Story Skeletons in the Gaza-Israel Conflict

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Recommended Citation
Story Skeletons in the Gaza-Israel Conflict

Honors Thesis Submitted to
The University of Colorado Honors Council
For Psychology Departmental Honors

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Defense Date: April 2, 2015

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Abstract

Wars deeply affect every aspect of a country: the culture, the manners, the people and the education. However, nothing is more thoroughly immersed than language, the very basis for every modern society. Language is used as a tool in order to unite people, to flare conflict and to foster peace. During times of war, language is used as an essential tool to turn events into descriptive accounts and rhetorical opportunities, which in turn, evoke a predictable response from the audience.

The use of language in times of war is fundamental, but the process of framing the language is vital. In what follows, I will investigate certain persisting discursive patterns in their relation to reenacting conflict between Israel and the Gaza Strip. I will analyze the geopolitical and socio-cultural history of these discursive patterns to illuminate how language canonizes specific, and often detrimental, beliefs and practices into a culture, or a set of interconnected cultures. In the final part of this thesis, I will theorize the required language techniques needed in order to lay a foundation for peace-building discourse and the ultimate goal of peace between these two nations. Overall, I will explore the basic structure of Israeli Gazan discourse, namely the stories they tell.
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Rolf Norgaard and Dr. Barbara Fox for all of their help, patience, and their overall calming effect during this process. A special thanks to Dr. Rolf Norgaard for his help with getting started, as well as his constant attention, encouragement and support throughout the entire process. I am also grateful to Dr. Kira Hall for igniting my passion of language and society.

I also wish to acknowledge my Mom and Dad for giving me this unlimited access to knowledge and for inspiring me to persevere while helping me maintain perspective on the things that really matter.
Be careful of your thoughts, for you thoughts become your words.

Be careful of your words, for your words become you actions.

Be careful of your actions, for your actions become your habits.

Be careful of your habits, for your habits become your character.

Be careful of your character, for your character becomes your destiny

- Chinese Proverb Author unknown¹

INTRODUCTION

I had heard the blaring sound of the siren before. As a matter of fact, I had heard the rocket siren on three occasions within my first four months of being in Israel. The first time was the same day I began work as an English teacher at Teva. This, however, was only a “siren drill.” Therefore, as hundreds of students made their way into the massive bomb shelter only the delight of getting out of class was exhibited and reverberated into the surrounding air.

The second and third time I heard the siren was during the two national holidays of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and Yom Hazikaron (Israel’s Memorial Day). During these holidays the siren plays for exactly one minute. As the siren wails, the entire nation stands still in muteness, on Yom HaShoah remembering the lives of those who perished in the Holocaust, and on Yom Hazikaron remembering their beloved who

¹ See Jameson, R. (2014) for an insightful analysis of this quote.
have died in war. Yet, these sirens, no matter how impactful they were to my overall experience, did little to prepare me for the first time my life was truly at risk.

As the sound of the siren danced in the market place, and off the fabled thousand year-old stonewalls that encase the old city of Jerusalem, it took a split second to reside within me. “Oh” was all I could muster as I quickly scurried through the corridors of the market place for shelter. Thankfully, an Israeli mother pushing a stroller saw the shock in my eyes and nonchalantly led me to an archway that would serve as our bomb shelter.

During this time I realized that the reaction of the residents to the alarm is vastly different than that of visitors. The foreigners, who have never experienced such an event, rely on past narrations to construct their response - one of frenzy and distress as seen in my own reaction to this siren. In contrast, the sound of sirens, as well as events that are similar, has become a part of the Israeli’s daily life and they have learned to live with it. Their reaction to the siren is based on more than something read or heard; rather, their reaction is based on decades of personal experience and thus is one that emulates “life must goes on.” In fact, this coolheaded, almost unconcerned mindset is knowingly embodied throughout the people of this Nation, displayed even by a mother with a baby.

As the conflict of summer 2014 waged on I continued with my travel plans as I made my way to the city of Ashdod where I was to stay with an Israeli family for about two weeks. Ashdod, a city in southern Israel, is just miles from Gaza and sees hundreds of rockets hurled at it in times of conflict, and the summer of 2014 was a time of conflict.

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2 Due to the fact that Israel is approximately the same size as New Jersey, and because all Israeli’s are required to serve in the army, it is fair to say that almost every Israeli citizen knows of someone who has died in war.

3 Past narrations arise from one’s surroundings as a whole. Including but not limited to the narrations of: family members, friends, education systems, community, news outlets, and culture at large.
During my stay in Ashdod I found myself staring at the walls of the bomb shelter up to five times each day.

It was within this bleak bomb shelter that I was struck with my second awakening; no matter what happens next, whether I live or die, the report of these events are going to be retold based on the already existing personal beliefs of the narrator telling it. Surely, within this conflict, the infinite number of portrayals that could take place will be condensed into a set of only two narratives: a depiction of the suffering Gazan people fighting an oppressing nation or the depiction of Israel needing heightened and advanced security to protect its citizens against an unwarranted aggressor.

Since the language one uses to describe current events relies heavily on the language he/she has been predominantly surrounded by, then the past narrations construct the current response to any happening event. Therefore, the reaction to an event, and the coinciding words used to describe it to others, are biased because one only uses the words that one knows. Overall, the language used in the past organizes the structure of the discourse that will be used to portray current and future events.

If this analysis of framed language is correct, then one could go on to state that it is this framed language that manifests itself within the heart of the Gaza-Israel conflict. “The importance of narrative in constructing sociopolitical reality comes from its capacity to organize experience and human happenings” (Hodges, 2011, p. 63). This means that the depiction given to present events can work to unite a group of people as well as to flare conflict.

It would then follow from this view that language holds influence and thus power over the clash between these two people. To the same degree as the tangible violence
between the Gaza Strip and Israel is thrown upon the two people, so too is the language that is being hurled back and forth, making this conflict as much a “war of words” as it is a war of artillery shells and missiles. Much like the absence of peace exhibited between Gaza and Israel, there is also a lack of comprehension for the other side’s narrative of the same event. This lack of understanding constrains what can be meaningfully understood between them and consequently prevents words of collaborative peace from forming.

The goal of this study is to investigate how the framing of language used by both the Israelites and the Palestinians affects the Gaza-Israel conflict. By researching the partial lens each side uses to depict current events I hope to shed light on a driving force of this dynamic conflict. In order to build my theory I will first set a foundation to my analysis. In this section, I will describe the positive feedback loop that language holds on how we think: beginning with the idea that the discourse we know shapes the way we talk, moving to how the way we talk shapes our memory and thoughts, and concluding with how our memory and thoughts shape the discourse we use. This idea can be seen in the following figure:

Following this depiction, I will then move on to chapter 2 where I will show how this positive feedback loop began for each of the two nations. I will do this by exploring the history of these people and where the development of their specific nation’s stories
began. By looking at how the discourse used by the Israelites and Palestinians began, I will then be able to show how the positive feedback loop has been utilized, continuing the cycle of the respective nation’s story. From here I will able to demonstrate how the foundation of the nation’s discourse still lives today while simultaneously allowing slight variations that come with each new generation. Finally, I will shed light on the process that should be implemented to foster peace in the Gaza-Israel conflict.
Chapter I

Literature Review: Process of Framing the Language

Wars deeply affect every aspect of a country: the culture, the manners, the people and the education. However, nothing is more thoroughly affected than language, the very basis for every society. Language is used as a tool to unite people, to flare conflict and to foster peace. During times of war, language is used as an essential tool to turn events into descriptive accounts and rhetorical opportunities, which in turn, evoke a predictable response from the audience.

