Entendiendo la democracia: los usos de la historia oral
Understanding Democracy: The Uses of Oral History

Chair
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Is Austerity a Legitimise Political Policy?

Kathryn Cunningham
(UK):

Resumen: Muchos países europeos han respondido a los efectos secundarios de la crisis financiera de 2008 con fuertes medidas de austeridad que han afectado a los sectores menos pudientes de sus habitantes.

Este documento incluye material de entrevistas y las respuestas a un breve cuestionario sobre la legitimidad de esta política.

Hay comentarios sobre las actividades de la banca y las agencias calificadoras de crédito. También se hace referencia a dos publicaciones recientes - Thomas Piketty’s “Capital in the Twenty-First Century” y Redistribution, Inequality and Growth del FMI – que cuestionan la ortodoxia neoliberal de los últimos 30 años.

El objetivo no era crear un documento estadísticamente riguroso sino usar las opiniones de los encuestados, junto con comentarios online sobre la viñeta que aparece a diario en The Guardian, para intentar iluminar cómo hemos podido llegar hasta donde estamos hoy, fiscalmente hablando, y lo que tenemos que hacer para remediar el daño.

Abstract: The response of many European countries to the fallout of 2008 financial crisis has been to impose heavy austerity measures on the less affluent parts of their populations.

This paper includes material from interviews and responses to a brief questionnaire on the legitimacy of this policy.

There is some discussion on the activities of the banking sector and credit rating agencies, and there is reference to two recent publications - Thomas Piketty’s “Capital in the Twenty-First Century”, and the IMF’s Redistribution, Inequality and Growth - that challenge the neoliberal orthodoxy of the last thirty plus years.

The aim is not to produce a statistically-tight paper: it is to use the views of interviewees and respondents to a questionnaire, together with postings on the Guardian’s daily cartoon, to attempt to illuminate how we’ve got to where we are, fiscally speaking, and what we need to do now to remedy the damage.
INTRODUCTION
In the early years of the twenty first century there was a fiscal convulsion that led to number of major banks being bailed out by sovereign states, and austerity measures being imposed on the public services – especially health, education and social support systems – by those same democratically elected states. This paper offers a commentary.

The Queen of England requested that someone explain the cause of the financial crisis, and the London School of Economics arranged a seminar to coincide with the royal opening of the New Academic Building. The Daily Telegraph of 5th November 2008 reported Professor Garricano as saying: "She was asking me if these things were so large, how come everyone missed it." He told the Queen: "At every stage, someone was relying on somebody else and everyone thought they were doing the right thing."

The author shares the Queen’s incredulity that apparently no banks – indeed, no-one - had predicted the 2008 meltdown of hitherto stable financial institutions. The author was also stunned by the way that the debts of sovereign nations kept multiplying overnight as a consequence of an adverse judgement of only one credit rating agency. Greece and Ireland were dramatic examples. Spain ‘ducked and weaved’ to avoid the country, rather than its banks, seeking aid from the EU.

The financial markets enjoyed considerable benefits from the downgrading of countries. By a perverse logic, it is the poor who are suffering from the austerity policies and these were the least guilty of causing the crisis.

To the naïve observer, the fault lay with the banking sector, and not with the sovereign states or their populations. And the political and fiscal consequences for the majority of the populations of the countries continue to be fundamentally unjust. Notwithstanding the perversity of turkeys voting for Christmas, the voters of two members of the EU, Spain and the UK, opted for governments which imposed heavy austerity measures on the poorer sections of the population. Are those austerity measures legitimate?

This paper uses public statements of academics and journalists, and comments on the daily cartoon of The Guardian. Members of the local computer club added their answers to a questionnaire, as did residents of North America, Spain and Britain.

The paper provides credible judgements as to the defects of contemporary capitalism and as to the solution of these issues.

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE
Austerity has been the response of many governments to the financial crisis of 2008. What do you think of that policy?

Only two respondents to the questionnaire thought austerity an essential policy, one very articulately:

“Austerity is essential. With few exceptions (Norway for example) nearly every western democracy has debt hanging over its head like Damocles’ sword. When governments talk about reducing the deficit, what they mean is that their debt won’t increase as much this year as it did last year. Democratic governments seldom do what is needed to reduce debt because if they did what needed to be done to produce a surplus to reduce the debt, they wouldn’t get re-elected. Universal health care in the UK is no longer affordable but no government would survive doing away with it.”

“A friend of mine had lunch with the Canadian minister of Finance who told him 15 years ago that the problem is the debt. The cost of servicing debt takes a giant piece out of the budget. The debt means that the flexibility required to meet a crisis is greatly reduced. The debt is owed to financial institutions including pension funds and insurance companies.”
This respondent is a Canadian living in Spain.

All the other respondents thought that either austerity measures had been implemented too severely, or inappropriately, and too harshly on those least able to deal with the new insecurities of employment and social security.

One, another North American curiously, countered the Canadian’s arguments;

“The abiding rule here is “Follow the money.” Government policy is driven by the interests of plutocrats whose theme is “Capitalize the profits and socialize the pain.” It was the machinations of the bankers and the brokers, in cahoots with politicians, that resulted in the current financial crisis. Despite much evidence that during recessions the government’s role should be stimulus programs to get money circulating and thereby boost the economy, austerity programs have been the preference of bankers, brokers, and plutocrats in general. That is, because the money people are not punished for their roles in causing the financial crash they preserve their investments at the cost of the people. Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine: Disaster Capitalism* is the classic explication of the role of the IMF and World Bank on how plutocrats cause financial crashes and then profit by causing the government to retrench social programs, privatize government assets, and such.”

All interviewed endorsed this analysis.

**What do you think that governments, including the USA and the EU, should do to prevent a repeat of the crisis of 2008?**

““There is a clear need for a tighter control of public finances and control of the banks, forcing them to separate the commercial and speculative side of their activities from the banking services to the general public. Better education in monetary matters so that ordinary people have a much better understanding of how to manage their finances and will not be so prone to accept financial advice from any quarter without critical assessment. It should be part of the school curriculum.”

Most respondents replied along the lines of the above.

I showed the following paragraph to interviewees.

“Develop stringent controls on the operations of banks and brokerages including: a) breaking up too large to fail banks, preventing banks from gambling on the assets of their customers, b) prevent national, international banks, and brokerage firms from engaging in customer savings and loan programs, c) develop small community banks for this purpose, d) develop community owned as contrasted with corporate banks, d) prohibit politicians from accepting jobs in financial establishments for at least five years after retiring from political office, etc.”

All interviewed agreed. Respondents to the questionnaire were unanimous in requiring banks to be more controlled.

The current modus vivendi of the now virtually unregulated banking sector is well described in Sebastian Faulks’ novel ‘A week in December’, with the protagonist as a prominent hedge fund trader in the week before Christmas 2007. Carol Churchill’s play, ‘Serious Money’, is a brilliant 1980’s commentary on the corrupt practices of the City and Wall Street.

For a description of the decades leading up to the 2008 crisis I quote in full from the experience of a fellow poster, Quertboi, on the Guardian’s daily cartoon. He had referred to the ‘big bang’ as responsible for the 2008 crisis and I had asked for an explanation. He generously posted the following twelve paragraphs.
Quertboi  Financial Services Act (FSA)1986

"I was a young (very keen) marketer/salesman in a management services company when the FSA (1986) became law. Neoliberals refer to it as the Big Bang. It was the UK Act of Parliament that “liberated” financial services, separating investment banks from retail banks and even caused mutual (old-style building societies) to “convert” to plc’s and become aggressive for-profit machines (personally I obtained over £500 when societies I saved or bought my home through converted). Everyone (even socialists like me) thought capitalism was great!

Straight away there was a proliferation of plastic – credit cards became ubiquitous. In 1985 there were eight credit cards and sources of “personal” indebtedness; in 1987 we had a choice of 73 – today it’s nearer 200. Corporate debt also increased phenomenally. As a dedicated socialist I chose to do an MBA in the early Nineties and learnt that personal debt increased over 1000 per cent in the five years since the Big Bang and corporate and governmental debt increased 20 times more!

