Chapter 8
Symbolic Reminders of Identity

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When social identities are being used to promote either violence or reconciliation between conflicting groups, semiotics play an integral, if often implicit, role in the promotion of those identities. The symbols within a society help to connect individuals to the previous generations, promote valued cultural narratives, and provide a perceptual filter through which societies view the world (Phillips DeZalia & Moeschberger, 2014). One way to understand the symbolic reminders of identity is through the lens of the dialogical self and social representations. Instead of seeing social identities as static entities in which we place ourselves and individuals, Dialogical Self Theory (DST) views them as continually shifting in their importance and connection with each other as they negotiate their position within the self (Hermans, 2001b). Social Representation Theory (SRT, Moscovici, 1988) adds another integral element by analysing the ways in which communities affect and are affected by the changing beliefs—the social representations—embedded in society. Social representations are created, adapted, or eliminated in our environment to emphasise, modify, or devalue certain social identities that the individuals use to initiate and perpetuate a conflict or encourage peace.

These symbolic reminders of our identity can be promoted through political and social movements as well as through historical narratives of previous struggles and victories passed through the generations. By emphasising certain aspects of our identities, leaders can encourage political engagement and solidarity with those who they perceive as part of our in-group along with bias and aggression against the

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out-group. Although these semiotic reminders are often subtle, they are emotionally salient and can significantly impact the trajectory of a conflict.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. We will describe the basic components of DST and SRT, explain how they connect with SIT, and finally give a real-world example of the semiotics of SIT in peace and conflict works by exploring Northern Ireland and South Africa. Although many researchers connected with the world of SIT and peace psychology have discussed concepts that can easily be connected to DST and SRT (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Kelman, 2001; Staub, 2001), these theoretical frameworks are rarely used and not commonly understood in the peace and conflict world. It is necessary to understand the terminology and concepts of these theories to grasp their influence in conflict and reconciliation.

Dialogical Self Theory

Hermans' (2001a, 2001b) based his theory on the dialogical self on the work of Bakhtin (1993) and James (1890) and on the belief that the self is not a singular, static entity. As Valsiner describes, "the dialogical self is a theoretical entity (self) which is organised (exists) through a process of dialogical relations between its sub-parts" (2007, p. 149). When one is thinking of the self and relating to others, one is guided by the dialogue of the various aspects of the self, known as *I-positions*. These I-positions have a hierarchical relationship, with each having varying degrees of salience and importance at different times. For example, while one is at work, the I-position of "employee" could be most salient. At home, the I-position of spouse, parent, or child can take precedence. When something significant happens in society, one's view of self as a member of the society can reach the top of the hierarchy. On September 11, 2001, many found their identity as an "American" more salient and a catalyst for guiding behaviour than it was on September 10 of that year.

At any given time, multiple I-positions are in dialogue within the individual or between individuals. The intrapersonal process is known as autodialogue, in what Valsiner defines as the "multivoicedness of the self" (2002, p. 256). More than one I-position can be active at a time and interacts with the other I-positions to change the hierarchy as well as potentially create new I-positions. This dialogue can also occur between individuals, in what is defined as heterodialogue. "When Bakhtin refers to 'multivoicedness', he not only has in mind the simultaneous existence of different individual voices, but also the simultaneous existence of an individual voice and the voice of a group" (Hermans, 2001b, p. 262). Although this theory focuses on one's view of oneself, it is necessarily a social process.

The social element of this is guided by culture, through the use of semiotic mediation. Signs are created and used by social institutions within the culture to guide individuals towards approved I-positions and to silence those that are unwanted (Valsiner, 2002, 2007). These signs do not simply encourage I-positions in the moment but "make the distinction between the immediate next *possibilities, impossibilities,* and *potential possibilities* of our feeling and thinking, facing the future"

(Valsiner, 2003, p. 55). When signs guide us to a particular future and its related I-positions, they are called *promoter signs*. These can be things such as songs, uniforms, pledges, ceremonies, remembrances, individuals, and historical narratives and can be both implicit and explicit.

