The Function of Symbols that Bind and Divide

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It is in the intent of this chapter to develop a basic understanding of the function and role of divisive symbols within post-violence or reconciliation settings. Whether these symbols are flags, ethnic labels, commemorations, or other social representations, they serve as a way for members of a society to both communicate heritage and socially connect with other members of a group—both past and present. In analyzing the conflict, understanding these divisive symbols can be of critical importance due to the emotional responses that these symbols elicit. Given this strong response, one can conclude that these symbols are similar to what Volkan (2006) refers to as a "hot place" or a "physical location that individually and collectively induces (or reinduces) immediate and intense feelings among members of an ethnic or other large group" (p. 137). These emotions can lead to some members of the culture being filled with a sense of pride and connection with their social group, while at the same time these symbols can create strong feelings of oppression or even hatred among others.

How these symbols are interpreted often depends on the context in which these symbols appear. Mach (1993) highlights the importance of context in understanding symbols when he notes, "the same object can symbolize two quite different ideas and emotions, and the particular meaning depends on the context within which the symbol is used" (p. 25). The context of the symbol often determines how one group is attributing meaning and identity to the symbol. Often, misunderstanding this context is the source of intergroup tension due to misunderstanding or lack of understanding of the historical significance of the symbol or how the symbol is being perceived by the "out group."

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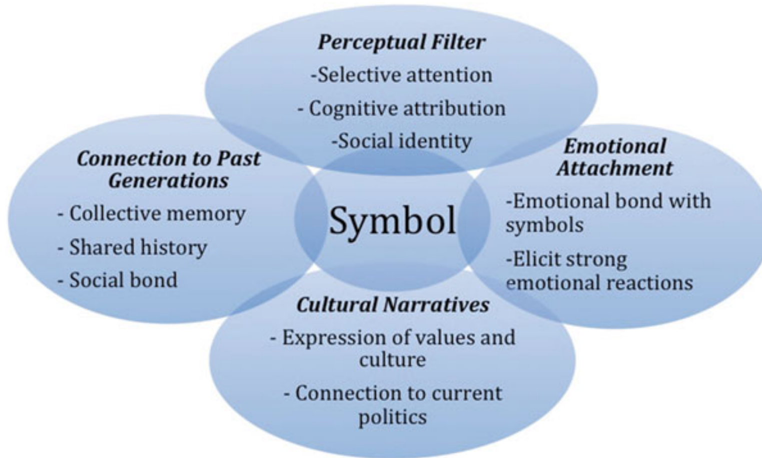

Fig. 1 Functions of symbols (Adapted from Moeschberger, 2011)

For scholars or practitioners working towards building cultures of peace, understanding the deep meaning in symbols can provide a depth of understanding of the conflict that can enhance creative peacebuilding approaches. In a comprehensive analysis of peacebuilding, Schrich (2005) proposes understanding conflict in three dimensions: the material or rational; the social; and the symbolic or cultural. The material dimension consists of conflict related to land or material resources that are in demand. The social dimension is a more complex interaction of communication, relationships, and social interactions. Lastly the symbol dimension "focuses on how people's worldview shape how they understand and make meaning of the world, and in particular, conflict. It brings attention to the perceptual, emotional, sensual, cultural, and identity-driven aspects of conflict" (Schrich, 2005, p. 32). It is our desire that an increased understanding of this collection of diverse symbols in various settings worldwide can help practitioners better assess and understand conflict settings.

In considering the breadth of rich examples from across the world, a model of understanding the functions of these symbols emerged. While each of the authors goes in detail about how each symbol is utilized in the specific setting, we have developed a conceptual model, guided by existing theories, that can help scholars and practitioners understand symbols in deeper ways. In sum, based on the cases presented in the current volume divisive symbols serve four interrelated functions: (1) connection to past generations, (2) elicit a strong emotional reaction, (3) express and maintain cultural narratives as they contribute to social representations, and (4) a perceptual filter to understand the self in relation to society (Fig. 1).