The use of language in times of war is fundamental, but the process of framing the language is vital. In what follows, I will investigate certain persisting discursive patterns in their relation to reenacting conflict between Israel and the Gaza Strip. I will analyze the geopolitical and socio-cultural history of these discursive patterns to illuminate how language molds specific, and often detrimental, beliefs and practices into a culture, or a set of interconnected cultures. The goal of the study is to explore the basic structure of Israeli Gazan discourse, namely the stories they tell, and to find within the discourse the structuring of the current conflict.

Central to the analysis of this paper is the understanding of discourse. Discourse, from a sociolinguistics perspective, mediates the meaning of the words through the entire language context (Brown and Yule, 1983). Discourse, likewise, is a dynamic usage of language in a certain context to convey a specific meaning (Hodges, 2011). Discourse, I argue, reveals how every word interacts with the context it appears in. Notably, the changing context continuously informs the meaning of the words by simultaneously
exploiting the familiarity of concepts and attaching new meanings (or reenacting old ones) to these already existing words. Ultimately, context captures a range of issues by supplying a type of framework that is already recognizable due to the predictability of the language surroundings.

Roger Schank (1990), in his book *Tell Me a Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory*, depicts context as a ‘Story skeleton and Story-Fitting.’ The story skeleton, Schank argues, is the basic pattern we use when explaining an event to ourselves and to others. Before language is used to tell a story, the narrator must first choose (consciously or unconsciously) the type of story skeleton she wishes to represent. Only at that time does the narrator worry about whether the facts fit onto the bones of the chosen story skeleton. Therefore, the story-fitting procedure, which is how we frame a story, only comes into light once the story skeleton has been selected. Since the story is molded to the story skeleton a kind of deceptive process takes place. According to Schank (1990), it is a deception because the stories created are not always accurate, “they lie by omission” (p. 169).

There is a way to present facts and there is a way to present stories. Facts are presented without a story skeleton in a simple robotic procedure; they are the presentation of all statistic and numbers. However, I argue that this technique is not within human capability while attempting to report a story. Instead, we pick and choose which facts to present and mold them together in a sequence, or story-fitting procedure, that ultimately accounts for the inaccurate accounts. Not only is the audience deceived, the author too suffers from this subtle deception. The previous statement is true on the grounds that the stories told by the storyteller are composed of what she already believes to be true, which
means that the stories she tells encompass the vision of her world and in turn shape her memory.

The skeletons we use cause specific episodes to conform to one another. The more a given skeleton is used, the more the stories it helps to form begin to cohere in memory. Consequently, we develop consistent, and rather inflexible, points of view (Schank, 1990, p. 170)

Our inflexible point of views, developed by the consistent story skeletons we choose, resonate profoundly within our cognition and affect our overarching perception and ability to evaluate information. This perceptual effect is termed framing bias and occurs when a mind-set is shaped based on which words are selected and how the words are phrased (Kernochan, 2004). In essence, framing bias occurs subconsciously in our everyday conventional way of talking. For example, it occurs when deciding whether or not the glass is half full or half empty. If the statement is phrased as, “The glass is half full” then it is a positive expression; whereas, “The glass is half empty” is implying that something negative has happened (Kernochan, 2004, para. 4). The results are consistent: based on the type of phrase read a firm viewpoint establishes itself and is later replicated (Tannen, 1993).

The framing bias is how humans process information that is unknowingly already fitted to the bones of a certain story skeleton. Although humans have the cognitive ability to resist this deception, the effort needed in order to unravel the effects of framing bias from the worlds discourse would require a strenuous effort. Overall, framing bias occurs from the information that is given, the possible responses that are offered, and “…the level of emotional involvement or moral judgment considered to exist” (Kernochan, 2004, para. 8).
By now it should be recognizable that in all discourse a framing bias will occur involuntarily. As the author of this empirical investigation, I have consciously struggled to uphold an investigation free of bias. However, I am only human and therefore cannot prevent the manifestation of the story skeleton and/or the language bias. Therefore, I urge you, the reader, to discern my own framing as I demonstrate the power that discourse exerts within the Gaza-Israel conflict.

In the current Gaza-Israel conflict language is heavily relied on in order to give depictive narratives of the occurring events. Language (or in other words discourse) rests on a cluster of factors such as the story skeleton chosen by the storyteller that encapsulates the framing bias. This idea came to me while I was sitting in the bomb shelter in the midst of rocket. I was struck with the awareness that no matter what happened next, each account would be retold based on the skeleton that the storyteller had already selected. Thus, this paper serves the purpose of investigating the reverberated words that have wrought the Gaza-Israel conflict. By examining the language surrounding the Gaza-Israel conflict, one can gauge the reactions of a nation to war: measurements of life, worth, and relationships can all be made through the discourse of wartime.

I shall now examine the historical story of the Israelites and Palestinians. This will provide important perspectives on the question of how a story skeleton is embodied among a group of people, and why there is an intense attachment to that story skeleton. While the root of these story skeletons do not necessarily result from the same event, in many cases they stem from a single piece of land that both nations have claimed. I will consider research that engages with the indisputable history of this land, the events
leading up to the formation of the nations’ individualized story skeletons and the reason they have persisted until today. The effort to capture the foundation of these people’s story skeletons is an important one when mapping the full extent of language framing within the Gaza-Israel conflict.
Chapter II

Framing the Roots: Ideology Forming

The specific discourse used throughout the history of a nation provides a common language to refer to objects of knowledge (Hodges, 2011). The fact that a common discourse is used by a single group of people demonstrates how the group’s interpretation and practices rely on one story skeleton. This, in principle, is ideology; a term defined as “…the representation of ‘the world’ from the perspective of a particular interest” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 44). Furthermore as Adam Hodges (2011) points out, “…language is never neutral. It always conveys some ideological perspective on the world” (p. 22). To put this into perspective, the Gaza-Israel conflict comes down to two different ideologies, both stemming from a single biased word: occupation vs. security. Choosing to identify with one ideology shapes the discourse used and simultaneously that person’s understanding of objects of knowledge and the world at large. As a result, the discourse used by an entire nation of people becomes common sense and all other possible interpretations are neglected or treated as ‘traitorous’, ‘blasphemous’ etc. Because of this, the past narratives and what the past narrative has deemed to be common sense, shape the discourse about the current and future conflict. As the discourse moves forward in time, from past to present to future, the narrative of the present continues to be developed naturally from the past events and the preceding ideology (Hodges, 2011). Therefore, this notion, that we make sense of present events by establishing the connection to past narratives, as long as the same discourse is used, can continue for centuries, as
exemplified in the 2014 Gaza-Israel conflict. To this day, two conflicting ideologies are pursued – one side shouting “occupation” as the other side shouts “security”!

The land of Gaza is a “stepchild of history”, having been ruled by both Egypt and Israel but “beloved by neither” (Tharoor, 2012, para. 7). However, this has not always been the case. Throughout its history more than 15 different nations have controlled the modern day land of Israel and Gaza, including but not limited to: Ancient Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Persians, Ancient Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Ottomans, and the British. The British, being awarded the mandate to govern this region in 1922, assumed jurisdiction for a mere two and a half decades. In 1947, following World War II and The Holocaust, the British terminated their Mandate and the United Nations General Assembly promoted a new resolution (“Palestine”, 2014). The new resolution divided the land into an Arab state, a Jewish state, and the Special international Regime for the City of Jerusalem (“Palestine”, 2014). “The Jewish leadership accepted the proposal, but the Arab Higher Committee rejected it; a civil war began immediately, and the establishment of the State of Israel was declared in 1948” (“Palestine”, 2014, para. 20). After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Six-Day War, Israel was able to capture the entire Mandate territory.

