



## SPECIAL ISSUE: MULTIPLICITY AND COMMONALITY IN NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION

### Guest Editor's Introduction

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In their seminal essay, “Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation,” Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) affirmed that “the future development of the field of narrative research requires a deliberate investment of effort in the elucidation of ... approaches to analysis” (p. 1). Efforts in this direction have certainly been invested during the 15 years that have elapsed since then, yielding valuable outcomes (e.g., Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012b; Riessman, 2008). Yet compared to the extensive and sophisticated corpus of theoretical debate in narrative scholarship, the analysis of stories seems still to be insufficiently developed.

This special issue of *Narrative Works* aims to contribute to enriching the field of narrative analysis and interpretation<sup>1</sup> by touching upon both its internal diversity and its commonality. This will be attempted by presenting five readings of a life story text, each demonstrating a distinct mode of narrative interpretation, followed by commentaries by two leading narrative researchers: Ruthellen Josselson and Mark Freeman. The different analyses offer a flavor of the multiplicity and richness that typifies narrative analysis, but at the same time point to its limits. Taken together, they illustrate what may be the core that makes narrative interpretation just this—*narrative* interpretation—differentiating it from other kinds of qualitative analysis. In keeping with the metaphor of “territory” employed to map the field of

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<sup>1</sup> I employ “analysis,” “interpretation,” and “reading” interchangeably. See Lieblich’s (2014) comment on the term “analysis.”

narrative inquiry at large (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), the different readings represent some of the “areas” inhabiting the field of narrative analysis. Using Clandinin and Rosiek’s terms (2007), they partly represent *borderlands* that this landscape shares with other methodological traditions, but importantly, they also illustrate its external borders.

I shall start this brief introduction by proposing what may define narrative analysis, or specifically, what may constitute a “narrative interpretive lens.” Subsequently, I shall elaborate on the exercise undertaken in this issue, offering information about Amos (a pseudonym)—the teller of the text under scrutiny—and the contexts of his telling. Finally, I will introduce the five interpretations of Amos’s story, offering some reflective thoughts on the different readings. At the end of this introduction, Amos’s life story text will be presented, word for word, together with the clarification of central terms (see Appendix). By this we invite readers to follow, perhaps to critically examine, the readings proposed, and hopefully to add other possible ones of their own.

### **The Narrative Interpretive Lens**

The metaphors of “landscape” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) or “territory” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) employed in discussing narrative inquiry may be helpful in delineating the narrower field of narrative analysis, too. I find, however, the metaphor of “lens,” also offered in characterizing narrative research (Chase, 2005; Tuval-Mashiach & Spector-Mersel, 2010), more suitable for this matter. While the first metaphors are apparently objective—for the territory is there, independent of the spectator—the latter emphasizes the viewer’s standpoint. By adopting it, I thus suggest that narrative interpretation is, first and foremost, *a way of looking* at narrative data.

This stance is narrower than conceptions that depict narrative research as encompassing “any study that analyzes narrative materials” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 2), and narrative analysis as “a family of methods for interpreting text ... that have in common a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11).<sup>2</sup> According to these broad definitions, narrative analysis is, basically, the analysis of narratives. That is, it is demarcated merely by

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<sup>2</sup> Despite this broad definition, Riessman’s own conception of narrative analysis is significantly more detailed, as evident from her criteria for “good enough” narrative research (Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

the type of data being analyzed—stories of all kinds<sup>3</sup>—independent from what the analyzer actually does with these stories. Most narrative researchers, though, seem to adopt a tighter notion, holding that there is something more that distinguishes narrative analysis. While obviously examining stories, the manner by which these are approached is somewhat unique. Thus, considering narrative interpretation as a distinctive lens through which stories are read or listened to implies that the same stories can be looked at through other analytical lenses. In other words, narratives can be *unnarratively* interpreted. This is probably what Riessman and Speedy (2007) had in mind, when critically stating that “Appropriating the terminology of narrative ... appears to be on the rise among those doing forms of discourse analysis and/or grounded theory research” (p. 434).