Connection to Past Generations

The function of a symbol in a given society is largely related to the power of the symbol in preserving the past within the culture. In this way the symbol becomes part of the collective memories that can inform current political discourse and connect current generations to their past (Liu & Hilton, 2010). These collective memories can serve as a powerful way to create a social bond among members of a people group, often to the exclusion of another cultural group. By their very nature, the symbols function as a way for groups to remember and shape their interpretation of history. While this shared history can serve as a potent social bond, it also helps shape the reality that is lived in the current sociopolitical landscape.

To some extent, all the authors in the current volume wrestle with the collective memories that symbols represent in each country. Perhaps the most in-depth example is the analysis of post-socialist monuments by Begic and Mravic in the chapter "Forsaken Monuments and Social Change: The Function of Socialist Monuments in the Post-Yugoslav Space." In their detailed discussion, the authors adeptly connect the monuments as deposits of collective meaning of past and present. They introduce symbols as not just markers of the past but markers of current territory, noting that these memories can serve as a way to exert power in "symbolic warfare." Munoz Proto (in Chapter "'What We Are, Where We Are Headed': A Peace March Visits an Ex-Torture Center") also illustrates this connection of the past to the present in her analysis of Villa Grimaldi and the dynamic and complex histories that can be "pushed aside" rather than resolved through remembrance. Several authors noted that the collective memories are a source of continuous trauma, an area that has been the focus of several recent publications (Opotow & Luke, 2013). Santos, in Chapter "Symbols that Speak: Christ and His Word in El Salvador," shares the personal and societal struggle with the trauma elicited by the Civil War in El Salvador, noting the historic significance of the current image of Christ within the modern day socioreligious memories. And lastly, Andriani, in Chapter "Holocaust Collective Memory in the Context of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: A Multifaceted Symbol," takes a creative approach in her discussion of the Holocaust as a symbol, rooted in the collective memory of the Israeli culture. In her findings, there is evidence that collective memories certainly influence current perspectives in complex and complicated fashions. In some cases the impact of a symbol on the collective conscious extends beyond the society to a sense of worldwide collective guilt over an event such as the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. These examples both implicitly and explicitly impact present politics and public opinion in multiple nation-states as well as the UN on various foreign policy issues related to whether to intervene in global conflicts as well as the entire spectrum of complex issues found in Israel–Palestine.

Emotional Reactions

One characteristic that divisive symbols elicit that seems to be present within most settings after overt conflict ends is a strong emotional attachment to the symbol. Given that the symbols represents times of conflict or oppression this factor seems obvious—but in some settings the emotional fervor that the symbol elicits certainly points to a powerful marker that shapes current discourse. This aligns with Volkan's "hot places" notion that emphasizes intensity of feelings.

Two of the strongest emotional reactions can be seen in the current issues regarding flags in both Northern Ireland and the USA. As Stringer and Hunter point out in this volume, the recent rioting in Belfast with the Union Jack flying in the City Hall demonstrates the strong identification with the social meaning that the symbol represents within the unionist community. While the flag policy was in alignment with the rest of the UK, the rioting and protests became violent and ultimately resulted in numerous injuries. In a similar vein, the use of the Confederate battle flag (discussed in Chapter "Heritage or Hatred: The Confederate Battle Flag and Current Race Relations in the USA") can elicit equally strong reactions. Though protests of the flag flying have not yielded violent protests, the mere introduction of the flag into songs, clothing, or political rallies yields a strong emotional reaction by members of the African American community. Likewise, removal of the flag (such as the statehouse in South Carolina) from public space will elicit fury from pro-flag supports.

In a different way the Christ Symbol in El Salvador also contains a powerful emotional element. Though divided in the various Christian traditions, Santos, in Chapter "Symbols that Speak: Christ and His Word in El Salvador," highlights how all three traditions relate to the symbol in sensory and affective ways. Though the response may differ based on each narrative context for the Christ symbol, it is very clear that the symbol is alive within the lived experience of individuals interviewed.

