lethality. Over the past 20 years, I have used elements of narrative mediation as part of tribal engagement in conflict zones with the Fur, Zaghawa and Rizeigat tribes in Sudan; the Ogadin Somali clans and Oromo tribe in Ethiopia; the Sunni Arab tribes in Iraq; the Tamashek touchetts of Niger and the Pueblo tribes in the northern Amazon basin of Ecuador and Colombia.

The engagement of tribes caught up in violent conflict using this model became a powerful tool for understanding and reducing the rage and intensity of the confrontations (Christian, 2011). Through its use, we succeeded in the mediated prevention of individual family and village participation in attacks and related activities that would have contributed to the much larger cycle of communal violence. Section 2.2 above recounts an example of joint mediation that prevented one such attack in Darfur. Every individual engagement however, sought to discover the story elements that are in conflict, deconstruct the conflict story, and externalize its elements as a basis for reimagining a new story. Daily, we focused their attention on the survival of their children, the security of livestock and crops that fed them and the positive non-violent interactions that directly fed the larger historical narrative.

In daily engagements with family and tribe, I did not often ask where their related militia was; I had other resources for that. Instead, questions involved how they would educate their children, how they would transmit language, culture and the identity that it expressed. In Caquetá and Putumayo, Colombia, this

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involved mediating with communities to disarm, demobilize and resettle their abandoned villages in return for guarantees of indigenous language education and road construction for Pueblo farmers to access nearby markets (Christian, 2007a). In Kabkabiya and Al-Genina, Sudan, the conflict stories we mediated involved land use between Arab pastoralists and African agrarian families who were killing each other over complex versions of identity and belonging (Christian, 2006).

Some of the conflict story elements that we successfully mediated there in Darfur involved farmer versus herder, African versus Arab, black versus white, and slave versus freeman, with all of the emotion that those opposing positions entailed (Christian, 2013b). Again in eastern Ethiopia, the conflict stories between Oromo and Somali involved conflict stories about pastoralism versus agrarian identities in shared narratives. Most recently, in Niger and Mali, I worked to mediate conflict stories of identity and cultural expression between Tuareg, African and Arab tribes in the Sahel and Sahara desert. There, dimensions of identity and belonging took on added complexity with an existing farmer–pastoralist–black–white–slave–freeman conflict story that was deepened by the addition of green and red skin colours, which intensified the struggle over the larger historical narrative.

In summary, the support for my model is threefold. First, it is based on a recognized and widely validated mediation approach to resolving family conflict developed by Winslade & Monk that itself is based on the psychological family therapy of Michael White. To their existing stages of deconstruction, externalization and restorying, I added stages of discovery and joint mediation to account for the cross-cultural and communal nature of the conflict parties. Finally, my use of this adapted model in more than 60 months of practical fieldwork in violent conflict zones has created a praxis of recognized value for engaging intra-state conflict by practitioners of military, diplomatic and humanitarian intervention.

## 4 Conclusion

The model of mediation described here adapts western family narrative mediation therapy to the survival needs of sociocentric communities that are unable to emerge from their nightmare story of conflict that is killing them and their existential historical narrative. Narrative mediation, like therapy, “is not about relieving suffering, it’s about repairing one’s relationship to reality” (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991: 100). This is why it works, because this model does not assume that the mediator has the answer to relieving their suffering or reversing their losses. Rather, the mediation exposes the fantasy world of the conflict story to the reality of disintegrating historical narratives that contain sacred generational inheritances of individual and family identity. That is the real threat that the conflict story lies about; that without success in violent conflict, the identity of the family and the tribe will diminish or disappear and the only solution is to continue the fight. With mediator assistance, the conflict parties develop alternatives to the false conflict story that calls them to choose between immediate physical

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survival or future psychological annihilation and emotional death. The mediator is the foil to this false story, offering a different way out of violence without surrendering their non-negotiable right to live and extend their existential identity across time and space. Within the mediated stories of the historical narrative, the conflict parties find more than just absence of violence. They find the resilience to stabilize their community against the siren calls of violent extremism. This is the promise and the fulfilment of narrative mediation in emerging culture conflict.

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