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Narrative analysis

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The narrative mode has a special significance for the study of politics in that it has been long regarded as basic to the ideological construction of events and to the manipulation of public opinion. From Hayden White’s theorisations about the relations between narrative, politics and ideology to modern-day investigations about the way stories are embedded into different forms of political communication, narrative has always been at the centre of reflections about political discourse.

In this chapter, I approach the topic of the relations between storytelling and politics from the point of view of discourse analysis. As I will show below, narrative analysis in the area of political discourse studies is not a unified field. Indeed, researchers employ a variety of theoretical methodological instruments and focus on very different kinds of texts and contexts. These differences reflect not only diverging conceptions of narrative and politics, but also alternative ways of approaching discourse itself. Nonetheless, two general trends can be devised in the field of narrative analysis. In the first trend, the focus is on ‘master-narratives,’ intended as overarching structures that underlie and organize discourse and interpretation. Applications of this approach have mostly concentrated on public discourse and on discourse directly intended as politically motivated. A second approach treats narratives as a set of everyday discourse practices and genres that acquire specific characteristics in specific contexts. Applications of narrative analysis from this perspective have been much more varied since a view of narrative as a tool for making sense of and constructing experience also allows for an understanding of politics as an aspect of everyday life. The distinction between these two conceptions of narrative will guide the organisation of this chapter.

In the first part, I will introduce some theoretical methodological issues and definitions. I will then concentrate on studies that conceive of political narratives as grand narratives that are either controlled by, or reflect the influence of, politically powerful agents such as governments, international organisms or mainstream media. Here, the emphasis will be on master-narratives. I will also discuss work on the conflicts between expected narrative contents and forms and actual storytelling needs and practices in institutional settings (e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, or asylum-seeking procedures). The following section will discuss how narrative analysis has contributed to the study of political discourse by
looking, for example, at studies about the use of stories and anecdotes as instruments of persuasion in the discourse of politicians and in media aligned with political parties. I will then review work that has illuminated the way narratives are used to make sense of political issues in different domains. I will focus on studies that come from different theoretical methodological approaches showing how they have contributed to understanding ways in which narratives turn the personal into the political. In this section, I will also devote attention to recent developments that show a growing interest in digital media.

**Theoretical methodological issues**

**Definitions of narrative**

Before discussing narrative analysis and its application to the field of politics, it is important to briefly review some general issues, such as definitions of narrative and ways of conceiving politics, and to introduce narrative analysis as a field within discourse studies, together with some of the main concerns and debates in the area that are relevant to research in politics.

The definition of narrative is perhaps the most controversial issue in the field. Indeed, there is little agreement among linguists on the criteria that distinguish narratives from other discourse genres. It is to be noted here that the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are often used interchangeably in the literature, but in reality, a distinction should be made between the notion of ‘story’ as a prototypical narrative and the notion of ‘narrative’ as a genre that comprises different types of stories. Narratologists, that is, scholars who study narrative from a literary perspective, have focused on finding the constitutive elements of the prototypical story. They describe it as comprising a sequence of related events, with chronological ordering as the main criterion (Chatman 1990), but have added causal links as an important organising principle (Prince 2003). As narratology developed over time, the list of defining characteristics of stories increased and scholars started including elements such as the presence of human agency and the communication of human experience (Fludernik 1996). Even so, most narratologists would agree on the idea that a story could be defined as representing temporally and causally related events, dealing with some sort of complication, presenting goal-directed actions and having animate protagonists (for a discussion, see De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, ch. 1). These basic ideas have been retained in linguistic models of narrative.

The most popular among them has been, and still is, the one proposed by the sociolinguist William Labov who focused on narratives of personal experience, which he defined as ‘one verbal technique for recapitulating past experience’ (Labov & Waletzky 1967, p. 13). In his model, prototypical stories consist of an abstract (a kind of story summary), orientation (clauses or sections offering guidance to the listener in terms of time, space and story characters), complicating action (the main events reported), evaluation (clauses or sections expressing the point of view of the narrator on the events and characters) and a coda (a closing statement that connects the story to the present interaction). Not all these components were deemed necessary for a text to be regarded as a story, since the story may also simply focus on a series of actions in the past, but Labov showed that well-performed stories included all components and had developed evaluation sections. Most narrative analysts would agree on a basic definition of stories as concerning past events, chronologically and or causally connected by a narrator whose point of view they encode. However, many would also question the excessive focus on the prototypical story, the neglect of different narrative models and formats, the scarce consideration of alternative storytelling formats (for example,
of the presence of multiple narrators and differentiated audiences), practices (including the selection of specific addressees among possible audiences, the effect of audience reactions and feedback on storytelling, and so forth) and contexts (for example, mediated ones), which are typical of Labov’s model (see contributions in Bamberg 1997 for a discussion of some of these issues).