Cultural Narratives

The complexity of the symbols within society seems to be a reflection of the complexity of the cultural values as well as the conflict reform which they emerge. These symbols are highly contextualized and impacted by the diverse values of the host culture; in addition they are shaped by the individual values within the culture. These narratives are heavily influenced by cultural variables such as race, religion, sex, and social class and often seem to interact within the current political environment. For example, in Chapter "Holocaust Collective Memory in the Context of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: A Multifaceted Symbol" on Holocaust narratives in Israel found in this volume, Adriani discusses the cultural values of remembrance and survival and how these guide Israelis towards either empathy or anger for their

Palestinian neighbors. To some extent, all of the symbols analyzed in the chapters serve as a feedback loop to shape current cultural narratives, which in turn shape the representation of the symbols. This interaction with culture and values creates a dynamic system in which the meaning of the symbols is constantly shifting based on context and sociopolitical ideology.

Another clear example of the connection between cultural values and symbols can be found in the chapter on Rwanda. As Phillips DeZalia explains in Chapter "Being Rwandan: The Use of Language, History, and Identity in Post-Genocide Rwanda," the government is attempting to promote reconciliation through educational reform that promotes a common Rwandan identity. This has also led to the suppression of former means of identification and their related narratives. The important historical narratives are continually adapting to align with the symbols that are being promoted. In addition, in Chapter "Post-apartheid South Africa: A United or a Divided Nation?" Bornman describes how South Africa has tried to move past the ethnic lines of the past and embrace a national identity. The promotion of the Rainbow Nation, with its accompanying flag, national anthem, and monuments that join multiple groups' symbols and language, is an attempt at reconciliation—albeit one with limited success. Lastly, in Chapter "Contested Symbols as Social Representations: The Case of Cyprus," Psaltis, Beydola, Filippou, and Vrachimis found that symbols in Cyprus could communicate feelings of triumphalism or victimization, depending on the perspective.

Perceptual Filter

Symbols can also serve as a cognitive filter and anchor point for individuals to assimilate and interpret new information in relation to culture. These symbols are deeply impacted by a group member's social identity and can serve as a schema that allows individuals to makes sense of their lived experiences. This filter ultimately helps shape cognitive attributions related to group membership and categorization. In this way, symbols serve to both enhance and inform social identities (see section below), strengthening "us/them" and "in-group/out-group" perspectives.

Probably the most developed discussion of this social categorization process is in Stringer and Hunter's analysis in Chapter "Understanding Symbols of Division in Post-conflict Northern Ireland" of the deeply engrained symbols in Northern Ireland. This analysis reveals the power symbols have in everyday life in Northern Ireland, negatively influencing intergroup contact and cross-community relationships. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Bornman (this volume) highlights the influence of symbols in creating shared identities reflected in the "New South Africa." An example that shows both directions of categorization would be in Adriani's chapter on Israel. The "dovish" Israelis saw the Palestinians as part of their in-group because they had both suffered, whereas the "hawkish" Israelis categorized the Palestinians as an enemy group because they were not Holocaust survivors and did not deserve the same treatment.

Social Representation

While many of our authors take a broad look at the role of symbols in their country, another way to view the use of symbols is through a more specific theoretical lens. One of the theories that best clarifies the role of semiotics in reconciliation is Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory (SRT). This theory explains how the new ideas have been generated as well as how they have been dispersed throughout the society. As Jahoda (1988) states, "the purpose of social representations is said to be that of making something unfamiliar familiar" (p. 201). Before looking at symbols of peace and conflict through the eyes of SRT, it is important to understand its fundamentals. Specifically, one must look at its main components and the way it is used in violence and reconciliation settings.

Moscovici has been reticent in his research to define some of the fundamental terms of SRT, such as the basic one of social representation. What he has said is that they are "a specific way of understanding, and communicating what we know already"(Moscovici, 2001b, p. 31). Moscovici (1988) describes three possible social natures of representations. There can be a social representation that is the same for all members of the society. An example of this would be the Catholic and Protestant school uniforms described by Stringer and Hunter in Chapter "Understanding Symbols of Division in Post-conflict Northern Ireland" on Northern Ireland. There can be similar versions that peacefully coexist, such as the multiple languages in the national anthem mentioned in Chapter "Post-apartheid South Africa: A United or a Divided Nation?" on South Africa. Or there can be similar versions that cause tension and strife among various communities within the larger society, such as the different historical narratives discussed in the Rwanda section (Chapter "Being Rwandan: The Use of Language, History and Identity in Post-Genocide Rwanda"). This last version is one which intrigues Moscovici (1990). The tensions that exist between individuals in a society, as seen through their differing representations, is one of the basic subject matters of social psychology on which Moscovici focused his research.