Debt! A wretched thing. The “banking crisis” we have just endured was a crisis of indebtedness! Just as Marx foretold, capitalism sold its granny for a bit more capital. It’s called “neoliberalism.”

This phenomenon – the seduction by debt – all started in the EU with Mrs Thatcher’s FSA 1986. Within eight years even the Labour party had replaced its confidence in democratic socialism with the FSA’s neoliberal “markets and capitalism are great” nihilism.

But it wasn’t the FSA alone that caused the decline of our national economy and personal wealth; it was what it, and its prioritisation of debt, allowed.

Straight away real wages stopped increasing; capitalists realised we’d happily live on credit and even – thanks to the housing bubble – feel our increased wealth was a “right” (poor Gordon Brown felt compelled to keep the housing bubble alive).

Income inequality quadrupled, resulting in the UK becoming the fourth most-unequal economy in the world... cue the Occupy movement’s talk about the 1 per cent and 99 per cent, where even very rich people are still in the 99 per cent.

Trickle-down (the justification for neoliberal, unfettered capitalism) never happened. The rich get much richer and the poor just get more in debt, resulting in 2004 for the need for working tax and child tax credits, so that hardworking people who are not paid enough to live and have children are allowed those “luxuries” by receipt of £25 billion tax “subsidy per year. I am sure you can think of many other “features” of our economic decline.

And whereas – as a socialist – the position of real people matters to me, neoliberalism also precipitates a national economic decline, wonderfully documented by Michael Meacher in his latest book and touched on here. So neoliberalism is not even good for our economy.

It (neoliberalism) is a total lie and one that the hard Right pushes through “crisis capitalism.” Add Naomi Klein’s “Shock Doctrine” to your Christmas list and get the bigger picture of how the hard Right use shocks and crisis to promote their neoliberal agenda.

Anger can rebuild, re-found and renew.

“Hopefully we will get a little housing boom and everyone will be happy as property values go up,” George Osborne is said to have quipped at a Cabinet meeting earlier this year. The Chancellor’s joke misfired; some Cabinet colleagues felt that raising the prospect of another housing bubble was no laughing matter. Just in case anyone had missed it. From the Indie of 9/10/2013."
Quertboi is in good company in his belief. In 2010 Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1986, admitted that the 2008 crash was “an unintended consequence” of the Financial Services Act.

Ireland - Anglo-Irish Bank

An Irishman kindly explained why the Irish are particularly incensed at the austerity policies.

“In Ireland there are two large banks: Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank.

Next, in size, is Irish Life and Permanent, now called PTSB or Permanent Trustee Savings Bank.

There are a number of smaller, specialised banks and subsidiaries of foreign banks.

One of those specialised banks was Anglo-Irish Bank. One of the subsidiaries was Irish Nationwide.

Both of these engaged in reckless lending.

Anglo was paying one or two percent more than the other banks on deposit accounts. But, people continued with deposit accounts in the other banks, as there were doubts as to the viability of Anglo. Many banks in Germany, and other European banks, put huge amounts in Anglo because they were offering the highest deposit rates. The more they deposited, the more Anglo lent.

Eventually the bubble burst. The bank went broke. In common with other EU countries there is a government guarantee of the first 100,000 euro in personal accounts. These accounts should have been identified, and the depositors refunded that amount and no more. Those with larger deposits and those who purchased Anglo bonds should have shared what was left, in this case zero.

They had no guarantee. They placed their money where the interest rate was highest – and so was the risk. They were gamblers. They gambled, they lost, and yet they called on the Irish government to cover their losses. When Lehmann Brothers in the United States went under, the unsecured bond holders lost their stakes. There was no suggestion that the American taxpayer should bail them out.

Curiously, at this time, some UK banks, including Barclays had Anglo bonds, which they assumed were now worthless. DeutscheBank bought them at half their face value. This suggests that the German bank knew something. Many of the unsecured bondholders were German Banks. Angela Merkel said that “contagion” had to be avoided.

They insisted that the Irish government pay these unsecured bondholders. The government hadn’t the funds to do, so the ECB lent the money. If the Irish government would not agree then they would refuse all credit to Ireland, and ensure that no other credit source would be available. Unfortunately, Brian Lenehan who was leading the negotiations was dying of cancer; he did die, at the time he kept this secret. He probably was not suitable to lead such negotiations.

Under duress, and a promise to review this later, the Irish government agreed. Other Irish banks were now in difficulty. A general election was called. The leaders of the opposition parties “Fine Gael” (PPP) and the Labour Party (Socialist) made firm commitments: that they would not pay any more money to the unsecured bondholders. Both parties made huge gains in the election. After the election the PPP had a near majority on their own; but still went into a collation with the Socialists.

Read the financial times (so much for election promises):

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0d16aec2-03df-11e1-98bc-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2yldZnuD1
Some light at the end of the tunnel? There are some green shoots of hope:

"The Truth is out: money is just an IOU, and the banks are rolling in it.

The Bank of England’s dose of honesty throws the theoretical basis for austerity out the window."

That was the heading for an article by David Graeber, theguardian.com, on Tuesday 18 March 2014. He wrote: "Back in the 1930s, Henry Ford is supposed to have remarked that it was a good thing that most Americans didn’t know how banking really works, because if they did, “there’d be a revolution before tomorrow morning”.

"Last week, something remarkable happened. The Bank of England let the cat out of the bag. In a paper called "Money Creation in the Modern Economy", co-authored by three economists from the Bank’s Monetary Analysis Directorate, they stated outright that most common assumptions of how banking works are simply wrong, and that the kind of populist, heterodox positions more ordinarily associated with groups such as Occupy Wall Street are correct. In doing so, they have effectively thrown the entire theoretical basis for austerity out of the window.

"In other words, everything we know is not just wrong – it’s backwards. When banks make loans, they create money. This is because money is really just an IOU. The role of the central bank is to preside over a legal order that effectively grants banks the exclusive right to create IOUs of a certain kind, ones that the government will recognise as legal tender by its willingness to accept them in payment of taxes. There’s really no limit on how much banks could create, provided they can find someone willing to borrow it."

In other words, the supremacy of the argument for austerity cuts is starting to be challenged.

The Contra Friedman Argument

"The extraordinary success of Thomas Piketty’s best-seller shows that progressive ideas are at last winning” writes Chris Huhne in The Guardian, 28 April 2014. "There are two important pieces of evidence weighing in for the egalitarians. The first is Thomas Piketty’s ‘Capital in the Twenty-First Century’, and I now quote from Huhne directly:

"Piketty shows that in rich countries at the frontier of technology and skills, the growth of incomes is between 1% and 2% a year. Meanwhile, the rate of return on capital averages about 4% to 5% a year. So those who draw their income from capital returns will outstrip wage earners and “inherited wealth grows faster than output and income”.

In the period since 1970, aided by the Reagan-Thatcher consensus, inequality has returned to the pre-1914 levels of France’s belle époque and the US robber barons. The figures are breathtaking.

Piketty says of the United States: "From 1977 to 2007, the richest 10% appropriated three-quarters of the growth. The richest 1% alone absorbed nearly 60% of the total increase of US national income in this period.” The squeezed middle does not enter into it. A democratic society will not, and cannot, tolerate such trends. …..

The process is made worse by inheritance and, in the US and UK, by the rise of extravagantly paid “super managers”. High executive pay has nothing to do with real merit

Complementing Huhne’s words on Piketty, Quertboi (again) provides some helpful statistics:
The ratio of the FTSE-100 chief executives’ total pay to the average earnings of their employees in 2013 was 120:1 (three years into Osborne’s deceitful Austerity) was 120:1. This is up from 47:1 in 1998, a near 3-fold increase in the ratio in a mere 16 years, and up from 25:1 in the 1970s.

Huhne then turns to a second key document, “The second piece of evidence for my contention that the tide is turning is also important, as it shows that this rising inequality, far from being a price worth paying, actually slows down growth. This research is not from some group of flaming radicals but the International Monetary Fund, an intrinsically conservative institution.

Its report *Redistribution, Inequality and Growth* compares different countries’ growth and their degree of redistribution (through progressive taxes, benefits, and universal services like health and education). The conclusion is that “lower net inequality is robustly correlated with faster and more durable growth”. There is only weak evidence that even exceptionally large redistributions hamper growth.