Indeed, the dramatic popularization of narrative terminology during the last couple of decades not only puts the term *narrative* at risk of losing its significance (Riessman, 2008; Rimmon-Kenan, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Spector-Mersel, 2010a), but also may obscure the distinctiveness of *narrative interpretation*. If all text is narrative, then all textual analysis is narrative analysis. Consequently, just as it is necessary to define what narrative is, and what it is *not* (Riessman, 2008; Rimmon-Kenan, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2009), it is vital to delineate what narrative analysis is—and what it is not.

What seems to stand at the heart of the narrative interpretative lens, making it a distinctive way of examining storied data, is *holism*. This basic methodological principle derives from the epistemological conception of narratives as multi-origin and multi-layered products, in which various dimensions converge (Spector-Mersel, 2011). As Josselson (2011) puts it, “What is perhaps unique to narrative research is that it endeavors to explore the whole account rather than fragmenting it into discursive units or thematic categories. It is not the parts that are significant in human life, but how the parts are integrated to create a whole—which is meaning” (p. 226). In addition to *treating the story as a whole unit*, elsewhere (Spector-Mersel, 2010a, 2011; see also Spector-Mersel, 2014), I have suggested further significances of what I termed a “holistic interpretive strategy”: *regard for content and form; attention to contexts of production; analysis of both life and story; and employment of a multidimensional and interdisciplinary lens*—all widely emphasized by narrative researchers (e.g., Chase, 2005; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003;

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<sup>3</sup> Definitions of narratives, or stories, greatly vary in the social sciences. For a detailed description, see Riessman (2008).

Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Josselson & Lieblich, 2001; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). The five readings of Amos's story clearly embrace a holistic analytical stance, while variously focusing on its different practical meanings.

While the interpretive narrative lens is distinguished by holism, it is far from being unified. As Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes (2010) point out, "narrative analysis should be thought of not in the singular, but instead in the plural" (p. 3). Rooted in the postmodern epistemology of the narrative paradigm (Spector-Mersel, 2010a), narrative interpretation is an open, multi-dimensional endeavor, which allows the co-existence of multiple analytical perspectives. On the premise that "there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 2), any analytical reading is conceived as one possible story about a story, rather than as an act of discovering "the truth" about the text. The narrative interpretive lens is thus an extensive, pluralistic, varied, and colorful one, as is so well illustrated in Holstein and Gubrium's recent edited volume, *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* (2012b).

Considering this variety, we may think of the narrative interpretive lens as composed of various internal lenses, each representing a unique mode of looking at stories. Some of these sub-lenses are systematically identified in the different typologies of narrative analysis offered (e.g., Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1995; Phoenix et al., 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Attempting to contribute to these important efforts, I wish to propose an axis that can possibly serve as a point of reference in mapping the sub-lenses within the narrative interpretive lens. Let me introduce the distinction that underlies this axis.

Regardless of the type of analysis employed, narrative interpretation is inevitably a complex process that involves multiple readings and various layers of understandings. Given this complexity, I find it helpful to differentiate between two levels, often phases, within the process. The first level involves a close exploration of the story. Here we work closely *with* the text, as if *inside* it, aiming to answer the *what* question: what is the story about? When a self-narrative is being analyzed, as in the exercise implemented in this volume, the *what* often refers to identity. Thus, we may ask: what is the identity presented in the story? Once a reasonable picture of the story's *what* has been obtained, we usually proceed to attempt to respond to the *why* question: why precisely *this* story? Or, why *this* identity? Here we look for those factors surrounding the text that can offer an explanation of its *what*, such as

psychological motivations that have influenced the teller, the various contexts of the telling, and the culture in which it is embedded. In Gubrium and Holstein's vocabulary (2009), we explore the "narrative environments" within which the story has unfolded.

Working towards the *whats* of narratives and aiming at their *whys* generally comprise two integral parts of narrative analysis, as their combination is deemed essential to obtain a profound understanding of the storied data. At times, they are implemented sequentially, as two main phases in the analytical process. Alternatively, they are carried out simultaneously, as the researcher constantly moves back and forth from the text to its narrative environments, and vice versa. Either way, analytically speaking, exploring the *what* of stories and examining their *why* constitute two distinct levels or modes of narrative interpretation. Furthermore, some analytical perspectives focus explicitly on one of these levels, as implied by Holstein and Gubrium's (2012b) division of the various methods presented in their volume into "analyzing stories" and "analyzing storytelling."