Others have given more details on what characterize representations. Wagner (1994a) lists several necessary features of social representations including a collective nature; an ability to anchor novel events to those previously experienced; a hierarchical structure that entails a core basis with peripheral components; and a semiotic element, which Moscovici (2001b) saw as symbolic and iconic. Valsiner (2003) adds that social representations help individuals cope with the vagueness of the future by connecting it with the more stable past. In addition to connecting the past with the future, social representations also make the ideas of a community relevant, thus regulating the behavior of its members (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2001). At their core, social representations are meant to guide individuals towards particular realities and connect them with their communities. They establish thoughts that come to be the basis of the community belief system, automatic assumptions to which the members can return when confused, which is common in conflict settings.

This focus on the social nature of thought, rather than individual beliefs, continues with Markova (2003) who emphasizes that, while any phenomenon could potentially become a representation, there must be a social element. The phenomenon must be a part of the "public discourse" in order to be a social representation (p. 143). This goes along with Wagner's (2003) description on the ways in which social representations develop. They can be "thoughts, feelings, action and their justification" and they develop and change, not from an internal process but from "social controversy" (p. 8.2). Moscovici describes this social nature of representations as the consensual universe that "thrives on negotiation and mutual acceptance (Moscovici, 2001a, p. 238), a product of common sense knowledge distinct from the reified universe of scientific knowledge (Markova, 2003; Potter & Edwards, 1999). This is another reason that it is difficult to define social representations. They are not concrete objects but rather "dialogical phenomena" that are only found in relation to other phenomena, never as independent entities Elements of this are found in the personal narratives found in the chapter on Israel (Chapter "Holocaust Collective Memory in the Context of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: A Multifaceted Symbol").

The basic preconceptions that are utilized in this dialogue are called themata (Markova, 2006; Moscovici & Vignaux, 2001). The basis of themata is antinomies (Markova, 2003). Antinomies are basic oppositional dyads that exist, implicitly or explicitly, in every culture. They do not have to be expressly taught to a child in a given culture but are acquired through regular interactions in the culture. They can include such things as freedom–oppression, sun–moon, or joy–sorrow. These antinomies can be dormant if they are not actively recognized or utilized by a society and may never develop into anything more than implicit oppositional taxonomies. During Tito's rule in Yugoslavia, many of the historical differences between Bosnians and Herzegovinians would have fallen into this category, as described in Chapter "Forsaken Monuments and Social Change: The Function of Socialist Monuments in the Post-Yugoslav Space."

When the antinomies are put in the active dialogue of a community, they transform into themata. Any antinomy has the potential to become a themata if it is "brought to the explicit attention of social thinking" (Markova, 2006, p. 444). Almost all antinomies, at some moment in time, will become a themata for a particular culture. When antinomies develop into themata, they retain their antinomic nature though one side of the opposition tends to take precedence within the culture. These themata are the preconceptions at the foundation of common sense thinking. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the antinomies of freedom–oppression came to the forefront of American culture, with the emphasis being on promoting freedom and eliminating oppression throughout the world. This theme of freedom over oppression developed into very salient social representations such as the importance of spreading *democracy* and the supremacy of Western ideals. While these representations were very salient in 2001, as the time since a terrorist attack increases, the relevance of these themata decrease and there may be fewer references to them in the public discourse.

Anchoring and objectifying are two related yet different concepts that help to establish, modify, and maintain social representations. Markova (2006) sees the distinction between anchoring and objectifying as their main function in a society. Anchoring is utilized more for stability and objectifying assists in the process of changing a representation. Anchoring is the process of connecting a new phenomenon with one that has been previously established. Moscovici (2001b) explains anchoring as:

> a process which draws something foreign and disturbing that intrigues us into our particular system of categories and compares it to the paradigm of a category which we think to be suitable…In so far as a given object or idea is compared to the paradigm of a category it acquires characteristics of that category and is readjusted to fit within it (p. 42).