An example of a social institution using a promoter sign to guide individuals to a particular I-position and its related *possible* future was the Lee-Jackson-King holiday that was celebrated in Virginia until 2000. Martin Luther King Jr. day is a federal holiday. However, the day for Robert E Lee and Stonewall Jackson is only celebrated at the state level, specifically in a few southern states. Virginia combined its remembrance of Lee, King, and Jackson into one day. Celebrating the memory of the leader of the civil rights movement at the same time as one promotes the memory of the leaders of the confederacy—that is forever linked with the slavery—promoted the I-positions of Rebel, Southerner (as opposed to Yankee), and resister of civil rights. It discouraged people, especially children learning about the civil war and civil rights in school, from the idea that their ancestors had been on the wrong side of history or that the role of Virginia in these events was something to regret. Using the confederate flag as a sign of "southern pride" and deemphasising its racial connotations (Moeschberger, 2014) would be a similar process.

Social Representation Theory

Social Representation Theory is related to the dialogical self in that it helps to explain the way that social institutions use symbols to promote specific ideas within a society. Moscovici defines social representations as "a specific way of understanding, and communicating what we know already" (2001, p. 31). Social representations have: "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" (Phillips DeZalia, 2011, p. 1050; Wagner, 1994). Social representations guide individuals within a society towards specific beliefs and identifications. They can be seen as a form of promoter signs, albeit ones that require a social element (Markova, 2003, 2006). 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.

Every social representation has at least one core thema that is essential to its existence as well as several peripheral themata that help to connect the core to the social world. These themata are based on antinomies—oppositional dyads—e.g. love–hate, justice–injustice. These antinomies are implicitly passed down through generations and remain on the periphery until events make them more salient to the community (Markova, 2003). It is at that time that they may become their own themata and lead to the creation of relevant social representations. For example, in Rwanda, many people had heard of clans and knew the one to which they belonged.

However, they were not very relevant to everyday life until the government decided to promote the historical narrative of clans to emphasise the unity (over the division) of its people (Phillips DeZalia, 2014). Now school children are explicitly taught about clans and it seems like a rather common sense idea, or fact, within the society.

Social representations are created by promoting the related themata and *anchoring* them to firmly established social representations. Through *objectifying*, the social representations solidify their salient position within the society. "Social representations theory highlights the dynamic and reactive nature of representation that develops, supports, or challenges different positions and associations in different contexts" (Howarth, 2007, p. 135). An example of anchoring and objectifying would be when George W. Bush referenced the crusades when discussing America fighting in the Middle East. By anchoring the new idea of the need for this conflict to the established narrative of the crusades, it made the actions more salient. Now, through objectifying, many Americans would relate the conflict in the Middle East to a struggle between Christianity and Islam, and referencing this *common sense* representation more easily gets Americans to accept what is happening as necessary.

Just as themata can reside at the core or periphery of a social representation, the social representations themselves can abide in different areas of society. Some are belief based, being implicitly passed down through collective memory and traditions. Others are explicitly taught and considered more knowledge based (Markova, 2003). Regardless of the format, social representations guide community thinking and actions, and, as previously mentioned, can promote specific I-positions or view of the self within the society.

Social Identity Theory

There are significant links between DST, SRT, and SIT. Figure 8.1 shows some of the connections between the three concepts.

Many of the concepts commonly discussed in SIT have direct links to some of the terms we have just defined. Although I-positions do not have to be social in nature, many are and would thus be considered social identities. The salient factors we use to categorise individuals can easily be symbolic in nature and fall into the category of promoter signs. In addition, the inherent oppositional nature of in-groups and out-groups—an essential component of SIT, especially as it relates to peace and conflict issues—is directly linked to the notion of antimonies. You cannot know who you are and what you believe without also knowing who you aren't and what you disavow. Now, we will break these links down into more detail.