Aiming at differentiating between these two analytical levels, yet also acknowledging their possible entwining, instead of a clear-cut division we may consider them as two ends of a continuum, along which various narrative sub-lenses can be situated. A few narrative analyses would be found at one of the continuum's extremes, exclusively exploring the *what* or the *why* of stories. Most narrative interpretations, however, would be probably positioned somewhere along the continuum, endeavoring to understand both stories' *what* and their *why*, in different variations.

The *what-why* interpretive continuum might be a good referential basis for an initial distinction among the five readings of Amos's story offered in this issue. While none is situated at the continuum's ends, the first three analyses, by Spector-Mersel (2014), Kupferberg (2104), and Perez and Tobin (2104), are closer to the *what* end, while Tuval-Mashiach's (2014) reading stands nearer the *why* extreme. Lieblich's (2014) account represents a mid-place along the continuum, simultaneously combining the two levels of analysis. In what follows, I will elaborate more upon each reading, illuminating these possible locations.

### The Present Exercise: Opening up the Sub-Lenses

Works dealing with varieties in narrative analysis typically rely on diverse data when demonstrating different possible ways to examine stories (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium, 2012b; Phoenix et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008).<sup>4</sup> This mode of presentation possesses obvious strengths, principally the empirical examples being taken from actual research projects. Nevertheless, the various differences between the data used for demonstration—as to the research aims, questions, and design, and most importantly, in what is considered narrative and how it was generated—often allows only the appreciation of the salient characteristics of each method, while obscuring their subtleties.

This shortcoming was overcome in the enlightening project *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis* (Wertz et al., 2011). Here, different analyses of the same interview data were presented, each rooted in a distinct qualitative tradition. The narrative analysis, instructively written by Ruthellen Josselson, constitutes one of the “ways of doing qualitative analysis” in that volume. While this is evidently true, as Josselson (2011) herself notes, “There is, mercifully, not yet dogma or orthodoxy about how to conduct narrative research” (p. 228). Hence, Josselson’s interpretive account constitutes not only one way of doing *qualitative* analysis, but also (only) one way of doing *narrative* analysis. Nevertheless, as it is contrasted to non-narrative qualitative analyses, it might be mistakenly conceived of as *the* way to conduct narrative analysis, thereby creating a homogenized picture of a heavily heterogeneous lens.

In this respect, our present endeavor can be seen as a direct continuation of the “five ways” project. It zooms into one of the five qualitative analyses discussed there—the “narrative way”—opening it up and exploring its internal diversity and commonality. By doing this, it is our hope to contribute to elucidating the pluralism within the narrative interpretive lens on the one hand, and its distinctiveness, on the other hand. Just as its “bigger brother,” the variation in our exercise is demonstrated through the same piece of narrative data. I will now turn to introducing this data: the story being analyzed, its teller, and its telling.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Lieblich et al.’s (1998) volume relies principally on a single study, the different modes of analysis are demonstrated on different stories from the sample.

### Amos, His Life History and (T)his Life Story

Amos was an Israeli man, 85 years old at the time he told the story referred to, married, with three children and several grandchildren. Amos belonged to what is known in Israel as the “1948 generation.” This term refers to a generational unit (Mannheim, 1952) identified with the *Sabra*: the “new Jew” that the Zionist revolution yearned to create in Israel to replace the rejected Diaspora “old” Jew. The members of this generational unit—the *Sabras*—were born mostly during the 1920s and grew up in the 1930s under the British Mandate that ruled at that time in Palestine. They underwent an intensive socialization track, which emphasized collective values and prepared them to “serve the homeland,” principally by fighting for an independent Jewish state. Indeed, the *Sabras* played a central role in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. In fact, this war is so identified with the *Sabras*, that it even determined their heroic name as the “1948 generation.” When the State of Israel was founded, the *Sabras* were at the forefront of the establishment of the army and of the central civic institutions, within which they typically developed their occupational careers.