For the study of narratives in relation to political issues, we will see, for example, that many different genres besides the narrative of personal experience are relevant, such as the anecdote, the chronicle, the life story, the testimonial, the small story, and so forth, and that the contexts and media in which such narratives are embedded are also very important to understanding the way they are used.

**Narrative as methodology or as epistemology**

Another important issue that concerns narrative analysts is the ambiguity and overlaps between a conception of it as a methodological instrument (i.e. a tool for eliciting first-hand experience) and as a specific epistemological mode (i.e. a way of understanding reality). Indeed, many discourse analysts, particularly after the narrative turn’s stress on the legitimacy of qualitative research paradigms (Bruner 1986) take the view that eliciting stories or analysing existing narrative testimonials about particular experiences (e.g. political ones) is the best way to get to participant understandings of particular events or social experiences. Such preference for narrative is based on the idea that narrative is one of the most widespread and preferred modes of encoding and understanding human experience.

We will review debates around the epistemological status of narrative more in detail below, but here it is important to note how the conflation between narrative as a tool and narrative as a mode presents many possible complications and has therefore led to polemics and debates in the field. Indeed, while using narrative as a tool for eliciting experiential accounts and subjective perceptions is an accepted and largely uncontroversial practice, embracing the view of narrative as an epistemic mode has led many analysts to interpret narratives (elicited or spontaneous) as unmediated and transparent reports about experience, without paying sufficient attention to the conditions of production of such stories and therefore treating them simply as vehicles for the communication of content. Scholars who approach storytelling as practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2008) have focused on the importance of this issue, for example, highlighting the role of the interviewer in the context of elicited stories (De Fina 2009, De Fina & Perrino 2011) and the influence of different kinds of contextual factors on the shape and function of narratives.

**Narratives and politics**

The special relationship between narratives and politics has been noted over and over again in the literature on both topics. Bottici argues, for example, that:

Narratives are ways to connect events in a nonrandom way, and therefore they are powerful means to provide meaning to the political world we live in. […] They tell us both what is the sense of our political world in general and also of our place within it.

(Bottici 2010, p. 920)

Scholars note that since stories are the most ubiquitous of discourse genres, they are necessarily connected with politics, both in the sense that personal and private narratives,
such as autobiographical stories and anecdotes, are used by politicians and political movements, and in the sense that narratives, such as news stories, stories on social media and a variety of historical narratives, circulate and are widely shared, thereby shaping public perception about politically relevant events, relations and people.

However, the way in which narrative practices may be related to the political realm crucially depends on the conception and definition of what politics is. Hoare (2010) takes up and discusses a useful distinction originally proposed by Freeden between ‘thinking politically’ and ‘thinking about politics’. In his words: ‘thinking politically refers to a range of particular thought practices of, and concerning, collectivities’, while thinking about politics refers to ‘the patterns and ranges of views that people hold when their thoughts concern the central issues and challenges their societies encounter: the core domain of politics’ (Freeden 2008, pp. 197–198, quoted p. 6). Taking inspiration from this distinction, it could be said that politics can be conceived both as the realm of action and thought about how issues and problems concerning individuals intersect with issues and problems concerning society as a collective entity, and also as the realm of direct engagement with issues of power. If politics and the political include, as I believe, both the realm of public struggles and discourses about social issues, and the domain of private (or less public) discourses and practices that pertain to the individual as a member of society at large, then our definition of what kinds of narratives are political also needs to be expanded. At the same time, if the notion of politics is not reduced to the negative connotations that are attached to it when regarded as not simply an arena for the imposition of power, but also as terrain for the proposal of solutions and new ways of tackling social questions, then again, the range of narratives that can be seen as political expands. In her work on political narratives, Molly Andrews espouses the latter view when she declares:

I am then interested in what kinds of stories people tell about how the world works, how they explain the engines of political change, and the roles they see themselves, and those whom they regard as being part of their groups, as playing in this ongoing struggle.