We'll start with a discussion of the link between social identities and social representations. As Howarth (2007) states:

> Social representations and social identities must be seen as two sides of the same coin. In positioning ourselves in relation to others—that is, in asserting, performing, or *doing* identity—we reveal our perspective on the world and our ways of seeing and constructing
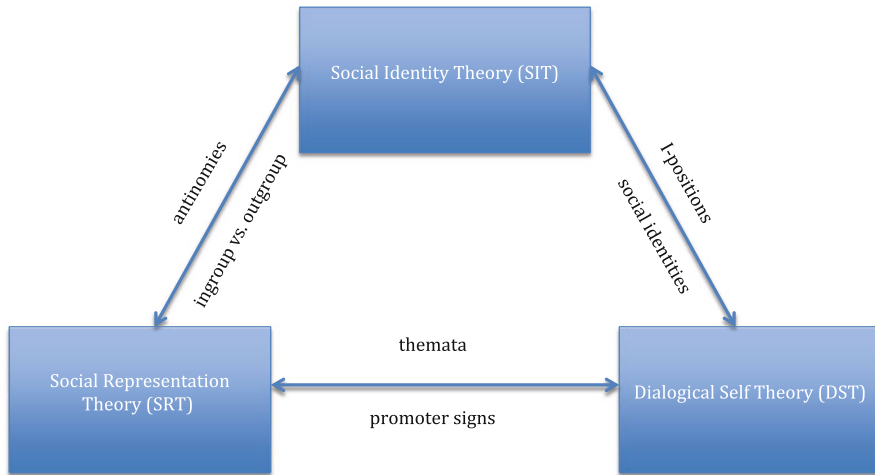
Fig. 8.1 Relationship between SIT, SRT, and DST

> the world, or our social representation. And just as identities tie us to particular communities of others and simultaneously highlight what is individual and unique about us, representations carry traces of our collective histories and common practices while revealing the possibilities of resistance and agency. (p. 133)

It is through social representations that social institutions direct us to the promoted social identities. Individuals are taught the social identities for their communities via belief-based as well as knowledge-based representations. Whether it is historical or folk narratives, educational curricula, songs, remembrances, or uniforms, individuals are guided towards particular social representations and their related identities. Liu and Laszio (2007, p. 97) describe it as a revision of the "collective memory and the social representation of history […] These representation appear as narratives and work as folk histories in accordance with the identity needs of the groups". These are not stable, rigid representations but malleable ones based on the current situation.

Through the processes of anchoring and objectifying, social representations are revived, revised, or created to promote the necessary identities for the group. Anchoring, connecting new phenomena to established representations, allows new and foreign concepts to be better understood and embraced. One can think of anchoring as a form of social categorisation. Howarth (2007) states that SRT is "primarily about the social, psychological, historical, and ideological dynamics of the production and *reproduction of knowledge*—particularly knowledge that relates to the social categorisation, differentiation, and identification of social groups and communities" (p. 134, italicises added). When we first meet individuals, we want to understand them in terms of who and what we already know. We are not comfortable with ambiguity nor novelty. Just as we anchor new ideas to established ones, we also categorise individuals based on groups we have previously formed in our minds.

These new phenomena/groups can become their own recognised categories and can be used independently through objectifying. For example, when Israel was being created in the post-World War II world, well-known historical narratives of the Israelites finding their promised land after the exodus were used to anchor the idea of this new nation. In addition, similar narratives and related social identities were used to unify people who may have had differing identities—e.g. Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews—into a new superordinate identity of Israeli. Now, over 70 years later, this identity is self-sustaining via the process of objectifying. However, one component of keeping this identity and the related representations alive is to silence those that differ. Liu and László explain it as "social representations of history structure the 'objective' situation through a process of selective interpretation, biased attribution, restricted assessment of legitimacy and agency, and by privileging certain historically warranted social categories and category systems above other alternatives" (2007, p. 87). The representations connected to the privileged and desired social categories and identities are promoted whereas those that differ from this preferred narrative are eliminated or ignored.