Looking at Amos’s *life history*—his *lived* life—against this background clearly reveals that it comprises central characteristics of the *Sabra* key-plot: the life course of the mythological *Sabra*. Although he was born in Poland—the Diaspora—Amos arrived in Israel at the age of two, and grew up in places identified with the *Sabra* ethos: In Balfur,<sup>5</sup> a cooperative Zionist community, and in Tel Aviv, the first and most central Hebrew city. He studied in well-known schools identified with *Sabras* and participated in a youth movement—another ultimate *Sabra* attribute—called *Machanot Olim*. What is more, within the youth movement, Amos joined a *hachshara*. The *hachsharas* were youth movement groups that prepared themselves to found a new *kibbutz*—an additional clear indicator of the *Sabra* ideal life. Importantly, Amos served in the *Palmach*—the prestigious elite fighting force of the pre-state Jewish establishment. He then fought in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. With the establishment of Israel, Amos joined the Israeli army and advanced in it. This was during the formative years of the state, when military service was extremely valued. Amos lived his entire adult life on a *kibbutz*, the living arrangement most identified with the *Sabra* ethos, and for decades the one most cherished by Israeli hegemony. He

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<sup>5</sup> All the biographical details are camouflaged, replaced by equivalents, or given synonyms.

performed central roles both in his own kibbutz—Gev—and in the United Kibbutzim Movement (the UKM), which is an umbrella organization of all the kibbutzim.

At the age of 71, Amos suffered a cerebrovascular accident, or “stroke,” resulting in a severe decline in his physical abilities, which continued to deteriorate gradually during the following fifteen years. In recent years Amos has become limited in all his daily living activities, requiring assistance in getting out of bed, eating, dressing, bathing, and walking. Since the stroke, he has been assisted by several homecare workers. During the last decade he has employed a Filipino worker, who lives in a separate room on the kibbutz, next to his and his wife’s apartment.

Along with the physical, psychological, and social obstacles stemming from Amos’s deteriorating physical functioning, an additional matter should be considered when appreciating his current situation. Like all Sabras, Amos confronts an identity challenge rooted in two major cultural processes. The first has to do with the symbolic meaning of being old. In the case of older Sabras, Western ageism is intensified by a powerful local variant. Designated to replace the Diaspora Jew, the ideal of the Sabra was established as its negative-type. Because the first was stereotypically imagined as old, the “new Hebrew” inevitably had to be young. The transformation from old age to youthfulness thus came to portray the metamorphosis of the Jewish people from Diaspora to Hebraism, from past to future—and this was deeply personified in the Sabras. The ageing of the Sabras thus embodies a major cultural paradox: those who were most identified with youthfulness—both by others and by themselves—have come to embody their lifelong rejected “other,” old age (Spector-Mersel, 2008, 2010b).

A further important point to be recognized when considering Amos’s current state is the far-reaching move from collective to individualistic values that has taken place in Israeli culture during the last few decades. As they are the clearest symbols of the collectivistic ethos, this change has elicited hard feelings among the Sabras, who often affirm that “this is not the state we dedicated our lives to.” This frustration, at times even a sense of betrayal, is powerfully felt among many older kibbutz members. This is due to sweeping privatization processes that have taken place in most of the kibbutzim (including Amos’s own kibbutz), alienating the founding generation from the community centers and current ideologies.



On the premise that all narratives are contextually bounded, the context within which Amos's text was produced demands careful attention. I contacted Amos at the end of 2009, as part of a study on the identity and experiences of elderly Sabra men who are assisted by foreign homecare workers. In the initial telephone conversation, I introduced both myself—as a (then) lecturer and post-doctoral student at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev—and the research topic, as stated above. I offered general information about the interview (similar to a daily conversation: I would invite him to talk about his life, respecting whatever he chose not to share with me); asked Amos's permission to (audio) record it; and emphasized confidentiality. Amos immediately agreed to meet me, and we set a date for the interview in his apartment.

Several days later, I arrived at the kibbutz. Amos's Filipino worker met me at the parking lot and took me to Amos's place—a tiny and modest two-room, old apartment. Amos was already waiting for me in his room, sitting in his wheelchair. I sat on a chair in front of him, and Amos's wife sat beside us. I repeated the information offered in the telephone conversation, emphasizing the issues specified in the informed consent form.<sup>6</sup> Amos read the form and signed it, with no questions.

