Character Constellations

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CHAPTER 5

CONFLICT

5.1 INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE CLASHES

How do conflicts between characters co-shape the representation of the social group(s) in which they function? In this chapter, the representation of social groups will be studied through the concept of conflict. Just as with the concepts of centrality and community in the previous chapters, conflict is used as an umbrella term. Here, it denotes a variety of negatively loaded relational notions such as ‘dislike’, ‘disrespect’, ‘avoidance’, ‘hate’, ‘hostility’, ‘confrontation’, ‘violence’, and ‘strife’.

Conflict as a narrative mechanism has been studied by formalists such as Vladimir Propp in the 1920s and Algirdas Julien Greimas in the 1960s, both of whom devised models of narrative action in which conflict has a vital function (Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, and Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*). Although these classic narratological models have made the idea that conflict is a driving force behind narrative action common knowledge, a specific in-depth conceptualization and a practical, replicable operationalization of conflict in narrative fiction has not been on the forefront of contemporary literary scholarship. The two models of conflict proposed in this chapter fill this gap while building on Propp and Greimas. In order to do so, a range of typologies, concepts, terms, and tools are conjoined from a variety of research traditions such as narratology, network theory, conflict studies, social psychology, and theater studies. By close reading three novels from the corpus in light of the output of
these models, this chapter aims to gain insight into how conflict situations co-
shape the representation of characters belonging to a certain social group.

What is conflict? This chapter turns to the field of peace and conflict studies
to pinpoint some central assets of the concept. For a first working definition, it
draws upon the work by Johan Galtung, founding father of the field, who defines
conflict in strong association with violence:

Whenever there is violence there is an unresolved conflict. Unresolved
conflict means that there is an incompatibility of goals, including means,
that has not been resolved, superseded, transformed, or transcended.
That conflict can be direct, between actors who have conscious goals,
or structural, between parties that have their interests. In other words,
if you don’t like violence solve the conflict. (Galtung, 2010)

According to this definition, violence is a meaningful marker of conflict. Conflict
is not a sufficient but a necessary condition for violent practices: there can be
conflict without violence, but there cannot be violence without conflict. It
makes sense, therefore, to integrate the notion of violence into this chapter’s
conceptualization of narrative conflict. Furthermore, this association with
violence highlights the hierarchical nature of conflict. From an ideological
point of view, conflicts between characters generally indicate representational
hierarchies through which a form of physical, verbal, or ideological violence is
expressed. Such hierarchies between (groups of) characters, then, determine
the dynamics and outcome of conflicts: arguably, there is a tendency for more
powerful actors or parties to be the dominant party in the conflicts. Often, this
is exemplified by a dominance of one representational category over another –
e.g., male over female, Western over ‘exotic’, higher over lower class. Following
Galtung’s definition, narrative conflict will be used in this chapter in both a direct
sense and a structural sense. In the direct sense, it refers to explicit, conscious
conflicts between (groups of) characters. In the structural sense, it refers to
implicit, sub- or unconscious conflicts between interests, principles, ideologies
incorporated or expressed by (groups of) characters, via inner conflicts, or
through artistic literary devices such as metaphors and symbolism.

A second characteristic of conflict is its fundamental relational mechanism, as
it is always manifested between an X and a Y – it takes (at least) two to conflict.
In the field of social psychology, a distinction is made between interpersonal and
intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 33). For interpersonal conflicts,
theories have primarily focused on the nature of e.g. frustration or aggression
(ibid.). The realistic group conflict theory (R.C.T.) is a seminal theory of
intergroup conflict (originally formulated in Campbell, 1965). The theory puts forward the idea that

opposed group interests in obtaining scarce resources promote competition, and positively interdependent (superordinate) goals facilitate cooperation. Conflicting interests develop through competition into overt social conflict. It appears, too, that intergroup competition enhances intragroup morale, cohesiveness, and cooperation [...] Thus, the real conflict of group interests not only create antagonistic intergroup relations but also heightens identification with, and positive attachment to, the in-group. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 33)

The ‘scarce resources’ can be anything from material sources such as food and money, to immaterial sources such as prestige and respectability. In works of narrative fiction, a competition for scarce resources can be represented explicitly through, for example, the opposing armies in *Game of Thrones* trying to reign over a geographical area, or implicitly through, for example, the different ethnic groups in Özcan Akyol’s *Eis* (2012) struggling for respect in their social environment.

A remarkable feature of this theory is that people in intergroup conflict will behave as a function of their group as it ‘heightens identification with, and positive attachment to, the in-group’. A sense of intragroup cohesion can arise when social groups are in conflict with each other. The protagonist in Philip Huff’s *Niemand in de stad* (2012), for instance, belongs to a group of student fraternity members that are clearly in opposition to members of society outside of their fraternity, which results in a positive attachment and identification with the student in-group. If this holds true for narrative fiction, then characters can be expected to act according to their social identity as they ‘will not interact as individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 35, italics in original quote).