(Andrews 2007, p. 8)

As we will see, narrative analysts have focused on one or the other of these two meanings depending on their theoretical background and object of study (see also the introduction to this volume for a discussion on this point).

**Grand narratives**

A great deal of work on narratives and politics focuses on what many call ‘master’ narratives, that is public dominant discourses about particular social issues. Such discourses are seen as frames through which other discourses (including political discourses and stories) are interpreted. For example, examining narratives told by Korean women who were sex slaves to the Japanese military, Murph argues that:

The relentless accusations and framing of the survivors’ experiences as prostitution and the survivors as prostitutes – who volunteered to work in lucrative war zones and who were not coerced to do so by the Japanese government – continually evoke the master narrative of prostitution.

(Murph 2008, p. 50)
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Such narrative positions these subjects in a way that corners them into delicate identity work to propose alternative interpretations of their past.

Much of the literature on master-narratives comes from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework and examines politics as the imposition of frames of understanding by the powerful. Therefore, it focuses mostly on reports of events in the press and on political discourses.

The examination of ideological bias in press articles has a long tradition. Authors have of course dealt with the coverage of political events, but also with the political motivatedness of event construals and the possible impact of such narratives on audiences. Studies look at how events are connected to each other and, in turn, at how such connections represent and convey particular ideological viewpoints. Scholars have shown that events of political significance in the press are emplotted in certain ways through processes of selection, temporal and causal ordering, attributions of agency to different protagonists, focus on particular occurrences, and choices at the lexical or syntactic level (see Fowler 1991, Hall et al. 1978, Matheson 2005; Jacobs 2000). They have also pointed to the role of these press reports in fitting into dominant models and value-systems that are reproduced and circulated. In a recent article on reports of political protests by the British press, Hart (2013) shows, for example, that these kinds of events are always construed as episodes of violence through the use of many different strategies: from the fact itself of treating them as violent episodes and therefore undermining their motivations, to constructing asymmetrical schemas about agents and patients of actions and to applying a selective focus on certain kinds of semantic relations within event clauses.

Another strand of CDA looks at the role of master or ‘hegemonic’ narratives in public political discourse. Particularly significant here is work on national identities and on how states, politicians and organisations construct a story about the identities of nations. Such collective representations then become frames within which individual stories can be understood. For these studies, narratives are interpretations of the past and therefore they are based on discourses and counter-discourses about history. For example, Wodak et al. (2009) examine how national identities are constructed within official commemorations. In particular, they analyse the discourses produced by politicians in 2005 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation in Austria. They argue that stories about traumatic events in the past can be seen as ‘attempts to create consensual images of history which unify a whole nation’ (p. 206) and to find a common core of images and explanations. Their analysis centers on linguistic/rhetorical strategies, temporal and spatial deixis, the naming of actors, syntactic constructions, such as active or passive, modality, metaphors and _topoi_, and their use in the building up of success or catastrophe.

Public narratives about the nation are seen by others as windows into the motivations and future objectives of political regimes. In a study about public discourse in the Putin-Medvedev era, Bacon (2012) defines public political narratives as ‘a sequential account given by political actors connecting selected, specific developments so as to impose a desired order on them’ (p. 768). In his view, being selective, such narratives construct a political point of view, but they are also predictive in that they indicate possible developments and future actions. Bacon stresses that for this reason, narrative analysis can illuminate actors’ views, motifs, priorities, instead of focusing exclusively on effects of power processes. These grand narratives are dominant because they are circulated through the media and repeated through a process of ‘accrual’, that is, they become part of people’s habitus.
Similar views of narrative as a kind of meta-discourse about recent or past history are found also in Hodges’ (2011) work on the ‘War on terror’ narrative propagated by George W. Bush about the 9/11 events in the US and in Kubiak’s (2014) analysis of the ‘War narrative’ as legitimation of American politics.

Most of the works reviewed above rely on a variety of data (such as different political speeches, interviews, articles in the press, books and interviews) and stress the importance of intertextuality, that is of connections between different texts and how such connections and metaphors are reflected in more private discourses.