Following Rosenthal (1993), the interview consisted of two separate parts. The *main narrative* constituted Amos's response to my initial invitation: "I would like to hear the story of your life." During this part I did not interrupt at all, supporting his narration by non-verbal empathic gestures. Only when Amos indicated that the story was over – by saying "That's that about myself"—did I start the *period of questioning*, focusing on specific topics and eliciting questions about his past and present, and about themes flattened in the main narrative. Amos's wife was present during most of the interview, occasionally adding comments.

The recorded interview was fully transcribed by a research assistant and meticulously revised by me. After camouflaging identifying biographical details, I sent (only) the *main narrative* to the other contributors, along with the contextual information described here and Amos's *life line*, namely a chronological abstract of his lived life (Spector-Mersel, 2011). While each of us independently worked with the

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<sup>6</sup> The consent form contained the following assurances: the interview will be recorded; the participant can withdraw from the research at any point; confidentiality is promised concerning the participant's identity in scientific publications; identifying details will be camouflaged; the participant may contact the researcher to consult about any problem regarding the research.

original Hebrew text, we also translated it into English.<sup>7</sup> Given the “Israeli-ness” of the story, not only in terms of language but principally in terms of culture, this was not an easy task. It actually involved a long dialogue among us, leading to continuous corrections and revisions. And while we attempted to be as faithful to the original text as possible, it is inevitable that some layers of the text were literally “lost in translation” (see Perez & Tobin, 2009, and Lieblich, 2014).

Finally, I want to address two points concerning Amos’s text. The first refers to its “type,” vis-à-vis the highly discussed division between “big” or “small” stories (Bamberg, 2007; Freeman, 2007; Georgakopoulou, 2007). As noted, in our exercise we referred only to Amos’s *main narrative*; the story recounted in the first part of the interview, following an open invitation for a life story, with no intervention of mine, the interviewer, throughout. As Freeman (2014), Josselson (2014), and Lieblich (2014) point out, this story is “sparse,” “skeletal,” “meager,” and “thin.” Whether these attributes make it a small story—or at least a non-big one—is, however, arguable. Whereas Freeman and Josselson seem to refrain from regarding Amos’s text as a big story, at least of the “classical” type, I do consider it as conforming to this story type. Not only is it autobiographical in kind, about personal, past experience—Georgakopoulou’s (2007) definition of big stories—but significantly, it is Amos’s response to an invitation for a *life story*. Importantly, whether Amos’s text constitutes a big or small story, is not a “technical” question, but rather an epistemological one, that touches upon the most pressing debates in narrative scholarship: what is a narrative? What is a “good-enough” or a “rich-enough” narrative that lends itself to interpretation? (See Freeman’s commentary, 2014.) Is there a “larger story” behind the text at hand? And most significantly, what can we learn from a narrative text about the person who tells it? Evidently, these questions are beyond the scope of this special issue. What seems, however, consensual among all the contributors of this issue is that Amos’s text constitutes one possible version of storying his life, presenting a highly selective part of his identity, and by no means *the* (one and only) life story.

The second point concerns a central feature of Amos’s story, which obviously stems from his actual life as a stroke survivor. In the face of his severe physical disability, Amos’s story may well belong to the emerging field of illness narratives. Thus, our analyses would fit

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<sup>7</sup> Special thanks to Alison Stern Perez for her significant help with the translation of the story.

“research that locates illness narratives in contexts of biography, society, and culture” (Hyden & Brockmeier, 2008, pp. 1-2). While this obviously constitutes a major relevant body of scholarship in the larger study of which Amos’s interview is part, it has not received significant emphasis in our accounts, which endeavor principally to demonstrate an interpretive (sub-)lens.

### **Five Readings**

Each of the interpretations of Amos’s text implements a unique mode of exploring narratives that has been previously developed and published. Accordingly, all contributors precede their analytical account with a detailed description of the method employed. Not only are its practical “tools” introduced, but also their theoretical foundation is discussed, acknowledging that all methods of analysis extend out of particular theoretical sensibilities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012a).

The first reading, by Gabriela Spector-Mersel (2014), grows from theorizing narration as a process of selection of biographical material, with the purpose of confirming an end point, namely a principal message. Accordingly, the analysis, led by a holistic interpretive strategy, seeks to identify the expressions of the (six) mechanisms of selection in the story, as a means of recognizing the identity being claimed. When examining the selection displayed in Amos’s story, a split end point emerges, that divides the narrated life into “*I was*” vs. “*since then.*” Amos’s two-part story is further considered an instance of a *tragic narrative*, offering new insights about this narrative genre.

