Preliminaries

"People do not commit political violence without discourse. They need to talk themselves into it." *(Apter 2001: 2)*

In Part I, the theoretical and methodological foundations of a reconstructive systems theoretical approach to constructivist conflict studies are outlined and discussed in greater detail. Based on that, in Part II, the results of two empirical case studies on the Maidan protests in Ukraine from late November 2013 to February 2014 (chapter 5) and on the antecedent of the armed conflict in Mali from October 2010 to February 2012 (chapter 6) are presented. These case studies are understood as plausibility probes, i.e. they are designed to empirically illustrate the analytical framework developed above (see chapter 3/4). This contribution focuses on two sequences of conflict-related observations or, in other words, two discursive clusters that emerged around a common conflict reference as two cases of developing conflict systems.

In comparison to other more conventional designs of case study research (see e.g. George and Bennett 2005), the present case studies are by and large refraining from a comprehensive reappraisal of a classical case study background, such as extensive introductions to the Ukrainian and Malian history or systematic accounts of the existing analytical literature. Thus, instead of deducing more or less explicit hypotheses about conflict development from suchlike considerations, the case studies were conducted on the basis of documented text-based communication that had been produced within the respective periods of investigation (see Appendix A.1.1/A.1.2). This approach sees itself as a kind of approximation procedure and is based on the general assumption that all kind of analytically relevant information, be it, for example, references to meaningful events experienced in the past, is supposed to be activated or reproduced in the given discursive frame of the analysed conflict communication (see details in chapter 4.4).

In the first sections of the case study chapters, the practical starting points and procedures of the implemented analyses are outlined, including explanations about the composition of the text data corpora (particularly concerning the selection of sources). As introduced in chapter 4, within the framework of the case study design here, the processing of the text data was effected by means of a multi-step analysis inspired i.a. by the *Documentary Method* and drawing upon elements of *Grounded Theory* (see Bohnsack

2014; Thornberg and Charmaz 2013). To present the results of the case studies (i.e. reconstructions of escalating conflict systems), the following chapters portrays a great deal of particular analytical elements that are gradually assembled to an overall picture of conflict escalation in the end. For this purpose, the Luhmannian dimensions of meaning (factual, temporal, and social) not only served as a useful tool to conceptually guide the coding procedure during the analysis but also as a superstructure to organise and present the case study results in form of three initial 'paths of reading' to grasp the process of conflict development. In this sense, chapters 5.2/5.3/5.4 and 6.2/6.3/6.4 are dealing with a portrayal of what has been said, depicted or discussed and what has become the topic of discourse. In other words, this corresponds to a kind of "formulating interpretation" (Bohnsack 2014: 225–228) which can here be characterised as a methodical step that does not produce abstracting language and theorising results but bounds itself to an acurate representation of the topical structure. However, a full understanding of the case studies in the sense of the present contribution is unfolded in the synopsis chapters (5.5/6.5) where critical moments of conflict development, particularly *escalating moves* composed of *structural couplings* and *normative shifts*, are presented. They are identified based on a systematic reflection of the modes of observation lying behind the factual, temporal, and social structure and are thus results of a kind of "reflecting interpretation" (Bohnsack 2014: 225–228). In this context, the world societal grounding of conflict communication plays a crucial role.

In summary, it can be stated that the case studies here are presented as analytical narratives consisting of a multitude of iteratively gained hypotheses that are cast in scientific prose. They represent the outcome of a close-meshed examination of text data and thus provide a direct connection to the conflict system's dynamic. To invite readers of the present study to delve into this kind of representation of a conflict discourse, the analytical narratives systematically use exemplary citations from the text corpus that support respective interpretative and analytical statements. Even though the text corpora of the case studies are structured according to two discursive working levels, particular groups of data sources are not as such in the focus of attention. For the case studies here, it is the discursive construction of conflict taking place collectively within communication that matters most.

Chapter 5 ("Observing a Developing Conflict System: The Maidan Protests in Ukraine 2013/2014") deals with the Maidan protests as a developing conflict system. Since the Maidan protests represent a spatially and temporally condensed microcosm of conflict development, we are dealing with a very special and exceptionally convenient case of a conflict system. Therefore, based on the analysis of the text corpus in several steps according to the methodological approach outlined earlier, Chapter 5 presents the Maidan protests as a succession of six escalating moves the conflict discourse carries out during four phases. Therefore, the case study begins to trace conflict development in Ukraine in an environment where new forms of attributing political power (esp. supranational integration) encounter strong ideas of national emancipation and self-determination, up to the end of the investigation period when the legitimate use of force is claimed by different sides and degrading the other has become a widespread phenomenon.

Chapter 6 ("Ways into Armed Conflict and War: Observing Mali's Crisis in 2010–2012") addresses the process of conflict escalation in the context of the Mali's crisis from

November 2010 to January 2012. The results of the case study presented in chapter 6, too, are based on the analysis of the text corpus in several steps according to the methodological approach outlined earlier. Hence, Mali's crisis in 2010–2012 gets portrayed as a succession of three escalating moves the conflict discourse carries out in three phases. At the beginning of the investigation period, the case study's tracing of the conflict development starts with a presentation of (northern) Mali as part of a conflict-shaken region in the past and as still being an object to external power dynamics that operate according to a centre-periphery model. The case study traces the process up to the end of the investigation period when the use of force becomes a generalised and legitimate means to achieve or defend democracy.

Finally, a remark concerning the handling of the following case study chapters: At this point, readers are invited to find their way through the following presentation of the case studies. The obvious way would be to read the case studies from beginning to the end and thus to track and understand the research process, as passed through by this author. The other possible way would be to start reading with the big picture (chapter 5.6/6.6) and then gradually go back into the case study details.[1] Hinting at this kind of 'zooming' through the case studies is not only meant as a tip to get a feeling for the abundance of the material and the amount of text; it has also a wider methodological significance for this work. Therefore, readers may also directly switch to chapter 7.1 on "How to use the Zoom" and then come back to the case studies.

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1   By referring to these *two* ways of reading the case studies, this study, of course, neither intends to encourage binary thinking without reflection nor to exclude many other non-linear ways of approaching these texts in a meaningful mode.