In the work discussed above, narratives are seen from a macro perspective as cohesively constructed interpretations or all-encompassing metaphors about the past. I will come back to the issues related to the definition of what exactly is a meta or ideological narrative below but now I will briefly turn to work that examines the role of narratives in institutional processes.

Nowhere is the political effect of narratives clearer than in institutional settings that directly depend upon and affect policy making. Examples of these kinds of settings are truth commissions and asylum-seeking settings. In the case of truth commissions, scholars have underlined how the process of storytelling is deeply embedded within government policies of reconciliation. In a study about TRC narratives in South Africa during the post-apartheid period, Andrews (2007) shows, for example, that the TRC had the role to restore a narrative fashioned by the state as part of a project to recreate and maintain national identity. Narratives were supposed to demonstrate a process of healing for the nation and the Truth Commission carefully controlled which stories could be told by setting criteria that excluded many of the testimonies. Andrews makes the important point that the individual stories fitted into larger meta-narratives: one was about the Truth Commission itself, the second was the assumed relationship between telling and healing, and the third was the idea that individual stories of suffering put together would allow the construction of a collective identity for the country. Similar arguments about the ‘hearability’ of narratives that did not conform to TRC expectations, are made by Blommaert, Bock and McCormick (2006).

Work on asylum seekers’ narratives also points to how political processes constrain the criteria for tellability and create clashes between asylum seekers and reviewing officials’ expectations about what can and should be narrated, and how. Maryns and Blommaert (2001) and Maryns (2005) analysed asylum seekers’ storytelling processes in Belgium and pointed to differences in perspectives on the events taken by the two sides and on the inequality determined by the fact that narrators did not tell their story in their own language, but had to use a lingua franca. Differences in event perspectives arise given the different roles that officials and narrators play in the interaction and their, often conflicting, objectives in terms of what they want to achieve in the communicative event. While asylum seekers are protagonists of the events they tell, and regard them as highly charged lived experiences, officials may define them as collections of facts that have to eventually fit into bureaucratic categories. Having no first-hand knowledge of these experiences, officials do not necessarily empathise with the narrators; however, their interpretations of, and judgement about, asylum seekers’ stories will affect the result of their pleas.

Jacquemet (2005) studied interviews that took place at the United Nations High Commission on Refugees in Tirana, Albania, for the granting of refugee status to Kosovars seeking UN protection during the 2000 conflicts in former Yugoslavia. He noted the disrupting effect that the prejudice against stories had on asylum seekers who were trying to convey dramatic experiences and who wanted to relate them in detail to officials who had been instructed to reject personal stories in favour of detailed responses to questions. In
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these environments, although stories are not directly concerned with political issues, they are embedded in important political processes.

Before I turn to narratives told by politicians, let me summarise some of the criticism and objections that have been addressed to accounts of narrative that use the construct of the meta- or the master-narrative. Even though it is important to recognise the significance of the link between individual narratives and more macro constructs, such as ideologies and discourses, the use of the term ‘narrative’ to refer to such macro-level phenomena may have the effect of effacing the textual and interactional nature of storytelling and of stories as such. There is a danger of substituting the term ‘narrative’ for any kind of macro-level discourse, thus leading to a misunderstanding of what narratives actually are in context. Such a tendency can be corroborated in the ambiguity and lack of precision with which the terms master-, meta- or hegemonic-narrative are used in the literature. Scholars (particularly in the CDA camp) tend to employ such terms to refer to ideologies, discourses, scenarios, historical reconstructions, and so forth, often without exactly clarifying what they mean by them. As we will see below, in more recent studies, there has been a shift towards a view of narratives as practices and therefore a much greater attention on the embedding of narratives in particular interactional and semiotic contexts, and on the use of specific resources and affordances by narrators.

Narratives in the discourse of politicians

Many scholars have noted that narrative plays an important part in discourses produced by politicians. Narratives are often used as a more immediate way of connecting with audiences and readers because they are seen as representing a non-argumentative, more common-sense and therefore more grass-roots inspired mode of conveying political views. In a review and critical assessment of CDA use of narrative, Souto Manning (2014) illustrates how politicians use everyday narratives to their advantage. She presents the case of a political speech by Bush in which he used an anecdote about a Texan painter whose work was showcased at the Oval office to come across as compassionate and optimistic. She also uses the case of a government campaign in Brazil to analyse how narratives are used in political advertisements on TV in order to garner support from audiences for public policies. Because stories have a more immediate quality than arguments, and are presented as conveying the experience of common people, their message is more easily internalised by audiences.