Another connection between SIT and SRT can be seen in the "oppositional dyads" that are inherent in both theoretical perspectives. In SIT, they are called in-groups and out-groups. In SRT, they are called antinomies. For both theories, you cannot understand who you are and what you believe without also understanding who you aren't and what you must avoid. For all of the good characteristics of our in-group, there must necessarily be the opposite negative characteristics of our out-groups. And at given times, different elements become more salient. Whatever identities—or themata—are most critical for a society in a given moment are the ones that will be promoted by the leaders of that society.

In some ways, social identities and the dialogical self have a more obvious link. Hermans' (1996) concept of I-positions and their hierarchical yet flexible nature can easily be described as various social identities that adapt based on society and the current situation. For example, on July 4, one's identity as an American may feel more salient than it does on the third or fifth because patriotism is promoted on that day. One's I-positions can be seen as a collection of all the personal and social (or collective) identities within an individual's self-concept. And the way in which these I-positions/identities interact can vary. Valsiner states that, "[t]he relationship between diverging I-positions at the same level of depth of semiotic mediation can take multiple forms. Some of these forms maintain the multivoicedness of the self" (2002, p. 256). At any given moment, more than one I-position can be interacting and negotiating their positions within the individual's self-concept. One's identity with regard to family, community, work, etc. are constantly in dialogue and working or conflicting with each other. A part of this dialogue also includes "communication between collective voices" (Hermans, 2001a, p. 56). When this dialogue includes individuals outside of the self, they may be called external I-positions (Hermans, 2012), or the previously mentioned heterodialogue (Valsiner, 2002). These include coworkers, family members, friends, and neighbours who help guide our view of self. They can promote certain social identities or encourage their silencing.

Additionally, the dialogical self is related to Gaertner and Dovido's belief that "whether a person's personal or collective identity is more salient critically shapes how a person perceives, interprets, evaluates, and responds to situations and to others" (2000, p. 37). At various times, different I-positions (identities) take precedence and this can be guided by one's experiences and interactions with others. As Coakley states, "Different combinations [of I-positions] achieve dominance in the imagination at different times and in response to different situations" (2014, p. 54). Whether we categorise someone as part of our in-group or as a member of an out-group is affected by which identity is the *loudest* in the dialogical self. These can also be intentionally shaped to ensure the salience of specific identities. For example, Kelman (2001) explains that "although national identities are generally constructed out of real experiences, these experiences can be ordered in different ways, resulting in different boundaries and priorities" (p. 195). This ordering is done by either social institutions or the individual and social representations can play an integral part in this process by encouraging ideals or historical narratives that promote specific identifications. It is through semiotic mediation, the use of symbols to guide thinking and identification, that this process takes place.

This encouragement can be facilitated by the use of promoter signs, symbols that make certain I-positions more salient. As previously mentioned, these promoter signs, symbols that guide us to potential futures and their related identities, can be things such as uniforms that mark you as a member of a group or than can be individuals who are endorsed by society as people one must emulate. When they are the latter, they are also external I-positions (Hermans, 2012). Promoting Martin Luther King Jr. as a hero of the Civil Rights Movement would be an example of this and is meant to guide individuals towards a superordinate social identity. The use of Dr. King as a promoter sign is not reserved for the United States. Societies around the world can use his work and the meaning behind it to guide their members towards specific beliefs and actions.

Peace and Conflict

This leads us to connection to the peace and conflict element of this chapter. The fact that "Much of the violence in the world today appears to be caused by heightened social identities, by groups that define themselves as 'us versus them'" (White, 2001, p. 154) has been well researched. However, when looking at peace and conflict within a society, it is also imperative that one also looks at the symbols that are used in this process (Phillips DeZalia & Moeschberger, 2014) and how they promote certain social identities while silencing others.

One link between semiotics, identities, and peace and conflict is what Staub calls "group self-concepts, or the socially shared way members perceive and experience their group" (2001, p. 164). One could see this group self-concept as a version of the multiple I-positions within the dialogical self. It can be both positive and negative, unlike the social comparison common in social identity research and is influenced

by the ideologies within the society. Staub (2001) defines ideologies as "blueprints for the organisation of societies and relations among individuals" (p. 165). Another way to describe ideologies would be to say that they are social representations based on themata that are important for the current needs of society.