The political implications can hardly be overestimated. It will surely no longer be easy for moderate social democrats like Peter Mandelson to argue they are “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich”. Market efficiency and sound finance still matter, but Crosland-like redistribution is back.

One of the biggest battles in most developed countries’ politics turns out to be wrong. The right was meant to be nasty and selfish, but good for growth. The left was soft and kindhearted, but a threat to prosperity. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the only people who win from low-redistribution policies are the super-rich. The rest of us lose. Even under the British and American voting system, the top 10% are only about one-quarter or one-fifth of the number needed to win a majority. If the others wake up to what is really going on, conservative parties are going to have a big electoral problem.”

It is possible that the hegenomy of neo liberal economics might become challenged by credible economics theory.

A final reference comes from the comments to the daily Guardian cartoon. The final sentence is relevant to the Queen of England’s confusion.

Frank Thomas 11 April 2014 11:33pm  “If recovery is measured purely in terms of GDP, and if GDP is measured in part by house price inflation, and if the UK continues to hold itself out as a tax haven which launderers dirty money from Russia and China via the London property market, and if that was Osborne’s plan all along, then it’s no wonder that he (Cameron) and the neoliberals (are very comfortable together).

This is a jobless recovery. A recovery based on asset-price inflation fuelled by low interest rates and help-to-buy policies which appeal to middle-aged homeowners and BTL parasites. A cynical policy, in other words, which is more concerned with tempting UKIP renegades back into the Tory fold than with offering opportunities to the young and the less well-off.

What is the point in continually cutting corporation tax or the top rate of income tax when the savings are offshored rather than being invested in creating real jobs for young people?

And where’s the sense in selling off Royal Mail to Osborne’s best man and his chums at Goldman Sachs for £750m less than the open market value? We need every penny we can get at the moment, don’t we? Don’t we?”

Austerity always was a lie. Classic shock doctrine stuff. Cameron admitted as much when he gave his Mansion House speech about how austerity was going to be permanent.
The strategy appears to be to get away with as much loot as we can before the ship finally hits the rocks.”

Getting away with as much loot as possible before the ship hits the rocks’ is the only believable explanation for the behaviour of the bankers up to 2008. They must have seen it coming. There is no evidence that they tipped off either governments or politicians. They plundered, and continue to plunder – as they will until stopped by legal force.

**When a democratically elected government follows policies that were either not in their manifesto[s] or the opposite of their manifesto[s], what legitimacy does that government have? What is legitimate for the electorate to do in protest?**

There was much more consensus in the answers to the third question - essentially, vote them out at the next election - so I will just quote two particularly erudite examples

“On Question[3], although I abominate Hobbes I would agree that bad laws are better than no laws. So given a lawful government, even though two-faced and weasel-worded, I would be very chary of stepping outside the law. Within the law, it is the duty of every right-minded citizen to use the ballot-box, the press and lawful demonstration to make clear his or her opposition to the policies of the government. It gets a lot more complicated when the state uses illegal means through the illegal use of the police or other forms of force or intimidation to smother dissent. But I still don’t think I would man the barricades. I speak only of England; it may not be so easy elsewhere. I do not see that governments become illegitimate because they do not stick to their manifesto; the ballot-box rules.”

And, again from the erudite North American: “This is the most difficult question because answering it would take quite a few pages, if not a book. I won’t do that. Simply put, this establishes an either or conundrum. There is no pure or absolute state of political legitimacy for any political action...since politics is very often defined as the act of compromise.

We are dealing with gradients of legitimacy/illegitimacy in regard to this particular question because it is very difficult for the people, individually or as a mass, to determine exactly what a politician, good or bad, has promised when his/her words are turned to action.

This is particularly true in a democracy where that politician must deal with other elected officials to get laws considered or passed. In the process the politician’s promises (no matter the specificity of the original) will be distorted. Also, for example in the instance of Obama, the democratic government might be divided and other elected officers might be much too powerful to allow any version of the top official’s initiatives to survive in their intended form.

In a well-established democracy, with a good constitution, there are often by-elections or such (in the case of the U.S. the entire House of Representatives is elected every two years) so that if the elected official[s] stray too far from their promised agenda these mid-term elections allow the electorate to “blow off steam” and achieve a mid-term correction. This is an important structural aspect of democracies that help avoid revolutions.

Also, in such cases too many decades pass since the early democracy establishing revolutions so that the people have no such experience of how to bring them about in mind and in action. Mursi’s Egypt or Yanukovich’s Ukraine provide examples of poorly established democracies where politician’s promises are worth little in the first instance and there are long established structural weaknesses in the political environments in which they operate.”

That is, that people are prepared to accept significant changes to manifestos. However, I note that the acceptability of changes to manifestos depends on the changes being made as a result of unforeseen
circumstances. Where the UK’s coalition government’s attack on publicly owned services is concerned, there would seem to be an intention of acting that way for at least some years earlier than the 2010 election.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES
I close with a few loose ends. First, one interviewee noted; “If I have the power, I’m happy for you to have the social status.” It is dramatically clear from the decisions of the UK government 2010 -14 that the interests of the City and the top 1% have been consistently protected, and that austerity has been imposed on everyone else. Cameron has jumped to the ‘fat cats’ agenda, and has refused to work with the rest of the EU for necessary fiscal reforms. In the UK the City has been permitted to benefit at the expense of the rest. The City and the 1% have exercised power while the democratically elected MPs have, for the most part, danced to their tune. The City and the 1% have exercised power and the current elected UK government has jumped.

Second, I have been continually surprised that the perpetuators of powerful political myths, such as ‘trickle down effect’ and ‘We can’t afford the NHS’ have been permitted to get away with such evidence-free assertions. They must be challenged at every opportunity.

Third, and maybe explaining the second, there is a serious question mark over the power of the press. An 18.4.2010 Guardian article by the ex-editor of the Sun, David Yelland, describes how ‘Fleet Street’ never covered the Liberal Democrats, and fantasizes about the difficulties for the press were there to be a Lib-Lab coalition:

“The fact is that these papers, and others, decided months ago that Cameron was going to win. They are now invested in his victory in the most undemocratic fashion. They have gone after the prime minister in a deeply personal way and until last week they were certain he was in their sights,”

That is, the owners of the press deliberately distorted the political agenda in their own interests. This is not surprising, but that fact needs to be recognised by the voting public.

In this context, it is interesting that Hollande was elected as President of France by the clearest of EU majorities on a manifesto to ease the austerity on the poor and increase it on the rich. He, having attempted to do precisely what he said he would, is widely reported as having failed. My guess is that he was as roundly hounded by the press as was Brown 2008 -2010, and that the credit rating agencies played their parts. It would take a good academic and/or investigative journalist to uncover the truth here.

One posting on Chris Huhne’s article raises points on debt and the housing market:

Trilbey 28.4.14 “You only live once, but I have spent far too many hours over years working loads of O/T to pay back the mortgage. But the bankers got enormously rich due to the huge loans people had to take out to buy a property.

I reckon I’ve been had, because these house price booms were orchestrated by bankers to get everyone knee deep in debt. They can create as much money as they like out of nothing and this is a force outside of market forces. And a shortage of houses with an unlimited money supply means serious high levels of inflation.”
CONCLUSION
What the UK and Spanish voting populations, and those of the rest of the EU, have experienced is a deliberate raiding of the public purse by the money markets. It has been authorised by the elected governments. So far, the voting populations have not woken up to the fact that private corporations and individuals are gaining massively while the populations of the countries are being robbed - legally - via their democratically elected governments. This ought not to continue.

So, is austerity a legitimate practical policy? From the interviews, the responses to the questionnaire, and the postings on the daily Guardian comment cartoon, the answer would appear be "Yes, but, not like this.

The beneficiaries of the 2008 banking crisis have been those within the banking fraternity and the very rich. Those least responsible are suffering most. This is fundamentally unfair though not – technically – illegitimate. However it is deeply resented at all levels of society except for the very wealthy.

Were the governments of the UK and Spain to stop the austerity policies on the health, education and social services provision for the majority and, instead, increase the tax on the income and wealth on the top 1% and the banking sector, a wrong could be righted and austerity measures be more fairly applied to the parties responsible for the crisis.
Oral History and Democracy and Power.