The tendency to tell stories as a way to connect with the public is recognised by some as a phenomenon that is closely related to the informalisation of public life. Paul Goetsch noted, for example, that the spread of television not only added a visual component to the experience of listening to political speeches, but also ‘encouraged Presidents to break with the conventions of formal oratory and to adopt an informal, sometimes conversational and narrative style’ (1994, p. 26, quoted in Schubert 2010, p. 144). In a study of former Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi’s and politician Grillo’s rhetoric styles, Ruggiero (2012) argued, for example, that both tend to communicate in the most direct way through the use of slogans and narratives that tap into common sense and subvert traditional categories of the symbolic use of language (Edelman 1988), achieving thereby, the ‘primacy of the narrative in political discourse’ (p. 307, see also Paternostro and Sottile 2014, on the same topic). Studying a collection of political speeches by UK and US leaders and politicians, Schubert proposes a taxonomy of narrative functions of political speeches. He distinguishes between ‘personalizing’, ‘integrating’, ‘exemplifying’ and ‘polarizing’. When politicians personalise,
they use stories to present themselves as particular kinds of individuals. An integrating function ‘can be discerned in narrative passages that emphasise common achievements or values of a nation or a political party, while the speaker is a representative of the group’ (2010, p. 11). Narratives can also exemplify particular argumentative points a politician is making, and finally, a polarising narrative uses historical reconstruction or anecdotes to construct enemies.

Studies have also addressed particular kinds of narratives or narrative functions. This is the case with Shenav’s (2005) analysis of what he calls ‘concise’ narratives in the speech of Israeli politicians, that is, narratives that summarise entire historical periods to the advantage of a particular argument. Fetzer (2010) talked about ‘small stories’ as allowing the intersection of public and private spheres in political discourse. Archakis and Tsakona provide yet another example of specific narrative types in their investigation of the role of humorous narratives in Greek parliamentary debates (also see Perrino 2015 on the use of humorous stories by politicians). They argue that:

such informal conversational resources and themes originating in local social networks and entering political discourse and oratory are strategically employed by politicians in their attempt to create a more personalised view of political affairs, hide the unequal distribution of discursive resources along different social groups, and avoid political argumentation.

(Archakis & Tsakona 2011, p. 62)

**Narratives as political sense making**

In this section, we turn to the use of narratives by individuals to deal with their particular experiences as integral to social experiences, as instances of social problems and as windows into their understanding of socio-political processes. In that sense, this kind of understanding of narratives also conveys a conception of politics as a domain in which the private and the public are closely interwoven. In a series of studies about how individuals construe social processes (from political changes in East and West Germany to war fought by the US), Andrews states that she is:

interested in what kinds of stories people tell about how the world works, how they explain the engines of political change, and the roles they see themselves, and those whom they regard as being part of their groups, as playing in this ongoing struggle.

(Andrews 2007, p. 8)

Narrative inquiry that takes this approach uses as a point of reference the idea, dear to ‘narrative turn’ scholars in the social sciences (see Bruner 1986), that getting people to narrate experiences, is a good way of understanding social problems from the point of view of their protagonists, or their victims. Thus, many of these studies take as their data, narratives told in interviews or in focus groups, and examine ways in which narrators portray their experiences and their role in a wide variety of contexts that can be seen as ‘political’ in the sense sketched above. For example, narrative analysts have looked at the wide issue of migration, studying how migrants construct experiences connected with ethnic and racial discrimination (see Baynahm 2003; De Fina 2003; van de Mieroop 2012) or linguistic discrimination (De Fina & King 2011; Relaño Pastor 2014). Other studies have focused on
different groups’ construction of social problems, such as homelessness (Trimingham 2015), gender oppression (Murph 2008; Latvala 2015), survival from wars and mass killings, such as the Holocaust (Schiffrin 2002; Piazza & Rubino 2015; Wodak & Rheindorf 2017).

