

What War Does to a Survivor's Sense of Time

The Spatiotemporal Self After Violence in Tajikistan

Dr. Damon Lynch

<https://damonlynch.net>



War Is So Forceful It Often Seems Recent

The violent past is alive and lies in front.

To understand why I developed a new paradigm called the spatiotemporal self, which is a novel alliance of existing theories on time and the self.

The alliance is formed by the visual perspective intrinsic to time and the self.

The spatiotemporal self consists of:

- Spatial construals of time
- Four levels of the self that emerged in evolution.

Cognitively, the spatiotemporal self is a human universal. Its paradigm is thus of general interest to the social sciences, not just scholars of peace and conflict.

The spatiotemporal self differentiates the **experience** of an event from its **conception**. They use different visual perspectives of the self, and thus a different sense of both time and self.

“When I think about [the war], it seems like it all happened yesterday. When we talk about wartime, everything comes to my mind, in front of my mind.”

Tajik civil war combatant

Our Experience of Past Events Is Complex

Respondents' phenomenological accounts of the wartime past exhibited a complex, multilayered temporal structure.

On the one hand, respondents layered time in them conceptually, differentiating past from present.

On the other hand, they flattened time in them phenomenologically, almost erasing distinctions between past and present.

Both ways of knowing the phenomenological past were equally practical to the respondent, despite appearing analytically incongruous.