Conflict thus has the potential to co-shape social identity. If we accept the premise that fictional worlds are modeled after real-world social and psychological patterns, it is reasonable to expect that narrative conflict also functions as a way to shape the identity of characters and the groups they function in. Hypothesizing that conflict has a similar function in narrative fiction, this chapter examines the ways in which conflicts are co-constitutive of the literary representation of social groups. To ensure that the models presented here are applicable (and generalizable) to a broad range of narrative fiction, basic narratological insights are integrated with the formal tools of social network theory. Whereas narratology
offers a conceptual framework, social network analysis provides some practical instruments to formalize and analyze conflicts between characters on a larger scale. Before presenting the models, then, this chapter describes how conflict has been studied in both the fields of narratology and network theory. Insights from both of these fields are used in the construction of the models. The first model focuses on conflict between two characters, the second model on conflict between three characters. Each of these models is subsequently described in detail and applied to the corpus of 170 novels as a whole. For both these models, close readings from individual novels from the corpus are used to exemplify their relevance.

5.2 CONFLICT IN NETWORK THEORY

In network theory, conflicts in networks are studied from a variety of different angles. Most obviously, conflicts are expressed through negative edges between nodes in a network. As in every network, relations between characters in a novel can have either positive or negative implications. Positively connotated edges are represented by, for instance, friendship relations, whereas negatively connotated edges are represented by (for example) enemy relations. In general, each edge exists on a negative-positive spectrum; the positivity/negativity of the edge is always relative to the overall social dynamics in the network. Furthermore, it should be noted that the nature of relations can change over time, as friends can become enemies and vice versa.

Although negative ties are not taken into account in most network analyses, some studies address the issue (e.g., Bohn, Buchta, Hornik, & Mair, 2014; Box-Steffensmeier & Christenson, 2014; de Jong, Curşeu, & Leenders, 2014; Smith, McPherson, & Lovin, 2014; van de Camp & van den Bosch, 2012). Researchers have recently proposed ways to reframe network analytic techniques and concepts for the analysis of negative ties as a response to the fact that positive and negative ties are usually treated in the same way by researchers in the field (Everett & Borgatti, 2014; Kaur & Singh, 2015). Networks consisting of negative relations are typically sparse, highly disconnected, and have no clustering, all of which tends to make the analysis of centrality harder if not impossible. For some centrality measures, negative ties pose no problems. The application of degree centrality to negative ties, for instance, require[s] few alterations in interpretation but [is]
applicable in both ties’ (Kaur & Singh, 2015, p. 41). But basing the computation of betweenness and closeness centrality on negative ties is problematic as these measures ‘rely on network flows and thus cannot be applied on negative ties where flow among nodes of a network is minimum’ (ibid.). The analysis of negative bonds in a network thus requires some customization of existing techniques. Everett and Borgatti (2014) provide such a customization. They formulate $h^*$, a negative centrality measure ‘in which a node gets a high centrality score if they have few negative ties to central others’ (Everett & Borgatti, 2014, p. 119). In this conception, characters who have fewer enemies would be considered more central, whereas characters with more enemies would have lower centrality values.

A network in which both positive and negative edges are ascribed to social relations is called a signed network (Doreian, 2011). Unsigned networks pay no attention to features of signed relations such as like/dislike, respect/disrespect, and love/hate. Signed networks are often associated with (structural or social) balance theory, of which social psychologist Fritz Heider laid the foundation in the 1940s. In a seminal essay he sets out the basis of the theory:

Attitudes towards persons and causal unit formations influence each other. An attitude towards an event can alter the attitude towards the person who caused the event, and, if the attitudes towards a person and an event are similar, the event is easily ascribed to the person. A balanced configuration exists if the attitudes towards the parts of a causal unit are similar. (Heider, 1946, p. 107)

This densely formulated theory is best explained by the common expression ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend’. In Figure 1, the rationale behind this maxim is visualized in what became known as Heider’s model of social balance. Imagine that a person $P$ is in a hostile relation with a person $O$. There is a state of social balance, as both have the same negative attitude toward each other. Then, a third person $X$ enters the scene, who also happens to dislike $O$. In order to maintain social balance, $P$ and $X$ should become friends, based on the fact that they share a negative attitude toward $O$. Heider’s theory asserts that there is social balance whenever a triadic relationship consists of either two negative relationships and one positive relationship as in this case, or when all relations between $P$, $O$, and $X$ are positive.
Conversely, a state of social imbalance arises when P likes O and X but finds out that O and X dislike each other. There is social imbalance as there are now two positive relations and one negative relation in this triad. This imbalance is resolved if P either starts to dislike X just as O does, or when X and O become friends. Social imbalance occurs when there are two positive relations and one negative relation in a triad, or when all relations are negative.