If a society's leaders want to promote a conflict, they must maintain an "us versus them" way of thinking. Historical narratives that remind people of the conflict must be supported and the social representations as well as the perceptual filters through which people view the other group (Phillips DeZalia & Moeschberger, 2014) must guide individuals towards the division and the need for continued conflict. Many of these social representations would fall into the belief-based category. They are not based on facts or research but more on collective memory and a common sense feeling that this is the way it has always been and always will be.

Whether it is landmarks, holidays, songs, stories, or uniforms, societies must find a way to "promote the cause of their collective struggle" (Psaltis, Beydola, Filippou, & Vrachimis, 2014, p. 62). The conflict becomes the most salient part of the group identity and leads to a cycle of continued violence. As Staub (2001) describes:

> In the course of this past history, not only the view of the other but the identity of each group [in the conflict] as well has come to be defined around this enmity: the other is my enemy, and I am the enemy of the other. In short, group self-concept comes to center on violent conflict with the other group. (p. 170)

As the social representations connected to this struggle become stronger, new experiences are understood by being anchored to these established representations. Every experience is viewed through this lens. It helps guide individuals to the *next possibilities* for future interactions with the out-group as well as *impossibilities* and *potential possibilities*. Any interaction with others will be initiated and analysed through the related social representations.

Although social representations can be used to continue a conflict, they may also be used to encourage reconciliation. For example, in Rwanda, the government overtly changed the historical narratives—and the related social representations—to encourage a superordinate in-group identity that promoted reconciliation (Phillips DeZalia, 2014). Social identities, like social representations, must also change if reconciliation is going to occur after conflict. As Kelman (2001) states:

> The stubborn resistance to change in collective identities is widely recognized and taken for granted. Yet identities have to change, or at least tacitly, if protracted identity conflicts are to be settled and, certainly, if they are to be resolved in a way that transforms the relationship and opens the way to reconciliation. (p. 194)

New narratives, and their related social identities, are anchored to previously established ideas and stories until they could stand on their own and, in time, potentially silence their predecessors. One's social identity cannot be drastically changed in a moment, but it can be gradually revised as different themata become more salient.

Although it is clear that creating a subordinate identity is an effective way to connect individuals who were previously in differing in-groups, there is debate on the need to silence the conflicting subordinate identities in order for reconciliation to be successful. The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner, Dovidio,

& Bachman, 1996) focuses on the importance of a superordinate identity in the promotion of peace. By recategorising individuals into one inclusive social identity, they can focus on their similarities rather than previous conflicts. In contrast, the Mutual Intergroup Differentiation Model (MIDM; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002) emphasises the need to maintain individual subordinate identities within the superordinate one. By allowing individuals to maintain a connection to their previous in-groups, they are less likely to reject the new superordinate one. MIDM can be seen as a variation of the dialogical self. One's self-concept involves a multitude of I-positions. It is not necessary to eliminate all but one. Although a group attempting reconciliation may work to have the superordinate identity become the most salient, it is possible for multiple in-group identities to coexist and dialogue with each other.

When using either the MIDM or the CIIM approach to facilitate reconciliation, individuals within a society must recategorise both themselves and others. This recategorisation is facilitated through the promotion of established as well as novel social representations. Whether it is songs, ceremonies, narratives, or landmarks, individuals are guided by those in control of society to use specific social identities. The representations used in this process can be explicit—e.g. through the creation of holidays—but they can also be implicit. This implicit process could be the silencing of former social identities and the elimination of their discussion in a public form. As Phillips DeZalia (2014) describes, the Rwandan government has eliminated the discussion of the traditional view of the Tutsi and Hutu social identities, although they may still continue in a more private, modified form. In order to encourage identification with the superordinate category of Rwandan, the government uses social representations and promoter signs—such as songs, educational curricula, statues, and holidays—to guide individuals to the desired labels.