When a theme first enters the public discourse it is connected to an already established and understandable concept. This process allows individuals to classify something after a single exposure to it. They can then communicate the new social representation to others, even if that communication first appears vague and ambiguous. An example of anchoring, discussed Moscovici's first work on this subject is the establishment of Freud's Psychoanalytic theory in France. When Freud's theory first came into the mainstream, it had to be anchored to already established representations. The first time someone heard the phrase, "repression," there was no instantaneous common sense understanding of what that meant. It had to be tied to an existing idea of an individual "forgetting" something, a concept that was already a part of everyday narratives. Anchoring the established representation with the new phenomenon does not automatically entail the replacement of the former with the latter (Markova, 2006). At this stage, it is only a connection.

Objectifying occurs after anchoring. In this process, the vague connection between the new phenomenon and the old representation has been established and the new phenomenon develops into a unique social representation, separate from the original. The new phenomenon becomes an *object* separate from all other. Once this process takes place, it allows the social representation to become a part of what the culture deems common sense. As Moscovici (2001b) says:

> …what is unfamiliar and unperceived in one generation becomes familiar and obvious in the next. This is not simply due to the passage of time or to habit, though both are probably necessary. This domestication is the result of objectification (p. 49).

The new social representations take precedence over the previous ones, situating themselves into the public discourse. Once they have been objectified, they are able to obtain an iconic status. They become relevant in their own right and can then be used to anchor other new phenomenon to an understandable concept. Going along with the previous example of repression in France, during the objectifying stage, there becomes increasingly less of a need to tie the phenomenon to that of forgetting. Eventually, it gets to the point where an individual can hear of repression and automatically have an image come to mind. There is no need to directly connect it to the process of forgetting. It automatically makes sense in its own right; it has become an object in the common sense dialogue of the culture.

The theory of social representations works well with our model for the use of symbols in peace and conflict. The language that individuals choose to use as they attempt to encourage reconciliation or continue a conflict is based on social representations. We understand our current situation based on the social representations that we use within our society. These are often tied to narratives in our society, such as the Holocaust stories passed down through survivors and historical narratives that are promoted or silenced in post-genocide Rwanda. The words we chose to use or ban—like the national anthem in South Africa—the monuments we choose to erect, dismantle, or transform—like the Turkish and Greek structures in Cyprus—and the ideas we choose to support or silence—such as the meaning of the Christ symbol in El Salvador—are all connected to social representations that are tied to peace or conflict.

Social Identity Theory

Another way to look at symbols in the divide and unite is through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as well as the related Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner et al., 1989) and the Mutual Intergroup Differentiation Model (MIDM; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). SIT states that a fundamental part of our self-concept is how we view ourselves as members of social groups (Brown, 2000). We are not independent entities but rather social animals who are continually deciding who is our friend and who is an enemy.

The two main processes that occur in SIT are social categorization and social comparison. In social categorization, we divide "people into 'us' and 'them,' into in-groups and out-groups" based on certain categories that we find salient (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). It is impossible to view someone as a blank slate. We must compare them to those we have met in the past and assign them to categories based on their similarities or differences with those people. If we feel that they share something in common with us, they will be assigned to our in-group and we will feel a connection to them. However, if we feel that they are more in common with those in our out-group, we will see them as other. Although promoting empathy as an in-group characteristic can make us feel more empathy for the out-group (Tarrant, Dazeley, & Cottom, 2009), we usually do not hold positive views for those we see as separate from ourselves. An example of social categorization is the use of the Christ symbol by Evangelicals in El Salvador (discussed in Chapter "Symbols that Speak: Christ and His Word in El Salvador"). They see their struggle as similar to that of Christ and see him as a member of their in-group and his struggle as similar to their own.