Following Heider, balance theory has served as an inspiration for research on signed networks. It has been formalized and further refined in the 1950s and 1960s (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Davis, 1967). However, although balance theory sparks one’s imagination and has proved to be a fruitful point of departure for formal network methodologies, it does not necessarily hold empirically. The simple premise that signed networks strive toward balanced structures is simply not always true, as there are numerous signed networks containing imbalanced triads in the real world (Doreian, 2011). For the present study, it remains to be seen to what extent the balance theory applies to the fictional worlds of characters in novels, which are studied in section 5.5 of this chapter. To consider narrative conflict in terms of social balance enables this study to go beyond the classic protagonist-antagonist or hero-villain duality. While the first model presented in this chapter works with this duality (see section 5.4), the second model transitions to a triadic conception of narrative conflict by testing Heider’s balance theory (see section 5.5).
5.3 CONFLICT IN NARRATOLOGY

For a theoretical understanding of conflict in narrative texts, a starting point is provided by a variety of interrelated lemmas in the seminal analytic dictionary of semiotics by Greimas and Courtés. As in most handbooks and encyclopedias of literary analysis, the lemma ‘Conflict’ is nonexistent, but the lemmas ‘Confrontation’, ‘Polemical’, and ‘Constraint’ cover elements that are directly related to it.

What stands out in the description of these lemmata are multiple references to the ‘subject’ and its relation to the ‘anti-subject’. Confrontation is said to occur ‘when the goal of the narrative program [of the subject] is contrary to the goal of the narrative program of the anti-subject’ (Greimas & Courtés, 1979, p. 70). This clash of two narrative programs can result in three situations: 1) a domination of the subject or anti-subject over the other, 2) an exchange between the subject and the anti-subject, or 3) a (mutual) contract between the subject and the anti-subject. In case the clash is of a polemical nature, the narrative typically contains ‘the figure of the […] opponent as a metonymic manifestation of the anti-subject’ (p. 324). Characters who oppose one another can be a manifestation of subject and anti-subject in a direct sense, but the subject/anti-subject opposition is broader as two clashing narrative programs in a novel might also take shape in the form of two opposing political ideologies, e.g., the confrontation in Orwell’s 1984 between the ruling totalitarian regime and the more liberal conviction of its protagonist. Furthermore, clashing narrative programs can also occur within a single character. In the slipstream of experiments by modernist writers, inner conflicts have arguably become one of the characteristic features of modern literature (Katz, 1995).

But most obviously, the subject and the anti-subject are performed by two or more characters who are engaged in a hostile relation. It is important to stress that such a relation is hierarchical in case the conflict is resolved by a domination of the subject over the anti-subject, as the anti-subject is then subjugated to the narrative program of the subject. This can be characterized as a situation of semiotic constraint, which is defined as ‘a range of voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious, obligations which the individual takes up through its involvement in a semiotic practice’ (Greimas & Courtés, 1979, p. 200). It is comparable to the subject or the anti-subject accepting certain ‘rules of play’ (ibid.). In a concrete sense, this can be thought of as a character – either willingly or unwillingly – accepting the norms and values of another character.
In Orwell’s *1984*, this is illustrated by Winston Smith’s inescapable submission to Big Brother’s totalitarian ideology: the protagonist has no choice but accepting his rules of play. Constraint, in all its manifestations, indicates a hierarchical opposition expressed through conflict.

For more practical applications of the concept of conflict, theater studies offer some points of departure. In his *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (2004), leading theater scholar Patrice Pavis stresses that conflicts between characters expressed on stage have often social, political, or philosophical causes:

> Tout conflit dramatique repose, selon une théorie marxiste ou même simplement sociologique, sur une contradiction entre deux groupes, deux classes ou deux idéologies qui se trouvent être, à un moment historique donné, en conflit. En dernière analyse, le conflit ne dépend pas de la seule volonté du dramaturge, mais de conditions objectives de la réalité sociale dépeinte. (Pavis, 2004, p. 66)

Conflicts are not exclusively motivated by personal issues between characters but can often be traced back to the ‘conditions objectives de la réalité sociale dépeinte’. The depicted social reality has certain possibilities and constraints that the character on stage must obey. For instance, a female character in a play that is set in an era where women’s rights were marginal has a priori more disadvantages than male characters. As such, the nature of a possible confrontation between her and patriarchy is already predefined by the ‘conditions objectives’ of that particular sociohistorical reality. Pavis provides a typology of five different forms of conflict (2004, p. 66):

1. Rivalry between two characters because of money, love, morality, politics, etc.
2. Two conflicting worldviews or irreconcilable moral conceptions.
3. (Inner) conflict between e.g. passion and reason.
4. Conflict between the particular and the general, e.g., between the individual and society.
5. A moral or metaphysical conflict between a character and a principle such as God or an ideal.