Northern Ireland and South Africa

Two countries that offer great examples of the semiotics used to promote social identities to encourage either peace or conflict are Northern Ireland and South Africa. We will look at each individually. In Northern Ireland, tensions between Protestant/Unionist or Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist or Republican communities tend to run high during the "marching season". The most contentious parades of the season happen every year on July 12, when parades are held to commemorate the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic King James II in the Battle of the Boyne (See Ferguson and McKeown, this volume for more detail on the Northern Irish conflict). This is an example of using historical incidents to anchor and promote the Protestant identity in Northern Ireland. Via the process of objectifying; the related social identity of Orangemen has been created—orange being the colour of Protestants, linked to William of Orange. Social institutions have been created to promote the endorsed identities. For example, some in Northern Ireland belong to the Orange Order, a fraternal social affiliation connected to the Protestant social identity.

Anchoring one's identity to the view of Protestants in history and objectifying the related modern social representations helps to keep the I-Position of Protestant as the most salient one within the dialogical self. One way this is done is by supporting the themata of pride about historical accomplishments related to historical Protestant leadership figures. For example, the July 12 parades often feature signs celebrating Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. This anchors the social identity of a Northern Irish Protestant to a common reference point of Protestants worldwide. This approach also uses the specific battle being commemorated (the Battle of the Boyne) to connect (anchor) the broader stance of conflict with the Catholic community, causing this historical event to function as a symbol, or promoter sign, of the tensions between these two communities. In the Protestant narrative, William of Orange is victorious, and the parades are a celebratory national event that families attend annually. As stated in SIT, one will find ways to view one's in-group in a favourable light. The symbols within the society will encourage this bias. The same event may be given different symbolic importance to switch the meaning for the out-group. In the Catholic narrative, these commemorations are viewed as "triumphalism" and contribute to an ongoing sectarian stance in the country.

It is important to note that the contentious issues are not primarily religious in nature, but stem from conflicting aspirations about Northern Ireland's relationship with the UK. Since most British descendants were from a Protestant minority on an island with an indigenous Catholic population, the issues became comingled with religion, sometime intentionally and other times by association. Unionists/Loyalists uphold loyalty and allegiance to the British crown, in contrast to the Irish Nationalist/Republican desires for a separate and united island of Ireland. These social identities at the extreme identify as Loyalist and Republican, alongside the religious affiliation that describes most in those communities. In this case, religion is actually used symbolically as a promoter sign for each community. It becomes a tool in the narrative of each community rather than the tensions actually being theological in nature. When individuals speak of their Protestant and Catholic identities, it is an implicit way to guide people towards the related social representation of Loyalist versus Republican. Because of this, you will have those who will tell you that they are an atheist in one breath; but also a Protestant, or a Catholic in another. Because of the actual meaning of the identities, this is not a conflict at all.

These identities and their related symbols can be better understood by incorporating our previous figure of the links between SIT, SRT, and DST as seen in Fig. 8.2