Most of these works use qualitative methodologies with a variety of instruments taken from discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, work on small data corpora, that is narratives told by a limited number of subjects and offer close textual analyses of the fragments under investigation. In these studies, the connections between the individual and the social is seen as residing in the way narrators and interviewers interacionally position themselves with respect to social issues. Stress is placed on the centrality of the interactional context, that is on the relationships established between interlocutors through the storytelling (not only on the content of the stories) and on the dynamic construction of context, which includes incorporation into the present discourse of ‘enregistered’ identities (that is, identities that are more generally associated with social roles, see De Fina 2014) and ideologies or capital D discourses. But such wider constructs are evoked and made relevant by the narrators and listeners, not presupposed by the analyst. Common analytic instruments include the notions of positioning, agency, stance and participation frameworks. Positioning (as defined by Bamberg 1997b, but also as reinterpreted later, see De Fina 2013 on this point) refers to positions taken by narrators with respect to:

a. the story world, that is, characters in the story;
b. the storytelling world, that is, present interlocutors;
c. the social world, that is, common ideologies and stereotypes.

Agency is seen as the degree of initiative implicitly taken in story worlds and/or assigned in storytelling worlds to themselves by narrators. Stance-taking refers to ‘the expression of an attitude, evaluation, or judgement as the speaker’s own point of view’ (Lampropoulou & Myers 2012). All these tools involve the analysis of linguistic strategies, such as pronoun choice and switches, passive and active constructions, modality, reported speech, time and place reference, linguistic devices conveying presuppositions, lexicon and syntactic expressions conveying emotions, and so on.

The concept of participation frameworks (Goffman 1981) proposes the idea that both the notion of speaker and hearer can be deconstructed in order to include different roles. For example, the speaker can take the role of author, animator (someone who just utters the words), or principal (someone who speaks on behalf of someone else). The audience in turn can include ratified addressees, but also non-ratified addressees and overhearers. The ways narrators and audiences play, impersonate or reject all or some of these roles determines the way stories convey meanings as much as the referential worlds that they evoke.

The studies mentioned above have centered on storytelling, particularly in interviews and research-generated environments. They have also focused on verbal devices and on self-representation. However, as is the case with discourse analysis in general, in the last decade, narrative analysis has widened its scope to include new ways of creating and communicating stories. Within this still-young field, the stress is on narrative as practices (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2008). From this perspective, narratives should be seen as embedded within other semiotic practices and as inscribed within the affordances and frames created and established in them. Narrative genres, therefore, are not seen as fixed, but as emerging within particular kinds of interactions, and the inventory of narrative resources necessarily widens to open up to non-verbal and multimodal tools. If storytelling is seen as practice,
then participation frameworks also become more important and significant as co-narration or co-authorship and multiple listenership or readership also acquire greater relevance.

Studies of narratives as practices within the scope of discourse and politics have concentrated on computer-mediated communication as it is within digital media, such as social media, that new forms of political participation are taking shape. Analysts have underscored, for example, the power of social-media participants in shaping, reshaping and circulating stories about politicians and politics, but also in terms of how new media are exploited by political powers to tell certain stories. In the study of political speeches that was quoted earlier, Schubert (2010) analyzes, for example, how speeches embedded within government-controlled sites are surrounded by electronic hypertexts that create new potential frames. He shows that hyperlinks allow users to access further narrative genres, such as photo contexts, biographies and historical surveys, which constitute kinds of meta-narratives that guide interpretation. At the same time, users are free to create their own ‘narrative paths’ as they navigate the websites.

As mentioned above, recent investigations are interrogating the participatory power of new media narratives. In a study of Chilean students, participation in demonstrations against educational policies, García Agustín and Aguirre Díaz (2014) show how the students combined the appropriation of public spaces through ‘flash mob’ events, that is, mobilisations organised through social media, performed and then circulated again through the same media, and within the frame of reference of popular narratives and characters taken from Japanese comics. Students perform roles that are taken from those characters and use the comics’ storylines to reinterpret present conflicts. These new forms of participation have completely transformed storytelling by giving users of social media power over encoding and circulation (see also Georgakopoulou 2014 on media transposition of stories about the Greek crisis).