Ali Reza Abtahi
(Iran):

Abstract: Oral history in both the technical, as the accent, mood and location of the interview and self-knowledge will effect on historical understanding due to profound and widespread adverse effects of the great philosophers from Kant to Maddox and hence; however, the past historical understanding was primarily a scholar and historian’s point of view and interpretations have also increased as increasing the people and diversity of their views.

In other words, in a new perspective on oral history as it tries to point to a more accurate and more realistic understanding of the events, so each event such as a picture frame can bring numerous interpretations and is considered part of the reality with the proviso that it seems impossible to achieve the absolute truth. The purpose of oral history is not verbal memories which are mainly person-centered. In the case of oral history in which the Interviewer placed against interviewee, could be on the outcome of bilateral negotiations and many obscure angles and numerous questions are answered if he/she plays an active, conscious and precise role- not the role of the recorder.

In this respect and in new knowledge through oral history, in recognizing an historic event new interpretations are born each time we lose sight of the incident, since it provides the background for further study. And everywhere new theories are proposed and used, Notre interpretations are presented and previous interpretations lost their place over time. Accordingly, from the eighteenth century onwards oral history as a new category, became a means to evict the documents and written texts from stasis and monologues and by collecting material from the intermediate group - rather high and powerful groups- new versions of documents and historical texts will be produced which are mainly produced by certain powers. In particular, the documents generally do not lose information from their environment. For example, communing with a Savak employees and documentation the frequent visits could turn him/her to a Savak employees or informant.
POSITION OF POWER IN IRAN
In Iran and especially in the pre-Islamic Sassanid era onwards, position of power and its distribution have a longitudinal (vertical) position with its own hierarchy and according to the principle of divine splendor and the like as recited ruling, there is not any place for dialogue and interaction with adversary groups. While Greek philosophers such as Aristotle promotes thinking and its mechanisms, in a society like Iran the path would largely lead to satisfy or revolt, there was not any discussion and unfortunately, all things were considered under a hallowed power. With the arrival of Islam in Iran, the dialogue and consultation period in Medina were not pursued at the time of the Prophet or Imam Sadiq (as) and in Islamic lands, the structures remained intact and discussion and exchange of content did not take any formal form. It seems that in the rule of rational perspective – e.g. Mu’tazilite – even the rights of opponents were not respected in practice (in the discussion of the Qur’an). Although it is not inherent in Islam, but virtually the public and classes were ignored and did not find a place to plan their views; so that it did not find any specific sustainable place in the relations between men and women and in the absence of the necessary institutions and structures, there was no possibility to arise the issues in a relaxed environment. And in spite of the changes occurring in Europe and especially in Qajar period and its impact on other countries such as Iran, the conviction, passion, excitement or fear-dominated insurgency were existed and the society remained in immoderation state. The acceptance of the principle of dialogue means that any result is thus based on a specific hypothesis and not the whole truth, in which just about everything that everyone knows, then it should pay attention to exchange and dialogue.

NEW PERSPECTIVES, DEMOCRACY
It seems that democracy is the result of new perspectives which believes that an idealized image of the human does not help us in understanding the history. In actual knowledge, we learn that how to adjust expectations and How we can expect people to go to the purity and goodness? In politic, this means that the policy cannot be focused on infrastructure issues. People should not expect something that is not in their nature. Hence, from this perspective and the first and largest historical clue to humans is tolerance which is the first dimension of democracy and tolerance rather than imposing as well as mercy instead of vengeance should be placed in the politics and ideologies. Because democracy has more realistic overview on human and humans are not Superman; and this is the story of the great poet Rumi on “The Story of Hindu Elephant in the Dungeon” that each individual interpreted the elephant based on their suspicious while they touch just a part of the whole. As long as our knowledge is divided into separate pieces, there is not reasonably possible to obtain a complete picture. So in a rational way as the unknowns become known to us, out knowledge can be more objective and by joining the components, a sect can be obtained and the result is, however, a new means and this is what comes from oral histories.

THE POSITION OF ORAL HISTORY TO POWER AND DEMOCRACY
In historiography, in order to obtain an accurate picture of an event, should work together to set various narratives. Oral history helps us that a phenomenon becomes clear through different interpretations in different events, and a plurality of geographically dispersed and human populations. Of course, however, this does not mean achieving the absolute truth; it just brings us closer to the truth. Posterities will have their own version and interpretation. Drawing out the narrative from different angles and languages using oral history, provides the possibility to overcome the documents.

HOW MUCH THE NARRATIVE OF ORAL HISTORY IS CONSIDERED AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE?
The answer is that there is no substantial difference between speaking and writing. Some people write their latent and mental awareness that is converted to a text document while this can be recorded on an audio file and there is no difference between a written document or audio file in terms of authentication.

THE RATIO BETWEEN POWER AND ORAL HISTORY
The ratio between these two categories is depending on what factors? If history, oral history, power and democracy are each independently a keyword, we can get better answers. The purpose of history is to obtain the recognition based on fact. Although it is not considered as an ideal model, Democracy is a governance model which does not have alternative in which human rights are more business. It does not
claim that human rights and justice are fully respected, but are observed when it is compared with monarchies.

In a state of mass governance, the administration is trying to engage and thus it would result in social maturity, although critics and fellow philosophers like Plato and his followers can exist as well. Plato believed that such a limited team can reach to the elite and powerful access in public administration and leads to more convenient mechanisms. This idea is strongly reinforced if believing in connection with divine splendor and absolute light of truth and put together those cases. While it seems that in societies where Plato’s view is accepted there is less attention towards social responsibility, however, in a democracy, everyone is responsible for their actions and thereby makes sense of social responsibility. In Aristotle perspective, all people are not necessarily a good cook, but all people understand the difference between good and bad foods, recognize the difference between justice and injustice. Hence, in democracy the governance is defined according to the normal human stature, not a Superman.

ORAL HISTORY AND DEMOCRACY

It seems that oral history has the ability to take out the intolerance and rigidity caused by human domination and monopoly if its mechanism can be recognized and properly handled. However, the oral history does not have distinct position than history; but consider living and moving individual as documents and can help the historian from this perspective. It should be noted that the claims and comments and statements should also be measured in comparison with other sources and thus, however, sources and documents obtained by the content of those can be complementary. Due to despotism, in authoritarian societies the possibility of asking question from higher authorities or any other authority is not allowed and only provisions and guidelines can be seen, while oral history investigates orders and instructions in a free and safe environment.

For example, in the history of contemporary Iran, especially before the revolution, about some changes, such as land reform several documents have been published which mainly reflects a general move from top to bottom is mostly seen in the form of decrees and circulars which have written to each other by the king, ministers and authorities. But how was the final decision which resulted in the issuance of rulings and circulars? These decisions were taken in what circumstances? Only through interviews with survivors and officials as well as agents of the Pahlavi period. In this regard, Cinema Rex in Abadan and its fire in the months before the revolution determined its true nature only through interviews with survivors and figures involved in the issue.

ORAL HISTORY AND ITS RELATION TO POWER AND DEMOCRACY

POWER AND DEMOCRACY AT CROSSROADS, WHICH WAY IS ORAL HISTORY?

Oral history due to its pluralist nature cannot be reconciled with power which has a monopolistic nature; since in view of the monopolistic, the different views and opinions are banned. The bygone history has been mainly the history of elders and powerful because science and education was in their power. Types of history rose over time by spreading literacy and providing historical context readers. This was not due to changes in attitude and behavior of kings, but by providing the right conditions, people who were away from education and could not create documents, wrote stories and historical documents and put them into the field of writing and production. Although the official historians exists through various political, propaganda, and military centers—which according to the new look it is also part of reality- but today, many people of different classes and can narrate the events through recordings, interviews, photos, video added to the official narrative. Democracy makes it possible for multiple people to work in unison with new features, while the approach based on the power cannot have any place in this regard. For example, in discussing the coup of 19 August 1953 oral history can raise the question whether the action is completely designed by the foreign government? Does the oil nationalization was an auspicious act or not? How was the perspective of workers employed in the oil industry on the issue? Many of these questions cannot be answered in written sources; while the interview can handle this sort of issues. Oral history can pose and answer the aspects that have already been raised and had not been considered by challenging people.
through discussion and question and answer format. These responses, however, can have a significant effect on our cognition and judgment.

