



# **Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution (Explorations in Narrative Psychology)**

*Sara Cobb*

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In the context of ongoing or historical violence, people tell stories about what happened, who did what to whom and why. Yet frequently, the speaking of violence reproduces the social fractures and delegitimizes, again, those that struggle against their own marginalization. This speaking of violence deepens conflict and all too often perpetuates cycles of violence. Alternatively, sometimes people do not speak of the violence and it is erased, buried with the bodies that bear it witness. This reduces the capacity of the public to address issues emerging in the aftermath of violence and repression.

This book takes the notion of "narrative" as foundational to conflict analysis and resolution. Distinct from conflict theories that rely on accounts of attitudes or perceptions in the heads of individuals, this narrative perspective presumes that meaning, structured and organized as narrative processes, is the location for both analysis of conflict, as well as intervention.

But meaning is political, in that not all stories can be told, or the way they are told delegitimizes and erases others. Thus, the critical narrative theory outlined in this book offers a normative approach to narrative assessment and intervention. It provides a way of evaluating narrative and designing "better-formed" stories: "better" in that they are generative of sustainable relations, creating legitimacy for all parties. In so doing, they function aesthetically and ethically to support the emergence of new histories and new futures. Indeed, critical narrative theory offers a new lens for enabling people to speak of violence in ways that undermine the intractability of conflict

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