Irit Kupferberg (2014) offers a second reading of Amos’s text, under the lens of a metaphor-oriented positioning analysis, which draws from a functionalist approach to discourse, discursive psychology, and a discourse-oriented approach to the study of metaphor. The author identifies and describes metaphors and metaphorical clusters that “conspire” with other language resources (Kupferberg & Green, 2005) that Amos produces in his attempt to position himself in the context of the interview. Kupferberg points to the various voices in the text, claiming that these voices cohere, when Amos’s age and physical limitations are considered, as well as the demands of the ongoing face-to-face interaction. The third reading, by Alison Stern Perez and Yishai Tobin (2014), employs an interdisciplinary discourse analysis that combines sign-oriented linguistics with a socio-psychological narrative approach. The authors explore Amos’s story, looking at both the form and content, on

both the micro and macro levels, claiming that it reveals the “divided narrative of a divided man.” Six oppositions displayed in Amos’s story are discussed, and are said to reflect his worldview and reciprocal relationship with his surrounding world.

Amia Lieblich (2014) proposes a fourth reading of Amos’s story, guided by a strong reflexive stance, which she terms “reading with the heart.” Lieblich combines insights emerging from a holistic-content reading and a holistic-form reading, and also points to central divisions and interruptions of the flow in the narrative. A major thread in her reading is conceiving of Amos’s story as expressing an attempted escape from forgetfulness.

The last reading, by Rivka Tuval-Mashiach (2014), employs a context model that looks at three spheres: the immediate inter-subjective relationships, the collective social field, and the cultural meta-narratives. Tuval-Mashiach demonstrates how exploring these three contexts in Amos’s story enriches the understanding of his identity. In addition to the insights growing from analyzing each context sphere, she proposes that all three point to Amos’s struggle to recreate relationships, as a major theme in both his life and story.

Alongside the diverse theoretical and methodological sub-lenses employed in the five analyses, a narrative interpretive stance requires a careful reflection of other factors, more personal and subjective, that colored our readings. One axis to be considered is our various professional and disciplinary identities—Lieblich and Tuval-Mashiach are psychologists, Kupferberg is a discourse analyst, Tobin is a linguist, Perez is a doctoral student in social psychology, and I am a social worker. Our different specialties were probably of influence too: trauma and resilience (Tuval-Mashiach and Perez), gerontology (Spector-Mersel), troubles discourse (Kupferberg), personal and collective identity (Lieblich), and sign-oriented linguistics and semiotics (Tobin).

Of major importance is also our diverse personal positioning, in terms of closeness to Amos—to his age, generation, experience, and social and cultural world. Among the six interpreters, Lieblich and Tobin are apparently the closest to Amos. Lieblich, both for her lifelong Israeliness and her age, which imply cultural familiarity, and because of her previous researches on the kibbutz; and Tobin, given the relative small age gap with Amos, and major similarities between their life stations, particularly serving in the Israel Defense Forces and living in a kibbutz. At the opposite end, Perez, who arrived in Israel only nine years ago from the USA, positions herself as a total “outsider,” unfamiliar with

basic codes in Amos's Sabra culture. Interestingly, however, being a newcomer to Israel and the Hebrew language possibly enlarged her sensitivity to certain discursive phenomena, allowing her to "see" them more clearly than native speakers.

Kupferberg, Tuval-Mashiach, and I are relative "insiders," albeit not to the same extent as Lieblich and Tobin, due to the mere fact of their being veteran Israelis. But significant differences arise among us, also. Unlike Kupferberg and Tuval-Mashiach, I was born and lived my first years outside Israel, in Argentina. The "other" cultural knowledge I am equipped with obviously sharpens my attention to those factors taken for granted, thus remaining unnoticed, to full "insiders." On the other hand, I was familiar with the Sabra culture and life course as a result of my previous research on older Sabras (Spector-Mersel, 2008). Other personal factors have been also involved in the interpretive readings. Thus, for Kupferberg, the analysis of Amos's story brought to mind her own aging mother's struggle to keep her dignity as a human being, and Tuval-Mashiach's reading was colored by her intensive professional experience with people suffering from illness and trauma. Of undoubted significance is also the fact that five of us are women, who attempted to understand a man, from within a heavily masculine culture (Spector-Mersel, 2008, 2010b).