For example, the offensive article issued to the leader of Islamic Revolution of Iran on 7 January 1978, everyone believed that the main culprit had been Darius Homayoun, Minister of Information and Tourism of Pahlavi regime; while conducting the interviews with Humayun and others who working with reporters and journalists Kayhan and Etela’at, it cleared that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the main culprit who commanded for issuing the article.

At the end, I am grateful to my friend and colleague Mr. Rasooli Pour for his cooperation, guidance and assistance.
CONCLUSION
If we consider oral history on new perspective and as an attempt to get the truth, in the middle between democracy (pluralist view) and power (monopolistic view), oral history is largely compatible with democracy and pluralism by its nature and it can be used as a means of historical knowledge, which utilize intermediate groups and even the previously disadvantaged communities and thus, however, this will break the walls of their limitations and exclusions.
El poder en las relaciones humanas. La democracia como instrumento político.

Juan Andrés Esteva Salazar
(Mexico):

Resumen: El 11 de marzo de 2012 tuvo lugar un acontecimiento que dio pie a la creación del mayor movimiento estudiantil mexicano en lo que va del siglo XXI. La visita del candidato presidencial del Partido Revolucionario Institucional a la Universidad Iberoamericana, culminó con la masiva protesta de decenas de estudiantes en su contra, que con consignas como ¡Atenco no se olvida! y ¡la Ibero no te quiere!, manifestaron su inconformidad.

La respuesta de las autoridades del Partido y de los principales medios de comunicación, ese mismo día, fue tachar a los jóvenes de ilegítimos y porros, minimizando el descontento. En contraparte, los estudiantes realizaron un video en el que se acreditaban como miembros de la comunidad universitaria y reivindicaban su derecho a protestar identificándose como #MasDe131. En pocas horas este video se convirtió en un fenómeno viral en redes sociales y cientos, quizá miles de estudiantes en todo el país se solidarizaron y se organizaron bajo el Hashtag #YoSoy132, en contra del candidato oficial y de los poderes facticos, como el duopolio televisivo, lanzándoselo a las calles en masivas manifestaciones que desafiaron las expectativas de los organizadores y reapropiándose de los espacios públicos, reclamando la democratización de los medios de comunicación y del gobierno mexicano.

Al grito de ¡Si no ardemos juntos, quien iluminara esta obscuridad? Y ¡Por una democracia auténtica, Yo Soy 132!, un grupo de estudiantes pertenecientes en su mayoría a escuelas privadas como el ITAM, La Salle, el Tecnológico de Monterrey, la Anáhuac, la UV y estudiantes del sistema de educación Jesuita, se congregaron en torno a un primer intento de organización llamado “La Coordinadora”.

La propuesta de esta ponencia es analizar la participación de los estudiantes de universidades normalmente asociadas con los grupos privilegiados del país para conocer las razones por las que decidieron salir a las calles para protestar contra el candidato oficial, rompiendo las barreras de clase características de la sociedad mexicana, estableciendo comunicación con los estudiantes de las universidades públicas, lo que no había sucedido desde 1968 y así crear el Movimiento #YoSoy132, que rebasó las fronteras de la capital del país y puso en jaque la campaña del candidato priista.
Democracy in the Classroom: Teaching 9/11 and the Politics of Collective Trauma.

Cheryl Duckworth (US):

Abstract: 13 years on, how is 9/11 being taught in US schools? This is an essential question for the future of teaching history, democratic processes and global peace and security. This presentation will share the data I gathered from surveys and interviews from over 150 teachers grades 6-12. Oral histories around teaching 9/11 emerged as a key method teachers were using to interrupt harmful historical narratives of the Other and thus increase democratic space in their classrooms and communities.
Narrative work in conflict resolution, at least in some sense, has been a part of the field for some time now [Cobb 2013, Winslade and Monk, 2008]. Yet as conflict resolution scholars and practitioners continue to work towards designing means of sustainably building peace and transforming conflicts at their root, the “narrative turn” in the field has continued to grow. As peace educators have been saying for several decades now, classrooms are an ideal and necessary space for this narrative and collective identity work. To guide the work of classroom teachers along these lines, then, this article will draw on the data gathered over the past year to identify key lessons for teachers wishing to engage students in the peace and social justice work of deconstructing violent narratives (which of course serve to justify manifest violence) and constructing with others in the classroom new narratives which open space for a more peaceful future.

With my research team, I conducted 24 interviews and just over 150 objective surveys with teachers nationwide (grades 6-12 only). The survey queried what kinds of activities teachers are using when they teach 9/11, the challenges and barriers they face, how academically safe they feel and reasons for not teaching 9/11, if they do not do so. The qualitative interviews conducted, in addition, gave us the opportunity to listen in more depth to teachers’ voices regarding how teachers are navigating this painful and politicized classroom content. A key theme that emerged from our interviews is the use of particular classroom activities to challenge and interrupt current harmful conflict narratives, especially as regards stereotyping and even demonization of Muslims in the US. This article will explore the approach our participating teachers took, and expand on this to draw on the author’s background as a former classroom teacher and current peace education scholar and practitioner to offer guidelines for expanding and deepening this narrative transformation work in the classroom.

A few key points about the dynamics and behavior of extremist narratives, a key driver of intractable conflicts, are of use here. One such insight, essential to peacebuilding and human rights, was perhaps best articulated by the 20th century political philosopher Hannah Arendt [2009]. Seyla Benhabib, following Arendt, offered a similar view [2011]. To narrate, to articulate one’s own story, is part and parcel of being human in this approach to human rights. To speak is to have agency. Without the actualized (as opposed to merely theoretical) ability to participate in the intersubjective, communicative processes (see Habermas 1981) of society and democracy, one remains an object rather than a subject of society. This sort of inequality we know to be a common driver of conflict throughout history. It goes without saying that teachers cannot transform this sort of cultural and historical violence alone, but as I argued throughout Chapter 2, schools are key shapers of our personal and social identity. The positioning of particular social groups, the framing of certain events in history, the silencing of other events, and the unpacked or unexamined cultural assumptions about human nature, history and the nature of knowledge itself are all relevant here. Nor is narrative conflict resolution work in schools a substitute for policy and institutional transformation where needed. Yet for the sake of clarity, the ways in which classrooms can implement narrative conflict resolution as one means of intervention is our focus here. I would argue these two techniques are in fact related to each other; narrative transformation is a part of what begins to make policy and institutional change on a larger social and political scale seem desirable or even possible.

Narrative conflict resolution theory tells us that the more simple and “closed” a narrative, the more likely that narrative is to lend itself to manifest (by which I mean actual, physical) violence (Cobb 2013). A narrative is closed when it precludes possibilities for any other alternative ways of being, behaving or relating to the Other, oneself and the world. In the specific case of a political leader or political party calling for war, the enemy is positioned as an existential threat. Complicating and opening up this narrative in as democratic and organic a means as possible is necessary for the narrative transformation that will enable peace building. What this means for teachers facilitating dialogues on history, literature, culture, current events and similar is that designing experiences where students can be exposed to, engage with and contest, many different historical narratives is vital.

Throughout Chapter 1 we examined the nature of 9/11 as a chosen trauma. Linking this argument to what we know from above about closed or extremist narratives, a way forward becomes clearer. Students must
have the opportunity to create their own meaning around this event. They must be able to hear a variety of perspectives about the events of 9/11 and meaningfully participate in dialogues about why it occurred, what this means for Americans (and the world) and how best to seek justice, healing and a more peaceful future. They must be welcome in a democratic dialogue in which they co-create their own definition of justice. In the age of cheap-to-free global communications, fostering international dialogues between classes can be readily possible (where schools have the needed technology). Students need opportunities to explore their own definitions of concepts like justice, peace, liberty and patriotism in the context of the post-9/11 world. The essence of peace education, as I have argued in other writings (Duckworth 2011, Duckworth in Duckworth and Kelley 2012), is designing multi-disciplinary, community-based learning experiences through which students can partner with diverse others to collaboratively address problems which confront the community. The key problem we have all faced, as an American community and a global community, is how best to achieve security without compromising liberty. I contend that these sorts of CPE experiences, if skillfully designed and implemented, can provide the space and opportunity for destabilizing extremist narratives that have taken hold on both sides of the conflict between the US and "the Islamic World".