The antinomies of Loyalist vs. Republican and Protestant vs. Catholic are also examples of opposing in-groups and out-groups. These can also be considered social identities (or I-positions) and are linked to related identities such as Orangeman or Northern Irish. Many social representations or symbols act as promoter signs guiding individuals towards the encouraged identities that will promote violence or reconciliation. These include iconic heroes such as Martin Luther and William of Orange. They also consist of the parades on July 12, the banners (often with images of the 95 Theses and the related heroes), and references to the Crown.
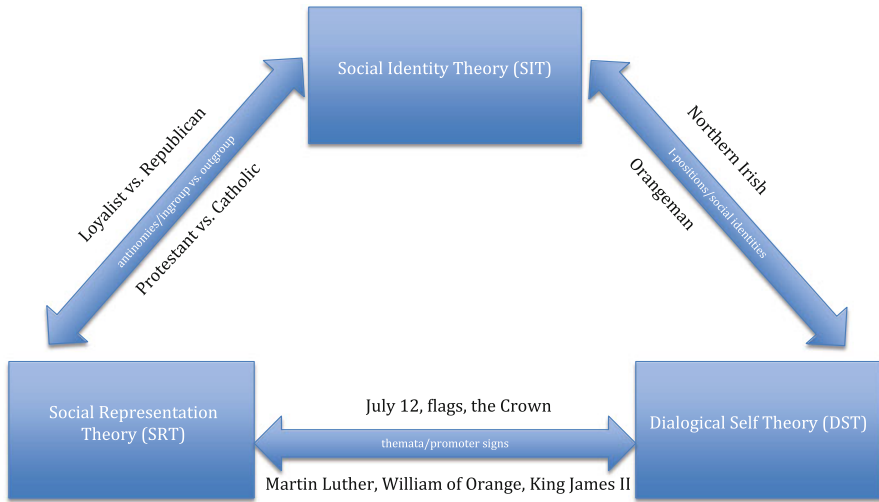
Fig. 8.2 Northern Ireland Symbols related to SIT, SRT, and DST

An attempt to negotiate a more unified social identity as "Northern Irish" might reference St. Patrick, who is viewed by the Orange Order as Protestant, and viewed as Catholic by others, but who is celebrated by all at some level. In the political scene, there are smaller political parties, like the Alliance Party, that have tried to take a non-sectarian stance. To the extent that a traditionally Nationalist party, like the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party) focuses on working conditions, healthcare, and education, rather than the traditional lines of divide (which focus on the goal of either unity with the Republic of Ireland or loyalty to the current position in the UK), there is more opportunity to have meaningful political exchange. Efforts to focus on "normal" political issues for the working class can promote social representations connected to a superordinate identity to bring that one to a more salient position within the self.

One place that exhibits some success in renegotiating social representations is in post-conflict South Africa (see also Meyer, Durrheim & Foster, this volume). While (understandably) a long way from a truly unified national identity, Mandala made strategic efforts to move from a focus on racial identity, to foster a superordinate identity of "South African" that is inclusive and moves beyond apartheid. He attempted this by shifting the national focus to a rugby team. Although this was a sport that may have at one time been more prominent in one community, all South Africans could understand the social representation of supporting one's team against the opponent. During the critical years of transition out of apartheid, Mandala threw his support behind a common national team that encouraged the entire country to focus on cheering on victories on the rugby pitch versus other nations rather than warring with each other. By encouraging the I-position of "supporter of the national team," Mandela helped to make the related I-position of South African more salient.

In striving for this direction, he also created a national flag and a national anthem to attempt to generate national unity and used semiotics proactively to create space for a broader identity that superseded the conflicts between Afrikaaner and Black/coloured identities. While there is certainly a long way to go, these are strategic choices by a leader that demonstrate an awareness of the need to renegotiate social representations in ways that move towards peace.

Conclusion

Both Northern Ireland and South Africa show the use of symbols to promote desired social identities. For Northern Ireland, many use these symbols to promote further division. When one uses the identity of "Protestant", it is not just a religious identity but a political one as well. If someone flies the Orange Standard outside his house or plants orange lilies in his garden, it is more than just a colour. It is a semiotic link to the social identity that is most salient within himself. For South Africa, Mandela's cheering for the national rugby team was not simply a sign of his interest in the sport. It was a way to connect all South Africans under a common identity of sports fan. This was a more subtle, implicit way to link previously warring groups.

While there has been significant research conducted on the importance of social identities in peace and conflict, the semiotics utilised in this process are often ignored. Something as subtle as a story, a song, a flag, flowers, a word choice, or a uniform can be a strong indicator of specific identities even if individuals outside of the community may be oblivious to their significance. These symbols play an integral part in the changing salience of the multiple identities contained within the self and their dialogue with each other. In order to not only end a conflict but promote lasting reconciliation, it is essential to examine—and potentially modify, create, or eliminate—the symbols present within that society.

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