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Special Issue: Untold Stories in Organisations

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To say that organizational storytelling has become a thriving area of inquiry would be stating the obvious (Boje, 1995; Czarniawska, 1995; Gabriel, 2008; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Why does the notion of a 'story' or 'narrative' matter when referred to organizations? Because human beings are and have always been storytellers (Campbell, 1976) their organizational creations (social groupings, institutions) as well as processes of creating them (organizing) can be construed in terms of narratives and storytelling. Proposing to explore the organizational world from the storytelling perspective is not (at least in our case) an ontological claim – that organizations *are* stories, but an epistemological and pragmatic one – that perceiving them as and through stories enhances our understanding of what they are. The storytelling literature focuses on the stories' capacity of granting us the access to the worlds of others (Rennie, 1994), helping us to make sense of the world (Sole & Wilson, 2003) or shaping one's life (Sims, 2003). Ever since the linguistic turn, perceiving social dynamics through narrative rather than functionalist lenses is increasingly granted recognition, for instance analyzing organizational discourses in terms of 'conquer story' or 'mythical journey story', with their own respective plots and protagonists, has become a recognized research strategy (Kostera, 2008). Thus, stories can not only be read *from* the surface of organizational interactions, but also organizational realities can be read *as* stories.

However, in the current Special Issue of the *Tamara Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry* we are interested in a different conceptualization of a 'story' in organizational research, namely in a story which either remains or becomes untold. Our approach to the 'untold story' is not the result of our inclination towards paradoxes: stories which are simply absent from discourse are not of particular interest from our perspective. We are, however, tempted to explore those absences which are in some way conspicuous: either because they were enforced ex post, owerwritten or because they resulted from intentional strategy of un-disclosing certain discursive elements. Hence, the processes and results of editing-out, silencing, intentionally ignoring and textually proscribing constitute some of the areas of inquiry. The non-concept of the untold can be read into multiple political, social and methodological agendas encompassing a variety of projects, tools and deliverables which in one way or another become arranged, structured and audited. Each such agenda, be it monetary policy in times of economic crisis, neoliberal tackling of the unemployment issue or orienting academic teaching towards

employability, espouse a range of narrative contents and strategies at the explicit expense of others. Delving into the world of neglected alternatives appears particularly relevant in times of proliferation of more or less spontaneous attempts to bring back the proscribed meanings on the social and political agenda ('Occupy' movement, 'Orange revolution' etc.). And yet, intentional not-telling and un-telling do not exhaust the scope of the untold.

The increasingly widespread critically imbued attempt to decontextualize, problematize and denaturalize organizational realities and 'established' ways of exploring them (Alvesson & Willmott, 2011; Grey & Wilmott, 2005; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) can be addressed by their imaginative and metaphorical re-conceptualization. If lack of imagination kills (Burrell, 1997) then bringing it back in the organizational research area may revive its agenda enabling us to investigate the organizing processes through e.g. poetry, intertextuality and fiction. Such strategies currently make for relatively silent spaces in the contemporary research frameworks. While not being absent, their presence(s) are often marginal, merely enabling them to appear on the fringes of the sustained (and funded) research discourse and predestined to occupy exotic territories. The current Special Issue is aimed at widening the loophole through which such creative re-conceptualizations of the organizational and institutional world can become more accessible in academia and academic teaching.

The four papers collected in this Special Issue variously engage with the notion of 'untold stories' in organizational context, mobilising different agencies and proposing diverse paths to explore them. Hamid Foroughi explores the complicated dynamics of a children's charity organization from the perspective of relevance (or lack of it) of stories which it nurtures. The untold past of this establishment – although heroic – is no longer considered a viable resource for storymaking in the new organizational reality, and is (easily it seems) forgotten. The disappearance of a set of stories from wider social agenda drives Andrew Armitage's exploration into the role of poetry in preserving stories long forgotten and in bringing the dormant ones back to life. His focus on the method of eliciting stories is mirrored by Michal Izak's methodological reflection on the intertextual untoldness and the emphasis on preserving the heterogeneity of the untold instead of normatively limiting its extent in the name of 'linearity' or 'clarity'. In this connection, Linda Hitchin surveys the relationality and multiplicity of untold stories. Her focus is on the significance of composition and fabrication of storytelling which she explores through an extensive period of multi-site ethnographic research.

We trust that this volume will go some way towards diluting the silences around the 'untold' and placing it on the agendas of organisational research.

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