This typology ranges from the most concrete, direct type of conflict (type 1) to the most abstract type (type 5). Each type defines two elements that are in conflict: two characters (type 1), two world-views (type 2), two conflicting feelings of thoughts (type 3), the particular and the general (type 4), and a character and a principle (type 5). In the statistical analyses and close readings of the novels that will follow, this typology will be used to specify the type of conflict.
at stake. As there is a wide variety of different types of conflict, it will prove useful in the analyses to make explicit what type of conflict we are talking about. This is not only relevant for clarification but also helps keep track of the shifts between types of conflict that can take place within a narrative, such as an inner conflict of a single character leading to a rivalry between two characters.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, conflict has an important function in two closely related classic narratological models, first described in the 1920s by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928/1968) and further developed in the 1960s by A. J. Greimas in *Sémantique structurale* (1966). Propp was the first to analyze narrative structures using a ‘morphological’ method referring to the analysis of all constituent elements that comprise a narrative. His method is based on the assumption that ‘it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the tale which will be as exact as the morphology of organic formations’ (Propp, 1928/1968, Foreword). Although his model is based on a distinct collection of 100 Russian fairytales and therefore is not necessarily generalizable to fictional narratives in general, Propp’s conviction that ‘the labyrinth of the tale’s multiformity’ can be reduced to ‘an amazing uniformity’ (ibid.) still seems rather universalistic.

On the basis of four axioms, he defines 31 narrative units he calls ‘Functions’ that range from ‘Absention’ (the hero is introduced as he leaves the safe environment of his community) to ‘Wedding’ (the hero is rewarded for his conquest and marries the princess). According to Propp, the number of these functions are limited to 31, they follow an identical sequence, and all fairy tales conform to the proposed structure. This model is remarkably similar to a narrative template used in comparative mythology: that of the Hero’s journey, also known as the Monomyth (Campbell, 1949). Furthermore, these functions are believed to revolve around seven general character types, which he calls ‘dramatis personae’: the villain, the donor/provider, the helper, the princess (and her father), the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero (pp. 79–80). Although Propp contends that the distribution of these character types can shift between characters, he has a structuralist conviction that all characters must fall in one of these seven categories.

From a contemporary point of view, such a formalistic, universalistic approach seems outdated and of little use for analyzing the diversity and complexity of present-day (Dutch) novels. Propp’s model is clearly modeled after the action that takes place on the level of plot. This works probably better for fairy tales than for novels, as the first are generally more plot-oriented, whereas style is typically a more central asset of the latter. However, Propp’s first axiom – ‘Functions of
characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled’ (pp. 21–23) – is relevant for the conceptualization of conflict in novels. The building blocks of novels are typically characters who perform certain functions, although these characters are obviously not always ‘stable, constant elements’. More precisely, conflict situations often take the form of a function in which the villain and the hero are confronted with one another.

Propp’s concept of the seven dramatis personae served as an inspiration for Greimas, who turned it into a more general abstraction commonly known as the actantial model (Greimas, 1966; see Figure 2). Just as in Propp’s morphology, this model focuses primarily on action taking place at the level of plot. It can be used to reduce every narrative action to a set of six components: the subject, the object, the helper, the opponent, the sender, and the receiver. Each of these actants revolve around three axes. The subject and object are located at the axis of desire; e.g., in Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), Werther (subject) wants Lotte (object). This relationship between subject and object is called a junction and can take the form of a conjunction when the subject and object are brought together, and the form of a disjunction when the subject is being freed of the object. The axis of power is where the helper and the opponent are centered; e.g., Lotte’s sisters (helpers) help Werther (subject) come closer to Lotte (object), but Lotte’s fiancé Albert (opponent) obstructs Werther (subject) in his wish to possess Lotte (object). At the axis of knowledge, also known as the axis of transmission, resides the sender who asks for the junction between subject and object, and the receiver who profits from this junction. E.g., Werther (subject/sender/receiver) requests that he might one day marry Lotte (object), in which case he would be the one benefiting (receiver) from this request (sender).