**Embedded Sense of Dispossession**

“Gazans are emphatically Palestinian, a national identity forged from the trauma of losing their land to Jewish armies in 1948, the year Israel was established. Many defeated Arab landowners fled to Gaza, where 3 out of 4 residents are classified as refugees” (Vick, 2012, para. 7). Since the Palestinian national identity arose from losing
their land, an embedded sense of dispossession is inherently a part of their national identity. As a result of the embedded sense of dispossession the national identity of the Gazan people began to embody the term ‘occupation.’ As this term was retold in frantic discourse again and again, the memory of an ‘occupied nation’ began to form, and a profound story skeleton began to take root among the 1.6-1.8 million inhabitants of this slim belt of land on the eastern Mediterranean. Their story skeleton reflects the historical grievances and the ongoing hardships they face including lack of food and daily necessities, unemployment, etc. (Macintyre, 2014). The development of this similarity among the people, as well as the erasures of distinctions, brought forth a new ideology and new body of people, termed “Palestinian.”

A merging of historical grievances and ongoing hardships allowed for Hamas, the current ruling party in Gaza, to win the democratic elections in 2006.

Now the group’s founders wanted it to be able to deliver social welfare programs to the residents of Gaza, which at this particular point number about 1.8 million people. But then a year in it published its charter and within that charter Hamas was calling for the destruction of Israel. Hamas started a suicide bombing campaign against Israel in the 1990’s (Hancocks, 2014, audiovisual).

Today the voices of this political group are made up of various underground cells, due in part to the lack of support from the West, which has deemed it a terrorist organization, and due in part to the loss of one of its major allies, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which considers Hamas to be an enemy (Hancocks, 2014). Currently, the statements of Hamas leaders have thus far failed to agree to speak with one voice; nevertheless, the leaders of Hamas have agreed on one thing: their continual refusal to accept Israel’s nationhood. The following excerpt, stated by the Hamas leader Haniyeh on December 14, 2010, exemplifies this:
We repeat today that we are with the establishment of a Palestinian state (1) on any liberated part of Palestinian land (2) that is agreed upon by the Palestinian people, without recognizing Israel or conceding any inch of historical Palestine (3) (“8 years”, 2014, para. 3)

The specific words of the framing bias presented in this text are italicized. In addition, this passage also displays the underlying story skeleton of this new ‘nation’ which I will analyze with my adapted version of Adam Hodges’ analysis method: beginning with the common sense of their ideology (1. there is a state of Palestine), moving to the knowledge of the nation (2. there is the land that belongs to Palestinian state), and ending with the interpretation of being ‘occupied’ (3. there are people dominating our land that we do not accept and therefore must not concede to). As the discourse waged on and the memories of a time vacant of the ‘occupiers’ developed, the Palestinian nation was born with a rooted sense of hostility towards Israel. This story skeleton can be traced back to the foundation of the Palestinian people as exemplified in the following quote said in 1970 by Yasser Arafat⁴: “Our basic aim is to liberate the land from the Mediterranean Seas to the Jordan River…The Palestinian revolution’s basic concern is the uprooting of the Zionist (Israelis) entity from our land and liberating it” (Gilbert, 1998, p. 418). Again, we can apply the same exact story skeleton to this quote as we did to the previous: beginning with the common sense of their ideology (1. there is a state of Palestine), moving to the knowledge of the nation (2. there is the land that belongs to Palestinian state), and ending with the interpretation of being ‘occupied’ (3. there are people dominating our land that we do not accept and therefore must not concede to).

⁴ Fatah was founded by Yasser Arafat in the late 1950s to promote the armed struggle to liberate all Palestine from Israel control (“Palestinian rivals”, 2007).
With a united front, created by the diminishing of internal differences⁵, the story skeleton of the Palestinians began to serve as the backbone for the people of the Gaza strip; and the backbone, along with the enmity of the Gazan people, has been inherited by the generations succeeding.

“Never Again”: The Need for Security

In contrast, after the Holocaust (1941-1945), when the extermination of at least six million European Jews occurred, the phrase “Never Again” was engrained into the discourse of Jews around the world. Never again, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2014) is “expressing emphatic refusal to repeat an experience.” Israel, a Jewish State, was founded on this principle and the development of Israel’s history affirms it. “The course of Israel’s history since the state’s establishment in 1948 has been determined by two central factors, the guiding influence of specific Zionist ideology and the need for security” (Mazor, 2009, p. 97). Zionism aims to protect the survival of the Jewish people by having a nation in Israel. The additional central factor to the course of Israel’s history is the need for security against those who wish to destroy it. The phrase “Never Again” refers to the preservation, protection and survival of the Jewish people – all of which are encompassed by these two central factors of Israel’s history.

As the ink was drying on the 1948 declaration of the new Jewish State, the four surrounding Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq) were simultaneously planning their attack. This 1948 Arab-Israel War further asserted and cultivated the new nation’s

⁵ The basis for the “diminishing of internal differences” is founded on the idea that factors describing individuals, such as political group identification or social class were diminished as the nation united under the term ‘occupation.’
demand for security. Within the last sixty-six years of existence, Israel has seen a high level of turmoil over its land and the acceptance of its legitimacy—exemplified by the fifteen conflicts it has been a part of, all of which strengthened the ‘security’ discourse and story skeleton of an already deeply infused ideology. On April 1956 Moshe Dayan, then chief of the Israel Defense Force gave the following statement at a funeral oration when honoring a settler killed in a kibbutz near the border with the Gaza Strip, “We are a generation that settles the land, and without the steel helmet and the cannon’s fire we will not be able to plant a tree and build a home” (Tharoor & Taylor, 2014, para. 2). Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 the people of this nation have developed their own story skeleton: beginning with the common sense of their ideology (1. There is a new state of Israel with a generation that must settle its land), moving to the object of their knowledge (2. This settler was killed by an opposing nation), and thus concluding with the interpretation that there is a need for ‘security’ (3. Therefore, we must use military action in order to defend the establishment of our life here). A similarly structured story skeleton is still embodied today as seen in the follow selection from a speech given by Ron Prosor to the United Nations on July 18, 2014:

Stand now with Israel (1) to prevent the next barrage of rockets (2), the next kidnapping, and the next suicide attack (2) so that we may, once and for all, remove the threat of terrorism (3) casting its dark shadow over the people of Israel (“Full text”, 2014, para. 7).

The repetitive need for security, exemplified by phrases in italics in the excerpt, magnifies the discourse as well as coheres to the collective ‘security’ ideology. The positive feedback of the Israeli story skeleton is demonstrated in the fact that the Israeli story has not changed throughout the years: beginning with the common sense of their ideology (1. there is a state of Israel), moving to the object of their knowledge (2. Hamas
is a threat to the state of Israel), and thus concluding with the interpretation that there is a need of ‘security’ (3. therefore, we must protect the people of Israel and remove the threat at all costs). Over time, the parallel stories, featuring a threat and the need for security, indoctrinated itself further into the language skeleton and continues to thrive in today’s generation.

Collective Memories Define the Future

Dan P. McAdams (2006) in his article, “The Role of Narrative in Personality Psychology Today,” suggests that someone’s identity is synonymous with their life story. McAdams (2006) uses the term ‘life story,’ which, in essence, is same to this papers use of the term ‘story skeleton’:

I consider the life story to be an internalized and evolving cognitive structure or script that provides an individual’s life with some degree of meaning and purpose while often mirroring the dominant and/or the subversive cultural narratives within which the individual’s life is complexly situated (p. 1).