What is narrative destabilization and why does it matter for sustainable conflict resolution? Macro historical narratives take hold through some concrete and identifiable processes and mechanisms—such as government bodies and initiatives (like Ministries of Culture, public museums or the naming of memorials, parks and streets) media, family, faith communities and of course schools. In more extreme circumstances, governments make overt efforts to erase violent or guilt-ridden aspects of history (Barkan 2000). As extremist narratives emerge, take shape, gain power and metastasize, they preclude the possibility of counter-narratives. They do this by positioning the narrative, and probably the speakers as well, as illegitimate and immoral. In some cases the silencing is direct and overt, as in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, but in other cases it may be more subtle. What is necessary then for teachers to do is destabilize, confront and speak back to the hegemonic narrative and empower students to participate in the public co-creation of a new narrative. Schools are in need of community partners to accomplish this, a point to which I will return shortly.

The narrative on both "sides" in the wider conflict between the US and the "Islamic World" is perilously closed and extreme. That is to say, the view of the Other is thin as opposed to being able to see the Other in full human moral complexity. Further, these narratives are one-directional and contain no irony, in the sense that they do not (yet) allow for any examination of how the behavior of one’s own identity group may have contributed to the conflict. Another feature of extremist narratives is that they tend to presume ill motives and a lack of integrity. This is part of how the Other is delegitimized in an extremist narrative, and thus repositioned as someone who does not have any natality, no ‘right to have rights’ as Arendt would phrase it. Why would a people who obviously cannot be trusted deserve a seat at the table? From here full dehumanization is a natural trajectory.

What kind of narrative then is being given to students in US classrooms? Given how infrequently it is taught, and the short amount of time typically dedicated to teaching 9/11, it is hard to see how the narrative students receive can consistently from classroom to classroom be as nuanced or historically grounded as we need. Chapter Four provided fascinating and I think instructive exceptions to the rule but this must become the norm if schools are to be able to build cultures of peace in their community.

That said, where English, history and government teachers in particular are managing to carve out space in a standardized and regimented day offer much from which to build. To reemphasize a key finding of the in-depth interviews from Chapter Four, some of these teachers engage students in activities that empower students to participate in dialogic, reflective moral processes. This is so important to narrative peace building processes! For one, such activities empower young people as moral agents. This alone, I would argue, can be a beginning of destabilizing a violent or extremist narrative. Secondly, some educators invited students to research on their own, gather narratives of 9/11 from friends and family, write their own 9/11 narratives when students were old enough to recall, and debate urgent issues still facing us of
liberty, security, peace and justice. When this does occur, students become agents and authors of history, not just history’s objects or students. This furthers the “destabilizing” of the hegemonic narrative around 9/11 as such narratives find much more difficulty taking root in democratic, communicative contexts where equal subjects together shape and make meaning around collective history. Educational philosophers from John Dewey to Maria Montessori and Howard Zinn of course have spoken on the importance of this type of agency for advancing social justice and building democratic citizenship, which are of course important aspects of a culture of peace.

Still, even more can and should be done. Wherever possible, especially non-Muslim students need to hear from their Muslim peers who are of course the Other in the context of this conflict. This may or may not happen organically through facilitating class-to-class dialogues online depending on the demographics of the school. We also saw in Chapter 4 examples of some teachers directly engaging stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, typically through class discussion or documentaries but sometimes also through guest speakers or though making skillful pedagogical use of the diversity of the classroom. Teachers also spoke of ways in which they directly challenged, contradicted and corrected uneducated statements or views of Islam. Recall from Ch 4. that many teachers I interviewed found it necessary to directly counter harmful cultural narratives about Muslims which have long been present but which have become increasingly salient, extreme and entrenched since 9/11. I am mindful here too of the five teachers who reported concern about bullying of Muslim students. Not one of these teachers felt their school had done enough to protect these students or resolve the incidents that had occurred. Further, it is likely that this particular kind of bullying is under-observed and under-reported, as Muslim students will often not wear traditional dress or openly identify themselves as Muslim precisely for fear of bullying. Perhaps this is one reason that teachers themselves are not always aware of Muslim students in the class. Teacher 15 noted this explicitly, stating that there are “probably Muslim students at [her] school but [she’s] not sure”. Classrooms and schools that are aspiring to a culture of peace will do their best to prioritize bringing marginalized voices to the fore. This has to mean teachers, parents and administrators insisting that the time and space in a classroom needed to build community be protected, not crowded out by testing.

Another narrative I believe that needs deconstructing, and then improving, is the professional narrative of teacher neutrality. This narrative seems to be functioning for teachers in a similar way as it does for journalists. In both cases, neutrality serves the status quo. As someone who myself taught for seven years in our public schools, I find it so easy to empathize with teachers who express this professional value and in some ways I share it myself as a teacher now before a graduate classroom teaching peace education and international conflict resolution. I sometimes withhold my own view of a particular issue or debate so as not to sway students or phrase myself in a much more careful manner than I would outside the classroom. At the same time, what and who does this culture of ostensible neutrality, this narrative, really serve? Where do we reach the tipping point from a teacher not “indoctrinating” her students to promoting a sense of false equivalence between arguments that are not equal? When does substance become sacrificed to neutrality? This culture of neutrality itself can perhaps explain why so many teachers did not necessarily perceive overt barriers (in the sense of censorship or articulated administrative or parental concern) between them and their teaching of 9/11. There is little need to censor journalists who do not attempt to fundamentally challenge political leaders. Similarly there is little need to censor or discipline teachers or curriculum writers who do not fundamentally challenge the status quo of our schools today. If the narrative of 9/11 presented is thin or exclusively orthodox, or does not deviate from the sanctioned, official narrative, the barriers that, at least to my mind, clearly exist could well remain invisible. Typically we as humans are not aware of cultural barriers until we have disregarded them. Are we seeing here a manifestation of the manufacture of consent, as Gramsci or Chomsky might argue (Simon 1991, Chomsky, 2002)? Narrative conflict resolution focuses considerably on the need for people as moral agents to articulate themselves and their views. No one is arguing that teachers ought to tell students “what to think” but neither can we present all sides of an argument as equally right or just. This would be the history curriculum equivalent of defending any cultural practice, regardless of its violation of human rights.
I have been arguing that in many ways, the barriers to going beyond the official narrative regarding 9/11 may be internalized by teachers, as we can see in the professional culture of neutrality that cannot truly be achieved and in some ways is not even desirable. Yet in some cases, clearly teachers experienced and articulated them overtly. The need some teachers expressed to avoid the controversial issues is also a real concern with respect to the narrative students are inheriting about the meaning of 9/11. Teachers (and their students) deserve an educational environment in which they feel they can question orthodoxies, make meaning and address controversies without fear of reprisal. While only a few teachers explicitly felt that there would be consequences as measured in my quantitative data, the subtle self-censoring of some teachers was clear from the qualitative interviews I conducted. In effect, the results in the classroom are the same: a narrative about 9/11 that is thin, ahistorical and decontextualized. This prevents the narrative transformation needed for sustainable conflict resolution.

As Foucault (1982) so seminally theorized, to construct knowledge is to hold power. If students do not experience learning contexts that allow them to question power, they can hardly help but absorb and reproduce the narratives already dominant. In the case of 9/11, of course, we are discussing a narrative of innocent victimhood and trauma that justified revenge, as well as restrictions on civil liberties. The dynamics of chosen trauma suggest that this narrative will continue to be destructively reproduced unless the generations “post 9/11” are helped to write a more historical, empathic, complex and ironic story.