![Figure 2. Greimas’s actantial model. Adapted from Greimas (1966).](image)
Point of view is a crucial aspect in establishing an actantial model for narrative actions. Greimas underscores that there is no final, definite model, but that a range of different models can be devised for the same sequence of actions as different points of view are taken into account (Greimas, 1966, pp. 172–191). The above-used example from Die Leiden des jungen Werthers is modeled on the perspective of protagonist Werther, whose subject-role predetermines the establishment of all other roles in the model. From the perspective of Lotte, the model looks completely different, as she has other desires than Werther and other characters contributing to and obstructing the fulfilment of those desires. Besides, multiple roles can be played by the same character, as Werther can be simultaneously subject, sender, and receiver.

The axis of power is of particular relevance for this chapter, as conflicts center around this axis. For that reason, it will be reframed here as the axis of conflict, although the original name also makes sense as conflicts typically denote hierarchical power relations in which a form of semiotic constraint is present. The roles of helper and opponent roles are reframed here as friends and enemies of the subject. More generally, the helpers and opponents might be conceived as being each other’s enemies, as they have conflicting goals, i.e., either helping or opposing the subject. An inner conflict can arise when a character is either subject and opponent at the same time (e.g., a drug addict (subject/opponent) wishing to be clean (object) but who keeps taking drugs), or helper and opponent at the same time (e.g., the character who is a sobriety coach and a drug dealer at the same time). Finally, it is noteworthy that actants do not necessarily have to be characters, as values, principles, belief systems, and ideologies can also take up the role of an actant. As a general scheme, the actantial model will serve in the close readings as a structural point of departure in framing the type and mode of conflict relations at stake.

5.4 MODEL I: HIERARCHIES IN ONE-ON-ONE CONFLICTS

On the axis of conflict, hierarchies between characters take shape. According to Galtung’s thesis, violence is the result of unresolved conflict (see the first section of this chapter), and violent practices commonly lead to a domination of one of the involved parties over the other. The model presented in this section operationalizes hierarchies between characters by establishing for every pair of
conflicting characters who the more powerful party in the conflict is. Then, it will be tested whether one of three identity categories – gender, descent, level of education – is a predictor of a character’s dominance or subordination in the conflict. Are, for instance, Dutch or male characters more dominant in conflict situations than non-Dutch or female characters? In order to make sense of the resulting statistical pattern, the numbers will be confronted with a close reading of a case that is selected for the reason that it simultaneously conforms to and deviates from that pattern. The type of conflict under consideration in this section is exclusively focused on two characters and thus relates to the first type offered by Pavis’s typology (see section 5.3): rivalry between two characters because of money, love, morality, politics, etc.

### 5.4.1 Conflict Scores

A first challenge is to define under which specific conditions characters are in conflict. As these conditions may vary endlessly in nature and intensity, it was decided to not settle this in a data-driven way, but rather to use the top-down relational labels assigned to characters by annotators, which are stored in database EDGES. From the five relational labels – friend, enemy, lover, family, colleague – enemy is the only label that explicitly points at a hostile relation between characters. Sometimes friends, lovers, family, and colleagues are in conflict with one another; in those cases, double labels were assigned, such as colleague_enemy. Double labels were also assigned when the nature of the relation changed over time, such as friends becoming enemies. The labels friend and enemy are the only mutually exclusive labels. Two characters can be enemies and colleague, lovers, or family, but they cannot be enemies and friends at the same time. In case a double label friend_enemy or enemy_friend was assigned, the order of the labels reflects the change in those relations, e.g., the relational label ‘friend_enemy’ denotes that the relation was initially friendly but later became hostile.

How to establish which party is the most powerful one in the conflict? In order to tackle this problem, the results of the character rankings model presented in the third chapter are taken into consideration. In that chapter, all 2,137 characters in the corpus were ranked on the basis of five centrality metrics, each of them indicating a specific form of centrality. As explained in detail in that chapter, a character’s position in the rankings is a sign of its importance in the narrative and possibly of the power it exerts over other characters. In this line of thinking, the higher-ranked character in a conflict can be perceived as the dominant party in that conflict. Framed in terms of the actantial model, characters with higher
centrality scores than their enemies arguably have better chances of fulfilling their goals than their enemies.

In order to gain insight into the social dynamics between characters who are in conflict, this section introduces the ‘conflict score’. This score is based on the idea that, in situations where characters show hostility or antagonism toward one another, their respective network centralities is a proxy of their dominance in the conflict. While simply counting the number of enemies of a character indicates the extent to which a character is involved in antagonistic relations, the conflict score of a character is an indication of the power a character exerts over their enemies.