Continuing right along, McAdams’ (2006) ‘life story’ also mimics the term ‘story skeleton’, as used in this paper, by identifying how a life story often reflects and shapes “…particular values and moral orientations” (p. 14). Additionally, McAdams (2006) argues that life stories give unity and purpose; therefore, the stories we tell about our lives reveals a lot about our identities. This individual identity arises from the subjective act of assembling one’s own experiences together to form a story.

Narrative approaches have been extensively employed in the study of difficult life events and major life decisions, revealing how people make sense of adversity and change and how that sense-making influences the development of personality (McAdams, 2006, P. 14).
Although two individuals may have similar experiences, it is the way we tell the story that defines our personality and behaviors. Furthermore, it is the development of our own stories that ultimately allows us to distinguish from stories that are different from our own and stories that resemble our own. Applying this concept to the broader Gaza-Israel conflict, each one of these nations individually assembled their own story, and regardless of the fact that both their stories stem from the same time and place, each nation has its own unity and clear-cut purpose (security vs. occupation).

When discourse heard from an entire body of people is continuous and persistent then specific historical facts become indisputable (Hanks, 1989). “These national memories of the past are not merely individual memories, but rather collective memories” (Hodges, 2011, audiovisual). A nation’s collective memory is the assembly of discourse used throughout a period of time that results in a nation’s shared cultural standards and understandings (Hodges, 2011). As a result of the nation’s collective memories, the ability to hear other ideologies becomes minute. This means that the discourse one side is willing to hear is only that which lines up with the already deeply rooted story skeletons.

Although the ideologies under analysis were developed by real events, they are stories based upon assumptions and expectations passed down from previous generations. Recall that the past is constructed by memories that are established primarily by the stories we tell. Now consider the theory presented earlier in this paper that the stories we tell have been fitted into the bones of the skeleton we choose. Therefore, if this holds

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6 The land controlled by the British up until 1947.
true, the discourse used currently is outdated and constraining⁷, only existing off of preceding language skeletons to interpret events.

Each of the historical examples explored above contributes an important foundation to understanding the language framing that is exploited within the current Gaza-Israel conflict. In addition, this foundation has depicted the process by which each nation’s story skeleton emerged. The framing of the roots to the Gaza-Israel conflict provides a helpful backdrop for the focal points of my analysis.

⁷ All language in essence can be looked at as constraining. However, in this thesis I argue that because the individual expression has been consumed, or submerged, into the overarching national discourse, it has left these particular nations with even less freedom and with even less choice.
Chapter III

Contemporary Framing Summer Events 2014

It has been established that the current discourse employed in the Gaza-Israel conflict does nothing more than strengthen the bondage of these people to their respective story skeletons. In addition, we have seen how the language used in times of war evokes a certain response by extending a specific discourse across an entire ideology. Overall, the movement in the discourse from past to present to future not only foreshadows the openings of new discourse, but works to narrate any new discourse as flowing naturally from the past events (Hodges, 2011).

Therefore, it seems that the people involved are bound to their story skeletons. The two clashing ideologies, formed by collective memories, supply the opponent’s justification for assault on one another. This self-evident justification replaces sound judgment with blind conviction. For the purposes of this paper, sound judgment means the function of using factual intelligence and debate in order to carry out pre-determined end goals.

The natural progression of these two opposing skeletons, and their use of self-evident justification, intensified during the summer of 2014 and led to the most recent flare up of this continuing conflict. By analyzing recent events surrounding the summer of 2014, we will see how different branches have grown from this basic story skeleton. In the metaphor of a tree, the story skeleton would be the trunk and the current story skeletons would be the branches stemming from that trunk. Where the branches are clearly not the same thing as the trunk, we can still assume that the branches developed
from it. These ‘branches’, or multiple versions of a primary story skeleton, are important to this thesis because of the following: First, it explains the positive feedback cycle any story skeleton possesses by conceptualizing how new branches can only grow from a living trunk. Second, this metaphor also demonstrates how different branches from a living trunk develop at different times (with different generations) throughout the trees life.

**Storyline of the Current Conflict**

While the historical story skeleton and surrounding discourse provide many interesting issues in regards to the Gaza-Israel conflict, there are certain modern day inflections that give rise to conflicting stories. It is important to balance what has happened in the past with what is happening in the present in order to fully understand how these inflections have developed. In this section, I will pull from a number of resources that address the current story skeletons of these two nations before exploring the possibilities of peace-building discourse. I will focus on the storyline of the most recent violent outbreak between the Israelis and Palestinians, all of which provide powerful insight that addresses the life experience and memories of the people.

The immediate events leading up to the 2014 Gaza-Israel conflict are roughly as follows: Between May 1, 2014 and June 11, 2014 approximately six rockets and three mortar shells were launched from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip toward Israel. However, after three Israeli teenagers were abducted on June 12, 2014 the conflict quickly accelerated resulting in increased militant activity from both sides. Israel held Hamas directly responsible for this assault and consequently arrested hundreds of Hamas’ leaders and missile-targeted Hamas’ infrastructures. On July 2, 2014 three Israeli’s
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kidnapped and murdered a Palestinian teenager in an overt revenge attack for the killing of the three Israeli teenagers (Crowcroft, 2014). “From the day of the abductions on 12 June through 5 July 117 rockets were launched from Gaza and there were approximately 80 Israeli airstrikes on Gaza” (“2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict”, 2014, para. 19). On July 8, 2014 Israel launched an official movement called “Operation Protective Edge.”

The Overarching Story Vs. Daily Life

The people of Gaza have suffered tremendously; they have endured destructive attacks on their homes; they have agonized over their life’s work being brought to flames; they have grieved the death of their loved ones. In fact, according to the United Nations monitoring group Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Operation Protective Edge killed 2,257 Palestinians (Strickland, 2014). In this tiny speck of land, not a life exists that hasn’t been burdened by the horrors of war. Once the smoke of devastation clears the air, their reasonable yearning for freedom brings them to desperation, conceivably driving the rocket attacks from Gaza toward Israel.

Abi Ali, head of Middle East and North Africa Country Risk and Forecasting, believes that the estimated 10,000 rockets launched during July of 2014 by Hamas and other militant groups give evidence to Hamas’ military wing, asserting itself as the one in control (Mullen and Todd, 2014). Hala Gorani (2014) expanded this argument by announcing, “Palestinian leadership in the West Bank on Monday called for a 24-hour cease-fire, but Hamas is telling CNN it has not agreed to anything yet and has continued its rocket attacks on Israel” (para. 3).
We’ve also heard from Hamas’ military wing. They say that they’re trying to engage the Israelis in hand-to-hand fighting. We understand from Hamas there’s a Hamas claim that they have attacked and tried to disable Israeli tanks. We don’t know what success they’ve had, no independent confirmation on that (Penhaul & Amanpour, 2014, para. 41).

In response to the assertion of Hamas’ military wing Israel began to widen its ground offense and heightened its assault on Gaza. “Most Palestinians in Gaza are still without electricity after Israel’s military hit the territory’s only power station…” (Gorani, 2014, para. 3). Regardless of the daily response that the military wing of Hamas evokes from Israeli reaction, according to Paula Hancocks (2014), “…some experts say, that simply by fighting against Israel, Hamas appears to be standing up for the rights of the Palestinian people” (audiovisual). The responsibility to defend the rights of the Palestinian people is upheld by Hamas if seen through the “occupation” story skeleton since they are fighting for the freedom of the Gazan people.