A narrative component of 9/11 that does not appear addressed by my participants is one of the US founding myths, a cornerstone of what is often called our “civil religion”. I refer here to American Exceptionalism. As I suggested in Chapter One, this myth has shaped the collective narrative of 9/11 that is emerging, as it has shaped our understanding of most other major events in US history. Yet only one teacher I spoke with explicitly engages students in activities and dialogues that invite them to challenge this narrative. Perhaps a student will then go on to reject or continue questioning the narrative, perhaps not, but if the opportunity is never raised, the students’ intellectual and moral space remains narrowed.

Other policy implications go beyond the classroom and remain largely outside of a teacher’s control but are still worth articulating. The states that have not must immediately pass legislation requiring that the events of 9/11 be taught. Community planners and school leaders must do much more to integrate schools; integration remains a fact far more on paper than in reality even today. Schools must become a space where teachers and students alike daily encounter people from many different backgrounds. They must also become what I call “multi-track”, that is, far more integrated into their communities than is presently the case. Such community partnerships can provide the resources and relationships needed to implement experiential, projected based learning. This methodology is the most conducive to narrative peace building in the classroom.

**TELLING A BETTER STORY ABOUT 9/11: NARRATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

To foster narrative conflict transformation, we must not only deconstruct extremist narratives. We must replace the old, narrow, rigid narrative with what Cobb (2013, 203-227) refers to as a “better formed story”. What then would a “better-formed story” about 9/11 be and how can educators help students to be a part of writing and telling it?

Narrative conflict resolution suggests that a “better formed story” about 9/11 would entail two key elements: complexity and irony. This harmonizes well with pedagogical goals of critical thinking. The most common dynamic of conflict at all levels is the tendency of the narrative of the parties to the conflict to be narrow, monodimensional and justificatory. The story of 9/11, of the suffering of Afghan civilians under Soviet occupation, or the Taliban, or resulting from the U.S.-led invasion, or the devastation of communities in Iraq after the US and its “coalition of the willing” invaded it, all constitute conflict narratives. They tell the story of one’s suffering, why it was undeserved, and provide justification for the party’s response to said suffering or victimization. They engage mechanisms, processes and institutions such as family, schooling, the media, faith institutions and government-sponsored narratives found at sites like memorials or museums. Needless to say, they are full of rage and pain and often seek to
position the group as blameless, righteous, honest, civilized and so on. As a corollary, these narratives position “the Other” as untrustworthy, lazy, aggressive, uncivilized and even at times demonic. I noted some of this in Ch. 1 and 2, but here now with the perspective of teacher experiences in the classroom teaching 9/11, I will draw this book to a close offering some ways I think classrooms might be a part of a more comprehensive peace-building process between “the West” and “the Muslim World”.

It was a pleasure and a reason for hope, I think, that we can observe some excellent practices already in today’s middle and high school classrooms—and this despite considerable curricular, resource, emotional and political barriers. Two activities come to mind as reasonably replicable in today’s classroom, with all of its many challenges, indeed under attack in many ways (Ravitch 2013). My aim here is to suggest activities and approaches that might help address the central problem as I see it, which is the hesitancy to address in a comprehensive and critical manner some of the more taboo topics related to 9/11, such as the role of the US in the world, which critics see as imperial. This hesitancy is understandable given the climate for teachers I have been describing above, yet I will offer thoughts here on how a teacher who wishes to bring such topics into her classroom might do so without risking her job. The pressing need to change this climate as a policy matter is urgent but outside the scope of this particular work.

One such practice is engaging students in gathering and sharing oral histories about 9/11. This we could see in, for example, assignments that asked students to interview family members and report back to class. As I argued in Ch. 4, such activities can help students view themselves as agents in and authors of history, rather than history’s subjects. Caution is due here, however. This result is not automatic simply because students are asked to interview folks at home; they must then be asked to reflect upon, make meaning from and critically engage with these oral histories. A powerful as an older brother or mother’s memories on 9/11 are, they must be placed in historical and socio-political context for students to be able to learn from them. The teachers I spoke with consistently expressed concerns about the time they had in the curriculum to devote. This creates a considerable challenge for any teacher trying to spend long enough teaching about 9/11 to provide students with needed relevant information, like the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, dynamics of U.S. foreign policy, and similar. Yet this is essential if the parties in the story here are going to become complex enough for a “better formed story” to have a chance to emerge. Part of narrative conflict resolution is about impacting power dynamics implicated in almost any human relationship. Power, as Cobb notes, “is...a discursive practice” (2013, 150). Dialogues and narrative work meant to intervene in a conflict then must do more than help parties understand one another better, or achieve a sense of empathy or responsibility. Narrative conflict resolution ultimately must help reestablish the moral legitimacy of the victim. Cobb observes similarly: “Power is a function of the way persons are positioned as moral agents” (2013, pg. 161). This means more than just speaking, it means being heard. The trick here, of course, is that parties tend to vie for victim status. Here is where teachers can usefully complicate student readings of history. Which party is more powerful? How do we know this? Can someone [or some group] be both a victim and a perpetrator? What do we do when there is clearly a “more guilty party” even if wrongs have been done on all sides? In terms of teaching 9/11 then, the narrative students receive about 9/11 must work to (re)establish the moral legitimacy of Muslim speakers. As we saw in our teacher narratives, some teachers are working to do just this. Yet I would again caution us against any expectation that schools alone can accomplish such tremendous work. Media, families, political regimes, economic relations and other human systems are also a part of the peace building process; it is only for the sake of clarity of focus here that I treat the role of schools.

The stories we tell about ourselves, our history and the history of the Others shape, and in some key ways, limit our moral imagination. As Hughes noted (2003), American civic religion is founded on the interconnected myths of the U.S. being both a Chosen nation, chosen by God to be a representative of His Kingdom on Earth, as well America being a wholly Christian nation. Our cultural narratives, without reifying them, can set boundaries of the possibilities we are able to perceive. So a second classroom practice that can serve as a means of disrupting and replacing harmful conflict narratives is the use of material that challenges student stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. This of course will involve teachers helping students to explicitly examine and, where appropriate, deconstruct the above referenced myths.
We saw this most clearly when we heard from teachers who chose documentaries that would challenge student preconceived narratives of who Muslims are (such as “Faith, Fasting and Football”) or other documentaries which similarly presented Muslims in three dimensions, humanizing the Other. Recall one teacher’s documentary selection specifically noted the impact of 9/11 on Muslims and showed the outrage of most Muslims regarding 9/11. Other teachers invited in guest speakers, in particular local leaders from the Muslim and other faith communities, to provide students with some beginning of ThichNhat Hahn’s “direct encounter”. While this is not occurring with nearly the frequency we need for schools to be successfully destabilizing dominant narratives about Islam, we do have such classroom practices to build upon. As a policy matter, the defacto segregation of our schools remains an impediment. Again, building on the notion of the importance of a “direct encounter” for peacebuilding (reasonably similar to the contact hypothesis), students and teachers cannot have this opportunity in communities that are not racially, ethnically and religiously diverse. Today’s risk-adverse, creatively stifled and testing-driven approach to education views taking the time to honor and educate about various cultures in the school community as a distraction and a risk. This could not be further from the truth; it is relevant and valuable content than can empower schools, with their communities, to address the conflicts that face them and prepare future leaders.

A third, and I think most powerful, “best practice” was not commonly seen in my data. This would be to incorporate the teaching of 9/11 into an overall thematic unit focused on causes of violence, stereotypes, the need for intercultural understanding and the dangers of scapegoating. In turn such units must be taught throughout the year and incorporated into building and system-wide actions to build a school culture of peace. Much has been written on the theory behind this and practices schools can put into place (Duckworth, Williams and Allen, 2011; Duckworth 2011; Duckworth in Duckworth and Kelley 2012; Bajaj 2006; Lantieri and Patti 1996; Freire 2003; Montessori 1949/1972; Beckerman and Zembylas 2012). Briefly here, the key point is that while creative and courageous individual teachers can make a tremendous difference in the worldviews of their students, isolated instances of a critical historical dialogue are not likely to be sufficient. School and community leaders must partner to engage students and teachers in dialogues and collaborative problem solving based in an interdisciplinary curriculum. Media and faith leaders would be especially appropriate partners in the case of dialogues around 9/11 collective narratives. The mantra of peace education? Problems make the best curriculum. If the problem at hand is peace and security, specifically relevant to relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews, and between the West and the Muslim world, the curriculum development “essential question” becomes what to do about this? Units involving math, science, history, research, presentation and writing can be developed around such questions vital to our democracy as

1. What is in fact the wisest balance between liberty and security? How have societies addressed this question throughout history?
2. How have peoples in history handled fear, loss and trauma? What lessons can we draw?
3. Is religion a “cause” of conflict and if so, why (or why not)?
4. What has the impact of the US role in the world been throughout the 20th century? What should it be going forward? Has it fostered peace? Conflict?
5. What does in fact cause violence? How can we prevent it?
6. What do peace and justice look like in a society anyway? Have any societies achieved them? How?