In addition to categorizing those we meet—when we compare groups—we like to view our own as better than comparable out-groups (Tajfel, 1978). This social comparison is so strong that promoting one's in-group can even take precedence over personal gain (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). No one wants to be a member

of an irrelevant or disappointing group and so we will work hard to view our group as the best. This necessitates viewing other groups, particularly those most similar, as worse than our own. This negative view of the other can be seen in the chapter on Cyprus in this volume. The Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots each view their own right to the land as more valid and their fight to keep it as more honorable and just. And for the chapter on Israel (Chapter "Holocaust Collective Memory in the Context of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: A Multifaceted Symbol"), it is difficult to view the Palestinians fight for recognition as similar to their own because it would involve seeing the negative aspects of their own in-group.

Although our identification with our in-group and dislike of our out-groups are strong, there are a couple of theories that look into ways to promote reconciliation, even with those we categorize as more different than us. In the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner et al., 1996), one more inclusive superordinate is promoted among members of different subgroups. By having a common superordinate identity, we can view members of our former out-group with "the same kind of positive evaluations and benefits afforded to in-group members" (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000, p. 243). Because we will always view members of our out-groups as inferior to our in-group, the only way to truly bring reconciliation is to bring the enemy into our in-group. For example, in the chapter on Holocaust survivors, those who saw Palestinians as similar to themselves because they were also victims of violence were more able to feel empathy for that group. Another example would be in the promotion of the Rwandan identity, discussed in Chapter "Being Rwandan: The Use of Language, History and Identity in Post-Genocide Rwanda." By eliminating subordinate ethnic identities, the government is hoping to encourage reconciliation among the people.

Another perspective can be found in the Mutual Intergroup Differentiation Model (MIDM; Vollhardt, Migacheva, & Tropp, 2008). According to the MIDM, it is important to recognize subgroup identities as part of the superordinate category. Acknowledging the uniqueness of the various groups that come together to form the superordinate category is an essential component of this model. Individuals reject the adaptation of an umbrella grouping that will result in the destruction of their subgroup identity, such as what is found in CIIM. Therefore, attempting to eliminate subgroup identification will hinder the acceptance of the superordinate category. By allowing members to retain their subgroup identity, while recognizing "mutual superiorities and inferiorities" (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, p. 591) of each subordinate group, it is possible to work towards reconciliation without fear of a loss of an important social identity. An example of this can be found in the chapter on South Africa found in this volume. The idea of a Rainbow Nation is a promotion of distinct groups who must work together for the sake of the country.

As with social representations, the use of SIT and the related CIIM and MIDM can be clearly connected to our model of semiotics in peace and conflict. In-groups and out-groups in countries that have experienced conflict are rarely new creations. They are often connected to past generations. Our elders and our leaders teach us who is our friend and who is our enemy. We make automatic assumptions about those we encounter based on these cognitions and act according to those

assumptions. Knowing that the Us versus Them mentality is such an integral part of both conflict and reconciliation, those attempting to bring peace often try to make in-groups more inclusive to expand the number of people with whom we feel a social bond. Some examples of this can be found in Chapter "Contested Symbols as Social Representations: The Case of Cyprus" of this book. Psaltis, Beydola, Filippou, and Vrachimis discuss the peace house that is supposed to unite Cypriotes instead of keeping them divided among Turkish and Greek lines. Springer and Hunter discuss the use of integrated school uniforms to make categorization among Catholic and Protestant lines more difficult in Chapter "Understanding Symbols of Division in Post-conflict Northern Ireland." And finally, in Chapter "Heritage or Hatred: The Confederate Battle Flag and Current Race Relations in the USA," Moeschberger gives the example of an African-American college student who displayed a Confederate flag in his dorm room to make it an inclusive symbol of southern pride rather than a symbol of racism and the division that entails.

The end of explicit fighting is never the end of a conflict. That is when the work of reconciliation begins. The semiotics of reconciliation and conflict play an integral, if often hidden, role in this process. In the following chapters, our authors will explore how nations are using symbols to navigate this process, with varying levels of success. By creating symbols that are meant to bind the opposing sides together, these nations are attempting to facilitate peace on multiple levels. If done successfully, these symbols function to change the cultural as well as personal narratives of those who encounter them to create a more unified society.

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