“We can see an event in so many different ways that we must understand how we decide which story skeleton is applicable. In politics, this decision is easy… they make choices on the basis of political positions adopted before any story is heard” (Schank, 1990, p. 159). Currently, many Gazan leaders exhibit this “easy decision” as demonstrated by the repetition of the previous story skeleton in their discourse. For example, Marwan Barghouti, a jailed leader of Fatah (a major Palestinian political party in the Gaza Strip) released a letter during the summer of 2014, calling on his people “to strengthen the resistance, being the only way to remove the occupation, achieving liberty, returning the refugees and [securing] independence” (Khoury, 2014, para. 8). Once again, the historically dominant story skeleton persists: beginning with their ideology (there is a united body of people composing a resistance), moving to the object of their knowledge
(the resistance is fighting to end the occupation), and concluding with the interpretation that ending the occupation would result in a better life (achieving liberty and securing independence). Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas also worked to further this persisting story when he declared “…we see the entire settlement project as an illegitimate project in violation of international law, and Israel must remove the settlements because we want a Palestinian state without [them]” (Khoury, 2014, para. 4). In the end, the political leaders of the Gazan people have a set ‘party line’ that does not see much variance from the previously used story skeleton.

What makes the Gazan political leaders so bound to the historical story skeleton? Martin Indyk (2014), a former U.S. Mideast Envoy, provides one answer to this question by theorizing how, “…maintaining the status quo is less costly in terms of political risk and, in this case, loss of life, than really shaking it up and making peace” (Indyk, 2014, para. 15). As Indyk notes, the preference for the status quo has overshadowed the preference of political risk.

While most political leaders in Gaza do not choose to step away from the historical story skeleton, and thus select the recurring story skeleton, every day people do, in fact, have an individual choice regarding how to look at a given situation (Schank, 1990). Hence, individuals have endless possibilities when describing an event. Further supporting the idea that individuals do not face the same severity of bondage that political leaders do, is Khaled Elgindy who claims that Hamas is in one of the weakest positions it has been in for several years (Mullen and Todd, 2014). This diminished support for Hamas is the individual’s story skeleton branching away from the overarching national discourse that Hamas strictly follows. The two questions guiding the rest of this section

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will be: 1) what is this individual story skeleton saying, and 2) what events led to the divergence of this specific branch from the ‘occupation’?

I believe that this weakened support for Hamas, which is being seen on the individual level, is because of the life that the Gazan people are being forced to live. Directly below is a remark by a Palestinian man in Gaza, as told by Alan Seid:

…we don’t need teargas, we don’t need armored bulldozers, we don’t need bombs! What we need is schools, what we need is health clinics, what we need is more housing…You ever see schools without books? You ever see kids playing in the open sewers (Seid, 2012, audiovisual)

This notion, that the people of Gaza are fighting for the freedom to merely build a life, to build a home, to build a family is further exemplified by Jehad Saftawi, a 23-year-old journalist living in Gaza City, “The normal thing for every regular Palestinian in Gaza or other parts of Palestine is to want to build a life. But we know that at any minute Israel could take that from us with its missiles. We know that there is no limit to Israel’s violations” (Strickland, 2014, para. 8). And again, this belief is further documented in an interview with BBC News, when a twenty-three year old woman from Gaza states, “Here in Gaza we do not have the right to defend our homes, meanwhile Israel seems to use any means of defense” (Peek, 2014, para. 23). Regaining the land provides the backbone for the politically recurring story skeleton: on the other hand, the discourse seen directly above, by the people of Gaza, may illuminate a new story skeleton emerging from the daily impact of these shattered lives. If so it would seem that the new skeleton contains a story beginning with the common sense of their ideology (the desire to build a life and have a home), moving to their knowledge (war with Israel has destroyed our life and our home), and ending with the interpretation that they have nothing to lose (the only thing left to do is fight). Here, then, is a novel inflection to the historical story skeleton: a
story surrounding the daily impact of the Gaza-Israel conflict. Their personal discourse demands not for the end of ‘occupancy’ or the end to the Israeli state itself, but rather, the Gazan people would stop fighting when given the simple freedom to live.

To fully explain the existence of this ‘daily impact’ skeleton it is crucial to reflect on how the historical skeleton serves as a guide in daily life, especially in times of crisis. Regardless of where or who, daily life demands decisions be made. The tool that is the moral exemplar of the historical skeleton is used directly in this decision making process. With the ideology and discourse of a nation harking back to the historical story skeleton it is simultaneously being used as a resource when making decisions – a moral exemplar.

The following is a quote by Mosab Hassan Yousef (2014), the son of Hamas founder Sheikh Hassan Yousef:

> When I was a child, the first Palestinian intifada started. And we witnessed violence and many people were dying and we hated Israel. Then the second Palestinian intifada came and waves of suicide bombing attacks and we blamed Israel. And I used to think that Israel is the enemy, not knowing how my father and his organization was only a tool in the hands of some regional powers, that they move Hamas and encourage them to kill and fight against Israel just for political gain (Yousef, 2014, audiovisual).

Yousef, by writing about a specific time when he associated violence and the death of his people with his hatred of Israel, demonstrates that no matter the case, guiding the individuals and their decision of who to blame was a part of the inevitable cycle: using the moral exemplar of the historical story skeleton to guide the decision on who to blame. Because individuals often expect their ‘daily life’ story to be isomorphic with the historical story skeleton, the Gazan people tend to make decisions based on the ‘occupation’ discourse. This discourse then allows for the hatred towards Israel to be the repercussion of the Gazan’s daily struggles, ultimately demonstrating how this ‘daily
impact’ skeleton has in fact emerged from the historical story skeleton. The following quote by Megyn Kelly (2014) exemplified how this may have come to be, “When you see these images that we are seeing now, of the Palestinian children looking scared, hurt, confused… the fear that Israel, in fighting this battle, may be stoking the next generation of hate” (audiovisual). Ultimately, it is the discontent with their daily life that eventually feeds into the overarching discourse and hardens the ‘occupation’ skeleton.

Taking a look at the ‘daily life’ story skeleton, one may come to believe that it could potentially lay a foundation for peace-building discourse. Whether it could or not, the fact of the matter is that it still contains the same hate discourse towards Israel that was planted by the ‘occupation’ story skeleton.

This may be because at the base of the peoples lives, when living in desperation from lack of freedom⁸, the militant words that are the loudest, the deepest, the most intense, seize the people. While this discontent with daily life deviates from the national story skeleton and adds a certain dimension with different values and preoccupations, so too does it coexist and interact with the broader national discourse.

**Narrative vs. Counter Narrative**

Some may argue that the solution to this reenacted conflict does not dwell in the words currently being used but will only occur when Israel stops its use of brutal force on the people of Gaza. Whatever the truth of this statement, we must ask: how can a nation built upon a story skeleton that expresses the need for security put down their arms and

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⁸ “The split between the Hamas-run Gaza wing and the Fatah-run West Bank wing of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has overshadowed every aspect of public life....” (Almeghari, 2010, para. 2).
only means of protection? The following quote is from an interview with Secretary of State John Kerry on Meet the Press on July 20, 2014,

*Israel has been under attack* by rockets (1). *I don’t think any nation in the world would sit* there while rockets are bombarding it (2), and you know that there are tunnels from which theaters have come, you know, jumping up in the dead of night, some with handcuffs and with tranquilizer drugs on them, in an obvious effort to try to kidnap people then hold them for ransom. The fact is, that is unacceptable by any standard, anywhere in the world. And *Israel has every right in the world to defend itself* (3) (Kerry & Gregory, 2014, para. 50).