There are yet other ways in which new media have broken established storytelling formats. Recent research on the construction of identities in public space has also demonstrated how stories and media are tightly intertwined. Analyses of narratives told, for example, by members of LGBTQ communities, have illustrated how coming-out narratives acquire power through the construction of collective frames and through the availability of testimonials on the internet, but also how these new spaces have allowed for the creation of hybrid genres (see Gray 2009; Jones 2015). The appropriation of the internet by oppressed and minority groups has also allowed these groups to get their messages across to a wide audience and to position themselves strategically. Storytelling has played an important role in such processes; therefore, to conclude this chapter, I will briefly discuss the example of video narratives posted by members of the ‘Dreamers’ movement as part of their campaign to push for migration reforms.

The Dreamers movement started in 2010 when four undocumented students occupied the office of an Arizona Senator in the US to pressure him to support a reform of legislation that would allow undocumented students to enrol in university. Such legislation came to be known as the DREAM act, hence their name. The Dreamers have since grown into a national organisation, with organisations in 26 states and with more than 100,000 members. They have organised countless events and protests and successfully pushed for approval, in 2012, of DACA (‘Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals’), a piece of legislation that allows a certain number of young migrants to stay legally in the US. The 15 narratives that I use as data for this exemplification were part of a set of stories posted online in 2014 as part of a campaign to support an extension of DACA to a greater number of immigrants and to stop deportation of their parents. The narratives demonstrate the role that new media can have in
the creation of a strategic collective identity that may serve the political objectives of the movement. The initiative called for stories to be posted on the United We Dream Movement site: these stories would focus on the authors sharing their own dreams, or their parents’ dreams, in order to prod migration reform. The resulting stories were actually posted mostly by movement activists rather than by audience members. Through them, young Dreamers present themselves and explain, through accounts of their own and their parents’ experiences, to the public and the-then President Obama in particular, why DACA extension and migration reform are so important to them. Stories are organised around thematic components that appear in all or most of the narratives. Among such components are: personal information, narratives about what the author was doing at the time of first hearing the announcement of DACA, a hypothetical story about what the author would do if DACA were extended, the telling of a crucial moment in which the author realised how being undocumented would affect everyday life, but also the telling of dreams. The organising principles behind the way these pieces were put together are strategic: one is a shared self-presentation (and presentation of in-group members) as loyal, family-orientated, altruistic, and hard-working; the second is an argumentative move in which the qualities attributed to self and family are used to support the plight for new legislation. Verbal strategies are complemented with multimodal strategies, such as the use of music and photos.

Due to limited space, I can only briefly discuss verbal strategies and reproduce some fragments from one of these narratives:

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you know I: I love my dad to death he is like my best friend↑
because uh anything ((photo of dad)) anything that happens to me like I confide in him,
and his (ends photo) ultimate dream is to see me and my sister succeed which is why we came to the United States in the first place
um he wanted me to get a better education→
he wanted me to have a better future
uhm you wanted me to have the things that that he didn’t
uhm and so I I want him to be happy
I want my family to be happy  ((some lines deleted))
I would look President Obama straight in the eyes and tell him that I am
I wouldn’t be the man who I am today I’m if it weren’t for my father
I would not have uhm any of my traits,
ueh I would not be as hard working, I would not be as honest or
just want a better future for everyone
if it weren’t for him I’m
he taught me everything I know↑
ueh and I’m that my father and my mother are human beings and that
I am a by product of that
and that they deserve a better future and that they deserve to not fear whether or not they
would be able to come home

(Jose 2014)
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As we see in this fragment, Ray is presenting himself and his family as desirable citizens in terms that appeal to typical US values of honesty, hard work and care for others. This allows him to articulate the plea to President Obama that concludes his narrative. This way,
self-presentation positions the listener towards a moral stance in which rejection of the plea of immigrants would be felt as unjust. As we see, there is very little in terms of a radical request here. Youth migrants adopt a conciliatory discourse in these narratives that is strategically useful to them, while still presenting much more aggressive profiles on other occasions, such as in videos taken during their marches.

This succinct example shows how narratives may be used as a vehicle to build and circulate collective identities that are strategically important to win political battles.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the many links that connect narratives to politics. We have seen that narratives can convey and reflect meta-discourses about society and identity, that through stories, both politicians and members of society at large position themselves with respect to socio-political issues and that narratives can provide strategic sites for the construction and negotiation of politically expedient identities. In all these ways, storytelling can be seen as political practice.

**Note**


**References**


Narrative analysis


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