Thus, for every two characters annotated as enemies, it was automatically established who of them has a higher degree, betweenness, closeness, eigenvector, and Katz centrality. The resulting ‘conflict score’ of a character is increased by one in case that character has a higher score on one of these centrality measures. Some characters have more conflicts than others (i.e., have more enemies), and the likelihood of a higher conflict score therefore potentially increases for characters with multiple enemies. An example: in the novel *Heldhaftig* by Britta Bolt, there are nine characters who show enmity to other characters, but not every character has the same number of enemies. The character named Najib has six enemies, whereas the character named Posthumus has only two enemies. This means that Najib’s conflict score for each of the centrality measures can be 6 at a maximum, as there are potentially 6 points which he can ‘earn’. Conversely, Posthumus’s maximum conflict score for each centrality measure is only 2. Table 1 shows the computed conflict scores for both Najib and Posthumus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Conflict score degree</th>
<th>Conflict score betweenness</th>
<th>Conflict score closeness</th>
<th>Conflict score eigenvector</th>
<th>Conflict score katz</th>
<th>Composite conflict score (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Najib</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posthumus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Example of computation of conflict scores for characters Najib and Posthumus from the novel *Heldhaftig* by Britta Bolt.*
Najib’s conflict score for betweenness centrality is 6, which means that he was ranked higher than all his six enemies for this particular centrality measure. For closeness centrality, Najib’s conflict score is 4, which means that two of his enemies were higher ranked than him for this measure. Finally, the means of all five conflict scores are brought together in a composite conflict score, which is an average indication of the power characters exert over other characters in conflict situations. Based on this composite score, Najib (score: 5.0) is more central than Posthumus (score: 1.6) in terms of conflict.

5.4.2 Results of Multiple Linear Regression

Are gender, descent, and/or education predictors of characters’ conflict scores? It would be interesting to see if characters with a certain demographic profile have higher conflict scores than other types of characters, as that would indicate a dominance of, e.g., the male over the female, the Dutch over the non-Dutch, or the higher educated over the lower educated in conflict situations. As there is no previous research on this topic, there are no strong reasons to formulate hypotheses about which identity categories will likely have an effect on a character’s position in conflict situations. Nevertheless, cultural theory provides a vantage point for an informal hypothesis.

Similar to the hypothesis tested in chapter 3, it is hypothesized that male, Dutch, and higher educated characters have better chances to end up high in the scores, as ideological approaches to (Dutch) literature have repeatedly suggested that these have favorable positions in representational hierarchies (e.g., Meijer, 1996a, 1996b, 2011; Meijer & van Alphen, 1991; Minnaard, 2010; Pattynama, 1994, 1998). This informal, cultural-critical hypothesis fits in a general scheme of binary oppositions of which the first known example in Western culture is the Pythagorean Table of Opposites referenced in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* A. The table contains ten opposites, among which male-female, of which Aristotle morally prefers the left part over the right, such as male over female. The current hypothesis builds on the common knowledge that Western culture implicitly prioritizes one side of those binary oppositions (Kristeva, 1969, pp. 65, 183; Cassin, 1994, pp. 151–276).

A multiple linear regression was conducted to predict characters’ composite conflict scores based on their gender, descent, and education. Gender is coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. Descent is coded as 0 for nonmigrant and 1 for migrant. Education is coded as 0 for higher educated and 1 for lower educated. With the composite conflict score as a dependent variable, this resulted in a regression
model in which only education featured as an effective independent variable. Gender and descent were excluded as independent variables by the model as they do not produce significant effects. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 363) = 7.362, p < 0.01$), with an $R^2$ of 0.020. Characters’ predicted conflict score is equal to a $B$ value of 0.933 + 0.405 (Education) (see Table 2). This means that lower educated characters scored 0.405 higher than higher educated characters on their composite conflict scores. Education is thus a predictor of characters’ conflict scores. Characters who are lower educated have significantly higher conflict scores than characters who are higher educated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient</th>
<th>Standardised coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Linear model with the composite conflict score as dependent variable. Gender, descent, and education were entered as independent variables. Only education generated statistically significant effects.

What is the relevance of this observed pattern in terms of the representation of social groups? If education is considered as a proxy for socioeconomic class (without suggesting that education and class always coincide), then a possible, Marxist-oriented interpretation is that conflict situations are a place where characters from lower classes effectively rebel against their fixed socioeconomic position. In the fictional worlds in which they are depicted, lower class characters have less socioeconomic status, but more central roles are ascribed to them in situations where they are in conflict with characters who are higher up the socioeconomic ladder. In this line of thinking, the dominance of the lower classes over the higher classes can be framed as a protest of the underdog.