In this excerpt John Kerry not only establishes why Israel has the right to defend itself but also simultaneously engages with the Israeli story skeleton from the outside worlds perspective: beginning with the common sense of political leaders (1. Deadly attacks have been made on the people of Israel), moving to knowledge that the world’s leaders possess (2. Any country in the world would not allow this), and thus concluding with the interpretation that Israel has the right to defend itself (3).

Just like the deeply ingrained story skeleton used to broadcast the words of political leaders in Gaza, so too do the political leaders of Israel enhance their own story skeleton. Just like the people of Gaza are fighting for the right to build a life, so too are the Israeli citizens. One of the differences between the nations of Gaza and Israel is the fact that the words of the Israeli political leaders seem to be much more connected to the beliefs and story skeletons being told on the individual level, as exemplified in the following:

…a video released by Hamas, purporting to show fighters infiltrating Israel through a tunnel and attacking a military installation…in Israel itself support for the war and for the Netanyahu government is overwhelmingly strong, as much as 95% according to a recent poll (Gorani, 2014, para. 31)
This strong support for war and for the Netanyahu government on part of the Israeli people can be traced back to the original story skeleton, giving support for war in order to have security.

Individuals have endless possibilities regarding how to look at a given situation. The fact that so many Israelis support this one story skeleton and their political leader, in spite of these endless possibilities, is astonishing and may be explained by the following:

“I mean, I think we’ve really seen that it’s just reinforced this notion that nobody outside of Israel really understands what they’re going through, that they’re surrounded by enemies and that they have no choice but to defend themselves. I think they do not – you can see on social media in particularly just a real polarization, a real hardening of attitudes, a lot of hate. And there are a lot of examples here, too, of the very, very small remaining antiwar left getting squashed and attacked” (Rudoren & Gorani 2014, para. 37)

Jodi Rudoren examines the cognitive processes of the Israelis and concludes that Israelis as a whole ultimately believe they do not have a choice whether or not to engage in war, because of their intense attachment to the security story. However, Jodi Rudoren (2014) has shed light on the radicalization of the Israeli discourse due to “…a real hardening of attitudes, a lot of hate” – a discourse not of self-preservation and peace with opposition, but of animus against the people of Gaza (para. 37). This contrasting story skeleton leaves out competing stories, and thus has no memory of events that do not cohere explicitly with the needs of the ‘security’ skeleton. A molding of a generation with a ‘real hardening of attitudes’ is the consequence of discounting certain stories and events as conceptualized by former Israeli President Shimon Peres:

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9 “Israelis are worried. They look at Iran, they look at Gaza, they look at Hezbollah in Lebanon, they look at the collapsing states around us, and Mr. Netanyahu did a much better job than Mr. Herzog in portraying himself as the leader who can look after the security of the state and of the individual citizens in the state” (Rabinovich, 2015, para. 4).
Fifty years ago nobody here believed that we should ever have peace with Egypt. Nobody believed we would have peace with Jordan before Syria. Nobody believed that we would do anything with Arafat, we did. So all the pessimist have a short memory. And all the optimist have a long memory and a good hope (Peres & Davies, 2014, audiovisual).

Former Israeli President Shimon Peres sheds light on the fact that story skeletons are always partial and selective. Furthermore, Shimon Peres reveals how a unified body of people with the same ‘security’ skeleton can inflect it given their particular moment in time. In the discourse of the ‘pessimist’, they have left out or chosen to forget certain discourse and events, birthing a young Israeli generation that is ultimately more pessimistic about future peace with their Gazan neighbors. Therefore, just as the individuals of this new generation grow older, gain traction, and become more powerful, so too does their story skeleton. In what is to come, the development of this generation and their new inflected story will be analyzed.

On November 29, 2014 a bilingual school for Jewish and Arab students located in Jerusalem was damaged when vandals spray-painted “There’s no coexisting with cancer” (Hasson, Lis, Skop, 2014, para. 1). This is not the first account of such discourse. In fact, my first encounter with a story skeleton this primitive took place while I was in Israel talking to a twenty-four year old Israeli man who described Gaza as a ‘Spider’s nest filled with venomous insects.’ According to the Hamas leader, Khaled Mashall, “The Palestinian “resistance” groups in Gaza have succeeded in creating a balance of fear, pain and mutual insecurity [with Israel]” (Toameh, 2014, para. 11). This I believe to be true. Due to the creation of fear, pain and insecurity that has developed among the Israeli people, a new branch of discourse has emerged; one representing the Israelis who do not
believe coexisting is possible due to an escaladed lack of trust. Former Israeli President Shimon Peres gave the following excerpt to BBC’s Wyre Davies:

I was for the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. …. They [Israeli government] made a very tough decision and I supported it…We offered them [the people of Gaza] the best [the land] without any conditions, we didn’t ask anything in return. And people say what if they [the people of Gaza] start shooting at us, and I say, look why should they. Now I have my problem to explain, they say why did I agree to it (“Former Israeli”, 2014, audiovisual).

In this selection Shimon Peres is referring to the so-called Disengagement plan, enacted by Israel in August of 2005 that evicted all Jewish settlers from Gaza and the formal removal of the last three thousand Israeli soldiers. This strip of land was then handed to Gaza with the sole anticipation of peace in return. However, this act of peace was met with rockets and violence. Historical events like this and others, along with the ‘short memory’ described by Shimon Peres in the first quote, helps shed light on the ‘no coexisting’ story skeleton. The people of Israel believe they have given enough chances for peace.

This new discourse does not exist in a vacuum. It has been prompted over time in a kind of call and response between the stories of Gaza and Israel. The current ‘war of words’ has consequently prevented the development of some stories while leaving the possibility for other stories to be enhanced, which means that while the discourses continue to evolve, they pave the way only for certain story skeletons to emerge, excluding others. Clearly, it is their neglect other stories that creates the partial recount that is the story skeleton. Interestingly enough, while analyzing the current story skeleton of Israeli discourse I have come to conclude that both the people and the political leaders have given in to this nuanced ‘no coexisting’ skeleton as demonstrated in the following quote:
Following the quick collapse of the cease-fire in Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the White House not to force a truce with Palestinian militants on Israel… The officials also said Netanyahu said he should be “trusted” on the issue and about the unwillingness of Hamas to enter into and follow through on cease-fire talks (“Gaza Crisis”, 2014, para. 2).

The enhanced counter narrative demonstrated above is an example of an inflection from the recurring story skeleton that we have seen all throughout Israeli history. This ‘no coexisting’ skeleton is a new branch of the previous ‘security’ skeleton; thus although it has retained elements of the previous it is in essence a divergence from the previous story skeleton. When decoding this ‘no coexisting skeleton using familiarity and knowledge of the past events it would seem that the new skeleton is as follows: beginning with the common sense of their ideology (1. The state of Israel has needed constant defense for the right to exist), moving to their knowledge (2. The people of Gaza have constantly inflicted unwarranted aggression upon the people of Israel), and thus concluding with the interpretation that they cannot trust the people of Gaza (3. There can be no coexistence). 10 It is important to note that this novel discourse does not imply the ‘eradication of the Gazan people,’ rather it narrates an inability to conceive coexisting

10 An exciting new development took place within the last twenty-four hours that further verifies this thesis’ argument! On March 18, 2015 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was reelected into office. The fact that the people of Israel reelected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a significant testimony to the ‘no coexisting’ story skeleton, and the analysis building up to it. This confirmation of the ‘no coexisting’ story skeleton, and the gained traction it has recently received, is due mainly in part to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s declaration on March 16, 2015 that, “Anyone who is going to establish a Palestinian state, anyone who is going to evacuate territories today, is simply giving a base for attacks to the radical Islam against Israel. This is the true reality that was created here in the last few years” (McLaughlin, 2015, para. 3). By doing a close examination of this quote one can apply all aspect of the ‘no coexisting’ story skeleton: 1. The state of Israel has needed constant defense for the right to exist 2. The people of Gaza have constantly inflicted unwarranted aggression upon the people of Israel and 3. There can be no coexistence.
which would thus establish a distinct and separate line prohibiting exposure between the two.\textsuperscript{11}

This restoration of security in a “fraught, broken, angry, dysfunctional region, rather than by motives for lasting peace” is epitomized by the current President of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, according to Aaron David Miller (Miller & Gwertzman, 2014, para. 1). This fixated discourse for security has replaced the humanity behind the Gazan people and accordingly has weakened the discourse of coexistence with them. All in all, the majority of the discursive patterns among Israelis fall in step with the words of their leaders, however, to move forward towards peace there must be trust and willingness to go behind the story to the humanity of the storyteller.