These various factors, partly discussed in the individual contributions, have certainly influenced the way we approached Amos's story. A clear instance is the dissimilar weight granted to the Sabra ethos in the different analyses. Thus, given my previous knowledge of the Sabra culture, I instantly identified those cornerstones of the Sabra key-plot appearing in Amos's story, subsequently emphasizing the culture in my analysis. In contrast, Perez admits that "All of the 'name-dropping' in which Amos painstakingly engaged ... simply had no meaning" to her, leading to "a conspicuous silence [in the analytic account] on the topic of Amos as a member of the Sabra generation and ethos" (p. 90).

To conclude this introduction, let me briefly relate our own story, that is, the story of the present exercise. This special issue is the final product of two years' fruitful collaboration among the six contributors that comprised two panel sessions presented, in different combinations, in the *Israeli Conference for Qualitative Research* (2012) and in the *Narrative Matters* conference (2012). We are grateful to the supportive audience in these two sessions: the first encouraged us to move from the local to the international sphere with our multiple readings of Amos's story, and the second confirmed that such a culturally-bound

demonstration can be well understood by non-Israelis and non-Hebrew speakers. The third chapter of our joint story began when *Narrative Works*' editors, Elizabeth McKim and William Randall, joined our adventure, providing constant encouragement, for which we are deeply grateful. We have been most fortunate that two of the most prominent and most creative narrative researchers—Ruthellen Josselson (2014) and Mark Freeman (2014)—generously agreed to participate in this issue. In their closing commentaries, they offer valuable—often challenging—insights about the present project in particular, and narrative interpretation at large. I deeply thank both for their supportive attitude from the very start of this issue. Principally, I am profoundly grateful to my partners in this intriguing journey—Irit Kupferberg, Amia Lieblich, Alison Stern Perez, Yishai Tobin, and Rivka Tuval-Mashiach—for their cooperative and contributing attitude along the whole way.

The final note is about Amos. Whilst working on this special issue, I attempted to contact Amos, to share with him the project. Although I had had his written permission to use his (disguised) story for future publications, I felt that this was an obvious requisite of an ethical attitude. Sadly, I learnt that Amos had passed away, only a few months after the death of his wife. I then attempted, not without concerns, to contact his children. I finally reached one of his daughters, who was profoundly moved and supportive of this project. I wish to dedicate this special issue to Amos, thereby expressing our gratitude to him.