An alternative interpretation of the statistical pattern, and one that is diametrically opposed to the former, is that lower educated characters have limited social and intellectual skills, increasing the likelihood of them using violence quicker than higher educated characters. This is line with research suggesting that people who are more educated tend to be less involved in violent and/or criminal activities (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Barrera & Ibáñez, 2004). The inclination of lower educated characters toward violence could subsequently
lead to a more dominant, and thus central, position in the network. In this interpretation, the lower educated characters conform to a rather stereotypical image of the lower social classes. As opposed to the former interpretation, these characters do not resist their fixed socioeconomic position but rather reinforce the rigidity of that position.

It is particularly at the level of the individual text that one of these interpretations might demonstrate their relevance. In order to illustrate the narratological value of these statistical results and their interpretations, I briefly demonstrate below how dyadic conflict between characters from different social classes in one novel from the corpus can be read in light of this section’s findings.

### 5.4.3 Close Reading: Class Conflicts between Two Characters in Bart Koubaa’s *De Brooklynclub* (2012)

The cult novel *Fight Club* (1996) by American author Chuck Palahniuk clearly served as an inspiration for Bart Koubaa’s *De Brooklynclub* (2012). Similar to Palahniuk’s novel, Koubaa’s story centers around a secret club where people from all layers of society get together to fight. Co-founder of this so called Brooklynclub is the novel’s nameless first-person narrator (hereafter: the protagonist), who is locked up in prison and unfolds the story of the events that led to his imprisonment. Next to the protagonist, the most prominent characters are his (former) girlfriend Lauretta and real-estate giant Mayer. A central event in the story is when Mayer rapes Lauretta in front of all the people present at the Brooklynclub at that moment, after which Lauretta then paradoxically leaves the protagonist to marry Mayer.

Violent conflict is the central tenet of the novel and is symbolized through the metaphor of the fight club. More specifically, the novel centers around a conflict between the protagonist and Mayer, which can be seen as a metonymic expression of a clash between the higher and lower socioeconomic classes. Being employed in environments such as an abattoir, a restaurant, a bar, and as an elevator operator, respectively, the protagonist is undoubtedly part of the lower socioeconomic classes of society. As a successful businessman who is one of the most powerful persons in the world of real estate (the young Donald Trump comes to mind), Mayer is undoubtedly upper class. Furthermore, ‘Mayer’ is a speaking name: alluding to the word ‘mayor’, it emphasizes his influential societal status.
How does social class tie in to the (violent and hostile) relation between the protagonist, Mayer, and Lauretta? This is most clearly understood by singling out the axes of conflict of three different actantial models, each of which has one of these three characters as a subject.

— Axis of conflict 1: The protagonist (subject) wants to build Lauretta’s dream house (object), but first has to destroy Mayer (opponent). He receives help from his friend Paaluk (helper). The plot of the novel builds toward the kidnapping of Mayer by Paaluk, a friend of the protagonist. The protagonist prepares for what he calls his ‘masterpiece: destroying Mayer and taking the ransom, with which [he] will build a West coast house for Lauretta’ (Koubaa, 2012, p. 57).\(^5\) By striving for that goal, the protagonist hopes to achieve ‘rehabilitation’ (p. 64) for the moral degradation that he suffered because of Mayer’s raping of his girlfriend. He wants to ‘purify Lauretta’s name’ by not ‘only humiliating Mayer, but to affect him deeply in his soul’ (ibid.).

— Axis of conflict 2: Mayer (subject) wants total financial and societal power (object). It is not made explicit who his helpers and opponents are, but it is clear that the protagonist (opponent) forms an obstacle to this goal as Mayer is murdered by him. The monofocal perspective of the novel does not allow for a genuine counterperspective from Mayer’s side of the story. Based on the information that the protagonist provides us, Mayer comes across as a power-hungry, immoral animal, which makes his character rather flat.

— Axis of conflict 3: Lauretta (subject) wants to have her dream house on the American West coast (object). Again, it is not made explicit by whom she is helped or opposed, but it is clear that the protagonist (helper) helps her to realize her wish. Because of his raping her, Mayer (opponent) can be conceived as someone who counteracts her. Throughout the novel the protagonist repeatedly talks about Lauretta’s wish for her dream house:

Lauretta had a dream: she wanted a house at the West coast. She closed her eyes when she described it while she laid down her head on my lap: a white villa like the deck of a steamship on top of a hill with a seaside view, large windows, blowing curtains, and a shell shaped pool everything surrounded by palm trees. (p. 61)

Most of these descriptions are focalized by the protagonist, so it is unclear if this genuinely is Lauretta’s big wish. As is the case with Mayer,
the absence of a counterperspective from Lauretta’s side results in her being depicted as a rather flat character.