\textbf{Discourse About the Other}

The humanity of the storyteller is nonexistent within the discourse of the other nation. In fact, both sides have legitimized a further divergence from peace talks. Among the Gazan discourse we have seen how the roots of their story have created a hatred towards Israel due to the occupation of their land and destruction of their daily life. Similarly, while at the same time contrarily, the new generation of Israelis has created a story with roots embedded in the hatred of the Gazan people due to their unrelenting violent ‘resistance’ movement and repetitive blockade for peace. Essentially, the discourse of the Gazan and Israeli people are similar, but inverse; in what follows I explore how this has come to be.

\textsuperscript{11} There are more extreme versions and less extreme versions of all story skeletons. Even though my analysis of the current discourse does not examine the language as leaning towards the eradication of the Gazan people, there is room and possibility to explore this idea further.
One of the highlights featuring the similar but contradicting story skeletons is the fact that each nations’ discourse has defined the other’s evil in a comparison to the evils done by the Nazi’s in the twentieth century. For the people of Gaza, the comparison stems from their land being taken, their daily lives being obstructed and destroyed, supplemented with terror, humiliation and occupation (Flick, 2002). For the Israelis, the extreme anti-Semitism rampant among the Gazan people, their recruitment of young suicide bombers and their “…wanton killing of innocents” has conceivably driven the comparison (Flick, 2002, para. 36).

Within the context of the two freshly budding story skeleton branches surrounding the current Gaza-Israel conflict, a source of hate towards the opposing side has developed. This new source of hate, although already present to a certain extent in the seeds of the ‘occupation’ story skeleton, it is new to become embodied by both the nation and the individuals and both the Gazan and Israeli people. What’s interesting about this discourse of ‘hate’ is that it is embedded in surprisingly similar beliefs. According to Deborah Flick (2002), “Neither is convinced the other wants peace. Each cites instances of the other destroying peace overtures with violent attacks. Each blames the other for the perpetuation of the endless circle of violence” (para. 37). 12 One clear aspect of the conflict lies in the blame each side holds for the other: surely the mental paralysis of hearing differing viewpoints and denial of self-wrong spurs hatred from both parties – which ultimately, once again, reinforces the inability to hear differing view points – establishing the positive feedback loop.

12 While the notion was present in 2002, and thus could be considered not ‘new’, I argue that while the beginning of this discourse emerged then, it has only recently gained traction among the people at large.
Ultimately, differing story skeletons are developing within both Gaza and Israel as a result of contemporary events and the inflection of modern framing. In the end however, we have seen how these counter narratives tend to harden the overarching skeletons and thus produce an even more unlikelihood of hearing competing discourse. Abed, a far-right nationalist politician supports my claim by stipulating how “Society has come to a point where you can’t even think of an Arab-Jewish coalition. We’ve been pulled so far apart from each other that we can’t even cooperate” (Chacar, 2015, para. 7). In view of this, one can conclusively claim that the current discourse is being used to intensify the events of the current conflict. If my notion of the current discourse is accurate, then the possibility of discourse supporting peace will only arise if there is a willingness to depart from the comfort of a story one has always told. I will discuss how this willingness to depart from the comfort of one’s story skeleton can be made possible.
Chapter IV:
Peace-Building Discourse

Behind every major decision there is a decision-maker, and behind that individual is the pressure and influence of the surrounding discourse. The Gaza-Israel conflict is no exception to this situation. Although the collective memories of these two nations will not fade, peace-building discourse will only be made possible if decision-makers step away from the comfort of a story they have always told. This claim is true based on the following concept: since history is a reflection of the stories we tell, any new discourse has the power to change that history. In what is to come, the discourse that has changed the course of history, from conflict to peace, will be analyzed and interpreted, so that the decision-makers of today can inflect the discourse of today towards peace.

There is a point in history when a story skeleton becomes self-perpetuating and self-justifying. This has been proven previously by the fact that preferred discourse is absorbed by the story skeleton while simultaneously avoiding any contrary discourse.

There is a vicious circle here: since the discourses available to us now shape the understandings from which future discourse must necessarily begin, a discourse to which there is no credible alternative easily becomes self-perpetuating (Markus & Cameron, 2002, p. 18).

When a story skeleton becomes self-perpetuating, as it has within both the Gazan and Israeli discourse, then it is undeniably embodied by the nation. In a circumstance such as this, how do you create, if not a new story, then a new direction for the stories that these nations have always told?

A new direction for a nation’s self-perpetuating story skeleton can be rendered possible on the occasion that the story is credible on some level, so that the story has the
endowment to be absorbed and gain traction. Suggesting that the discourse for peace cannot be utterly contradictory, rather, any new discourse has the requirement to have authority in existing story skeletons. This is how the trajectory of any discourse can change. Contemporary peaceful discourse must be at the edge of the givens and the stories that people already know. At the same time, known stories must be slightly altered to create peaceful discourse.

Even though the story skeletons of the Gazan and Israeli people to not lean towards peace, there have been moments where peace discourse has been proposed. Thus, the opportunity for the creation of a peaceful discourse has been planted by these previous peace talks. In the following I will examine what this peaceful discourse looked like and how the peaceful discourse was built on the prior respective national skeletons. By doing so, I will explore the process of framing the language of the Gaza-Israel conflict towards peace.

**Masters of Story Skeletons, not Prisoners of them**

The people of the Gaza-Israel conflict have become addicted to the negative story by internalizing the words of injustice and animosity. As Gil Troy, an American presidential historian, states, “He whose language we use wins” (Troy, 2015, lecture). Advancing this victory of the hate discourse is the partial memory that occurs when competing stories are omitted. The people of both Gaza and Israel exhibit this. Story skeletons by their very definition are selective and will favor one kind of historical moment over the other. Although these favored historical moment are true enough to have traction, they are not totally true because their story is always partial. ‘Partial’ is
being used in both definitions of that word: the telling of an incomplete story as well as
the biased favoring of certain stories.

As Troy (2015) points out, a partial discourse, built on the foundation of
disconnected memories, leads to a hindered identity. This is true regardless of which
national identity (security or occupation) one takes up. As we have seen, the individual’s
identity for these two nations has succumbed to their respective overarching national
identity; resulting in a developed blindness for the possibility of peace.