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### Appendix: Amos's Story

1 I was born in Poland. I came at the age of two. I came -- (they)<sup>1</sup>  
 2 **brought** me. We at the first stage, because my **mother's** family  
 3 mainly, were in *Balfur*,<sup>2</sup> so we came to *Balfur* for a few years. After  
 4 that we moved to *Tel Aviv*. In *Tel Aviv* I was... I studied at the *Beit*  
 5 *Chinuch*, the *A. D. Gordon Beit Chinuch*, and after that at *Chadash*<sup>3</sup>  
 6 High School – continuation. And...secondary school. And I was a  
 7 member of the *Machanot Olim*.<sup>4</sup> For a long time. Within **this**  
 8 framework I was sent to the *Palmach*.<sup>5</sup> Because then we had reached  
 9 the point that all *Hachshara*<sup>6</sup> provided a quota for the *Palmach*. It  
 10 was still before (they) had recruited all the *Hachsharas*. And I was in  
 11 the *Palmach*, from the year... '42...no...don't remember, '42. I was  
 12 in...2<sup>nd</sup> Company. After that we moved over to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion  
 13 [suppressed weeping]. After that in the Negev Brigade. I was...in the  
 14 beginning a squad commander, after that a platoon commander, and  
 15 after that...an officer in the Brigade, and... That's how I drifted  
 16 through the army and I finished as a Lieutenant-Colonel. And...that  
 17 was already within the territorial defense. And in the territorial  
 18 defense I met her. [His wife: *Not like that, you met me in a radio*  
 19 *course. You were an instructor and I was a trainee.*] Okay. And  
 20 when I was released from the army I came to *Gev*. Since then I have  
 21 been at *Gev*. In various roles. Community coordinator, treasurer,  
 22 and...after that I went...to work in the movement. In the UKM.<sup>7</sup> I  
 23 was...in the UKM for six years. Coordinator of the Health  
 24 Committee. I was...and after that back to *Gev*, I worked for a few  
 25 years in agriculture. After that, (they) assigned me -- (they) assigned,  
 26 I took on the task of establishing a factory, and I established the  
 27 factory called "*Gevit*." A paper products factory. And I managed it  
 28 up until I retired, actually. **Half**-retired. I had already wanted to be  
 29 replaced. And it so happened that **today** the factory... When I  
 30 established the factory it was...a bit of a problem in *Gev*. It was a big  
 31 investment, and (they) weren't used to that. And...in the beginning it  
 32 limped along a bit. And then (they) actually began...to run after me.  
 33 Why did you create this white elephant and why that... In the end  
 34 that factory **today**, is the only thing that supports *Gev*. A lot for  
 35 production, a lot... That's it, until...I got a **zbeng**.<sup>8</sup> A stroke. Since  
 36 then I'm bound to the chair and... **The lucky thing** is that...as  
 37 opposed to others, and I say as opposed, because I came out with an  
 38 **intact** mind. It bothers me quite a bit these days. Meaning...the shift  
 39 between **disability** and activity, it creates a problem for me,  
 40 sometimes I...I think that I [suppressed weeping] am healthy today,  
 41 in (my) thinking. (I) read books, read the newspaper, read...  
 42 television. So when I think that I'm **healthy**, and I try...to **do**

43 accordingly, **physically** – doesn't work. For instance getting out of  
 44 bed, beforehand I got up by myself. Now I don't get up by myself. In  
 45 walking I'm completely limited. And...and...these days I go back  
 46 and forth between thinking that I'm healthy and **the future**, that I'm  
 47 limited. And that's it, it's already...15 years. Essentially sitting in the  
 48 chair. And that's a **long** time. Very long. And along with that I  
 49 have...a Filipino aide. He really does help me a lot. And this is how I  
 50 go through my life. I don't have much more than that now. I  
 51 was...when I was active, I was a member of the political party  
 52 center, the council. I was...pretty active in the UKM, I was in a  
 53 position, I was a **working** man – in agriculture, I was in the  
 54 community, community coordinator, I was treasurer. That's my life.  
 55 Always in public affairs. Until I got sick. I got sick, so it took me out  
 56 of the...frame. I stopped going to the (kibbutz communal) dining  
 57 room – now there isn't a dining room anymore. (I) don't listen to the  
 58 (kibbutz assembly) meetings, no activity. I was limited, mostly the  
 59 walking limited me. And...that's that. About myself. What else do  
 60 you want to hear? Interesting?

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**TRANSCRIPTION NOTES:**

“--” signifies a break in the discourse and shift in tone, as if the teller is correcting himself

“–” signifies a break in the discourse, generally continuing in the same tone but without a pause that would warrant a comma

**Boldface** signifies stronger emphasis in pitch

<sup>1</sup> In colloquial Hebrew, the third-person masculine plural verb form (“they sent me”) is commonly used to send a passive message that defocuses the agent; either because it is unknown or irrelevant, or contrarily, obvious and primary. When “they” (or any other pronoun) is in parentheses, it signifies that the pronoun itself is not used with the related verb.

<sup>2</sup> A cooperative Zionist settlement established in the 1920s.

<sup>3</sup> Both are well-known schools identified with the Zionist settlement.

<sup>4</sup> A Zionist youth movement.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, the acronym for “strike force,” the *Palmach* was the elite fighting force of the *Haganah*, the underground army of the pre-state Jewish settlement under the British Mandate in Palestine.

<sup>6</sup> Under the British Mandate in Palestine, youth group movements that were mobilized toward agricultural settlement would go out to kibbutzim for a training period.

<sup>7</sup> Abbreviation for *United Kibbutzim Movement*, the umbrella organization of all the kibbutzim.

<sup>8</sup> Yiddish for “a bang.”