To those who would argue that there is no time for such interdisciplinary, project-based learning, I would pose this question: do we or do we not in the future need leaders who can address the above? If so, then our students need such curriculum. I direct this not at classroom teachers who must in many cases simply implement the curriculum they have been given, but rather at the policy makers who are driving “reforms” that increase rote memorization, high-stakes testing and centralized, often irrelevant standards. We must take care to note the barrier of “time” as cited by my participating teachers is a political barrier. The decision to divert the resource of classroom time to ancient, rather than more contemporary, history, or for example, to prioritize testing above all else, is very much a political choice.
based on a particular neoliberal view of what citizenship is (being a worker) and what schools ought to be about (producing workers). No one disputes that students need jobs, but the solution for that is economic policy geared for job growth (e.g. investment in R&D, infrastructure, and reversing our present course of austerity), not reducing teachers to proctors and students to one data point based on the day they took a scantron test.

Questions such as the above can help students to develop what I would call, drawing from Cobb’s narrative conflict resolution theory (2013) “ironic history”.

Zinn might phrase this as critical history, or history from the perspective of the Other/Enemy. From the perspective of the other, the cause of the conflict at hand is US imperial behavior. We’ve approached quite dangerous territory for teachers here. Just this morning (currently Dec. 2013) I was reading about a professor in MN who was formally reprimanded by her university’s Dean of Academic Affairs for teaching a lesson on structural racism. The professor’s positionality as an African American woman is relevant. She introduced the theory of white privilege and three white male students filed a formal grievance for discrimination, complaining that this lesson made them uncomfortable (Cottom online). (One suspects it ought to.)

If curriculum is going to be able to incorporate narrative conflict resolution work, the stories students learn about themselves, their societies and the Other must become ironic (Cobb 2013, pg. 248-74). That is, students must have questions posed to them that aid them in seeing the complex, systemic and historical causes of a contemporary manifestation of a conflict. (Recall my observation that 9/11 was not simply a day on which attacks occurred, but an era.) Even more specifically, Cobb writes that developing a more ironic story entails the parties to a conflict becoming able to see the contributions of their own behavior to the conflict (hence the sense of irony). This would mean, in the case of my own research, asking US students to see 9/11 from the viewpoint of the Other and vise versa. As I say, dangerous territory, leading us to ask the question of whether our own behavior in the world in any way contributed to 9/11, due to the US imperial role in the world, and yet ultimately we must find a way to have this dialogue or remain entrapped in a cycle of violence and revenge. Many, including some teachers themselves, will feel this excuses and justifies the actions of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. This cannot be the case, since nothing can justify the mass murder committed by the 19 perpetrators who crashed commercial airlines into the Pentagon, and the Twin Towers. Yet events in any conflict always have a context. The unwise and punitive aspects of the Treaty of Versailles, centuries of anti-Semitism and economic depression help at least in part to explain the rise of Hitler and the atrocities of the Holocaust. They cannot ever justify it. Any dialogues around 9/11, I think, will be aided by bearing this challenging and emotional distinction in mind.

Teachers wishing to bring discussions about imperialism into their classroom can take a comparative approach, drawing off of material already in many history curricula. For example, what features did the Chinese, Soviet and British empires have in common? Does the US play a similar role in the world? If yes, how so and what is the impact on other countries? If not, why so? Students can be invited to research, debate about and present on such topics, either at the classroom or even the building-wide level. Teachers will face daunting, sometimes even prohibitive, barriers to implementing such curriculum. As we are familiar with by now, the primary barriers include prescribed state curriculum, over-emphasis on standardized testing and the political controversies of the topics. It is the responsibility of school leaders, in my view, to foster a climate where such meaningful debates can be had, though I do understand at the same that school boards and administrators themselves face similar barriers. Parents, teachers and community leaders concerned that such debates indeed be realized in our schools must organize and engage state legislatures and local media to insist on a more nurturing and academically free school culture.

Americans perhaps have a unique relationship with history. We have a habit of seeing ourselves as separate from it, or at least not quite as subject to its vagaries and cruelties as other societies have been. Henry Ford, that American icon of the future, of progress and modernity, captured this when he said,
“History is more or less bunk. It’s tradition. We don’t want tradition, we want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker’s damn is the history we make today”. Americans innovate and invent naturally as a cultural habit; historical reflection is not a cultural habit of ours. In a real sense, we feel that we have escaped history. Hughes (2003) refers to this as the myth of “Nature’s Nation”, related to the myth of America being the Chosen Nation, that city on a hill. The myth of “nature’s nation” suggested that American was a blank slate, upon which any future at all could be written. This was possible because of the unique way in which this myth believes that God favors the US. “In other words,” writes Hughes (2003), “the American system was not spun out of someone’s imagination or contrived by human wit. Instead, it was based on a natural order, built into the world by God himself” (pg. 56). While this arguably encourages American optimism, we cannot escape that it is a view that positions the peoples and cultures who were here before the European colonists as invisible; Manifest Destiny has been often cited as an example of this. “At its core,” Hughes writes, “this myth encouraged Americans to ignore the power of history and tradition as forces that shaped the nation” (pg. 56). Blessed and appointed by God, and without the history that brings “original sin”, there was little need to be burdened with the past. When it comes to understanding and learning from the past, and healing collective trauma, the grappling with history that is called for goes against our cultural grain. Unlearning, then, as much as learning, is needed for narrative conflict resolution related to 9/11. Teachers helping students to grasp 9/11 and the era it defines would do well to address this directly, coaxing students to deconstruct this myth and develop an awareness of the forces and cultural myths which do indeed shape us, despite our tendency to think ourselves exceptional in comparison to other nations in this regard. I believe the rending of this myth is another reason for the deep trauma and terror of 9/11—we were invaded by history. We could no longer believe ourselves to be immune—to be exceptional. Soluka concurred elsewhere with this observation when he wrote that 9/11 was not “just a terrorist attack. This was an act of metaphysical trespass” (Hughes, 2003, pg. 158). The better students understand the founding civic and cultural myths through which we understand 9/11, the better prepared they will be for the post-9/11 era.

The story about 9/11 passed down to students, at least as revealed in my data, which is only one study and needs replication for increased credibility, is most often quite thin because we the adults have not yet come to terms ourselves with the shock and terror of that day and have not yet even begun to build consensus on how best to respond. We grieve annually, we grow the security and surveillance state, tolerate as a society NYPD infiltration of mosques in Manhattan and normalize drone warfare, but this has not brought healing.

During a presentation of this research, one of our doctoral students insightfully noted to me that this book is perhaps too early. Significant, traumatic events like the mass violence of 9/11, and the era of surveillance, torture and war that followed, are processed I suspect in generations, not years. But the time is now to begin a conversation, and to develop understanding of how the first “post 9/11” generation may be processing that collective trauma. The implications of the thin, decontextualized and ahistorical narrative that too many students are receiving are worrisome, in that they do not bode well for any possibilities of narrative conflict resolution and suggest the reproduction of many of the dominant narratives that helped to drive the larger conflict between the US (and allies) and the “Muslim World” to begin with. That said, there are ways forward, as I hope to have shown in the examples of those teachers I had the fortune to interview, who have found a way to bring complexity, critical thinking, deep historical analysis and perhaps even what Zembylas might call “critical emotional praxis” to their classrooms. They labor against powerful forces that have actively sought to weaken the autonomy and economic security of teachers in the classroom, and against a larger context of neoliberalism and continued Islamaphobia. Their work must succeed and be built upon if any sort of sustainable peace is to be built as we continue to process “the mourning after”.