So what would peace look like for the Gaza-Israel conflict? Peace is something
vague, it is a theoretical term that is hard to define. “But also like ‘happiness’, ‘harmony’,
‘love’, ‘justice’ and ‘freedom’, we often recognize it by its absence” (Webel & Gatung,
2007, p. 6). By defining the Gaza-Israel conflict as just that, a conflict, we are
recognizing the absence of peace. Charles Webel and Johan Galtung (2007), editors of
\textit{Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies}, believe the following:

And ‘national security’, or the collective survival of a culture, people or nation-
state, has in modern times become the macroscopic extension of individual
‘defensive’ struggles, sometimes ruthless, unscrupulous and murderous during
times of perceived and real threats to individual and familial existence (p. 11).

Being at peace allows for the individual to use their own discourse. On the contrary, we
have seen how the Israeli and Palestinian nations, during this current time of conflict,
have surrendered their individual discourse for strict national discourse. This national
discourse is now the ‘macroscopic extension’ of the individual. Therefore, these two
nations are consumed by their respective national discourse and have reduced what
should be a broad variety of discourse into a strict set of only two competing national
story skeletons.
That being said, the only way to have progress is to shed this binary approach. According to Aaron Miller, an American Middle East analyst, a basic element missing in the Gaza-Israel conflict is “Leaders who are masters of their political houses, not prisoners of them” (Miller, 2015, lecture). The significance of this statement can be traced to every breakthrough in this conflict “without exception” according to Aaron Miller (2015, lecture). So what does this mean and how does it relate to the overarching language framing of the Gaza-Israel conflict?

The process of framing language, by use of a story skeleton, is the method of fixing one’s words to the skeleton of one’s choice while concurrently preventing the use of competing discourse. In order to shed this partial approach, we must have leaders who are able to transcend the boundaries of their respective story skeleton. After all, in order for peaceful discourse to be taken up into the discourse of the people, the leaders of these nations must be masters of their story skeletons, not prisoners of them.

Being a master of a story skeleton will be defined as the ability to carefully and considerately analyze the nation’s story skeleton while simultaneously being aware of the constrictions the story skeleton inflicts. Furthermore, being a master demands the willingness to have dialogue with others that have a competing story skeleton. This criterion results in a leader who has mastered the goals of their respective nation while simultaneously being able to search for new realities of their own nation’s story skeleton in order to have conflict transformation. Inevitably, it is the replacement of the currently employed blind conviction with sound judgment.\[^{13}\]

\[^{13}\] See page 20 for the sound judgment definition as used in this paper.
The prisoners of the story skeletons are the political leaders who allow this self-perpetuating story to continue. They are the leaders who do not use their voice to project an innovative variation of their nation’s story skeleton, but rather they are the leaders who become incorporated in the previous story skeleton. Ultimately, the leaders with the ability to hear the words beyond their own story skeletons, to have the capacity and knowledge of discourse other than their own “…is the superb, the supreme act of a truly great civilizations” (Morrison, 1998, para. 1). The leaders we need are the politicians who are committed to building a nuanced discourse and defending them publicly and strongly. Meaning, there must be civil disobedience of establishing and engaging in positive contact with the appointed enemy (Webel & Gatung, 2007). Additionally, the leaders much have cognitive/emotional disobedience in their refusal to reflect on the world with their story skeletons partial view (Webel & Gatung, 2007).

An example of this type of leadership can be seen in the first Camp David in September of 1978. A peace agreement was reached between Israel and Egypt that is universally recognized as an important milestone in the history of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. This agreement, the first of its kind between modern Israel, and any of its Arab neighbors, was the product of thirteen days of negotiations between President Anwar El Sadat of Egypt, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel and monitored by President Jimmy Carter of the United States. It is important to note that these countries were able to forge a treaty not because of some distinct story skeleton that led them to this agreement: it came to be because of the individuals involved and their ability to engage in the “disobediences” mentioned above which led to this historical signing of new actions, new speech, and new thoughts.
The participating members of the Camp David Accords were successful in making a peace treaty because these were political leaders who were masters of their story skeletons, not prisoners of them. According to Miller, the success of the Camp David Accords is because of an extraordinary act of statesmanship on the part of Anwar Sadat with the knowledge that Menachem Begin was the kind of leader who could, if he wanted to, deliver (Miller 2015). It is my belief that President Anwar El Sadat of Egypt played the most pivotal role during the negotiation talks because he, above the others, was the peace builder – the one with the most acts of civil and cognitive disobedience.

Another analysis of the Camp David Accord by Ambassador Samuel Lewis upholds this viewpoint when stating, “Camp David succeeded in part because Sadat overruled all of his advisors” (Eilts & Lewis, n.d., para. 17). Sadat’s advisors represent the bondage or imprisonment of political leaders to their historical story skeleton, “His staff (Sadat’s), which had unanimously objected to Sadat coming to Camp David at all, felt he was in a very tough position and didn’t really want to agree to anything” (Lewis, n.d., para. 17). Sadat played a pivotal role in the construction of the Camp David Accords by being a master of his political house and story skeleton. If it weren’t for his commitment to be open minded – unchained from the story skeleton of his nation, and his confidence to take the risk of thinking, speaking, and acting upon it, then this deal would not have happened (Webel & Gatung, 2007).

Overall, the bravery of Sadat and the other political leaders involved in the Camp David Accords demonstrated how peaceful discourse is possible when there is a willingness to depart from the comfort of a story one has always told. Another way to think about this concept is by using Marshall Rosenberg’s term ‘nonviolent
communication’. The idea behind ‘nonviolent communication’ is to listen behind the words, to try and understand what the other person, as well as yourself, is actually attempting to communicate:

We express our feelings in terms of what another person has ‘done to us.’ We struggle to understand what we want or need in the moment, and how to effectively ask for what we want without using unhealthy demands, threats or coercion” (Rosenberg, n.d., para.2).

In essence, ‘master’s of story skeletons’ behold the power to hear and say things differently. This willingness to listen behind the words and see if you can say it differently does not take root in the ability to make new discourse, for then the other storytellers cannot understand it; rather, willingness begins with the masters of their story skeletons who are comfortable and confident to work with the given and the stories that people already know and yet are able to inflect them slightly in order to achieve ‘the impossible’.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been ambitious. I have tried to find reasons supporting the claim that current language framing employed by the discourse of these respective nations is overriding the prospective of peace in the Gaza-Israel conflict. It was argued that the language we know holds an uncountable grasp on the way that we think and act; and that it is our very language that has a positive feedback loop, making us entrapped further into our own discourse and our own story. I cannot say for certain that language is the sole answer to peace in this conflict, but I can say with relative certainty that the peace-building process calls for courageous individuals to become masters of their story skeletons. It requires that ability to “… say yes to encounter and no to conflict; yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and not to hostilities” (Lavanga, 2014, para. 16). Giving hope to the future generations that a change in societal perspective is both possible and realistic can be attributed to the following: the fact that the path for peace-building discourse can be outlined, including the type of individuals who would be of most value to the process and finally, the seeds of peace-building discourse planted by previous peace talks such as those at Camp David Accords.

Even though collective memories from these two nations will not fade, the means for peaceful discourse are there. The fight against the paradigm of the current story skeleton begins with the demonstration of sound judgment by masters of story skeletons, and the overall use of nonviolent communication. If the leaders of these two nation’s employed the techniques above, then there would be a variable in the nation’s discourse,
if only the slightest. Nonetheless, regardless of how small, any change in a nation’s discourse can give source to a new branch of the nation’s overarching story skeleton.

As a conscious body, humanity needs to be more aware of language and the ground-shaking power it possesses. The potential stemming from the knowledge of language gives us the opportunity to create a new reality. Armed with this knowledge, we must choose wisely. Language can, in fact, be a prevailing tool in order to establish unity between these two groups of people, and among nations struggling to define their own places in history.
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