The protagonist explicitly states that his goal coincides with Lauretta’s goal: ‘Lauretta’s dream was also my dream’ (p. 63). At first glance, this seems to have nothing to do with his social position. But at a specific moment in the story, it is suggested that his social status is the driving force behind his actions:

After having taken advantage of others for more than sixty years, I felt that it was time to do something back, something that I was good at and what, as opposed to my work as elevator operator, served a higher goal. (p. 64)

What this ‘higher goal’ exactly is, remains ambiguous. But what the protagonist does make explicit is that he has a ‘social debt’ (p. 65) to pay off.

This social debt can best be interpreted in the historical economic context that is foregrounded in the narrative. The Brooklynclub was founded in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the American economic recession of the early 1980s that followed. Mayer symbolizes the prototype of the evil capitalist for whom economic gain is a primary goal. As if that is not enough, the protagonist states that Mayer contributed to the fall of the American economy: ‘He [Mayer] helped bring America down the tube through his lobbying, and the real estate bubble is largely a result of his work’ (p. 41).

In light of this historical economic context, the conflict between the protagonist and Mayer can be perceived as a metaphor for class hierarchies in capitalist, neoliberal societies. The slogan of the Brooklynclub is ‘Union is strength’, which is subverted by Mayer when he joins the club:

I longed for shivers. Mayer had transformed those shivers into blind violence by considering the fights as games while, except for a few people, no member of the club wanted to prove their superiority. We didn’t care about losing or winning a fight, but Mayer was so vain that he assumed that he was under attack in the ring. He regarded it as criticism when someone hit him. By betting with extremely high amounts of money and by exploiting Cass and Gordon, he created confusion and strife. (pp. 85–86)

Before Mayer entered the scene, the Brooklynclub was a place of social anarchy where people would fight each other noncompetitively – hence the slogan ‘Union
is strength’. With the arrival of Mayer, the Brooklyn club transforms into the opposite: a place of competition and strife.

In the resulting competitive situation, the conflict between the protagonist and Mayer symbolizes the class struggle of those people who occupy a lower place on the social ladder. The protagonist represents the underdog who is dominated by his societal superior Mayer. The raping of Lauretta by Mayer serves as an illustration of that fact: Mayer is so powerful that he can take away the most precious ‘possession’ of the protagonist. By murdering Mayer, the protagonist not only takes revenge on his enemy but also breaks open the power hierarchies that are a result of his and Mayer’s socioeconomic positions.

This reading of the novel fits in the overall statistical pattern in which lower-class characters are more central in conflict situations than higher-class characters. In this particular novel, the conflict between the lower-class protagonist and the higher-class Mayer is indeed reflected by their conflict scores: the protagonist has a composite conflict score of 2.75, Mayer has a composite conflict score of 1.5. On the level of plot, the discrepancy in these scores is exemplified by the protagonist’s murdering of Mayer, which is the ultimate victory over one’s enemy.

However, this conformation of the novel to the statistical pattern only holds in this schematic, plot-based reading. An alternative reading of the novel sheds a different light on the nature of the conflict between the protagonist and Mayer. There are instances in the novel where it is subtly suggested that the protagonist and Mayer are actually very much alike, despite their different socioeconomic positions. First, there is the seemingly strange coincidence that the two characters are lookalikes on a physical level. The protagonist takes advantage of this coincidence in his ‘masterpiece’ of letting the kidnappers think that it is Mayer who they kidnap, although in reality it is the protagonist who earlier killed Mayer in his apartment.

Furthermore, the protagonist is fairly startled by the deep spiritual connection he has with Mayer:

I waited sixty years to pay off my social debt, and forty-two years to avenge Lauretta. Initially, Mayer appeared in my thoughts a few times every day. Every morning I had to fight against the daunting image of his drool dripping on Lauretta’s back while he clenched his rough hands around her waist in the Buick Riviera; an image that filled me with horror at the moments when I recognized myself in it, I used to cool down my self-hatred and shame by spitting on the mirror after I washed my face and brushed my teeth. (p. 65; emphasis added)
The classic metaphor of the mirror serves to underline the protagonist’s resistance toward introspection that is sparked by his recognition of the similarities between him and his enemy. A few pages later, this metaphoric logic is repeated:

I had no single mirror in my house in Queqertarsuup Tunua, and when I coincidentally saw my reflection in a window or a piece of ice, I turned away from myself as a dog from his own shit. The last time I felt disgusted by my own appearance was when they showed a picture of Mayer on television. (p. 67)

The foregrounding of the physical similarities between the protagonist and Mayer creates a tension in the plot. It is not only that the protagonist has similar looks as Mayer, but he is also able to picture himself vividly as the rapist of his own beloved, which fills him with genuine disgust. As such, the question arises as to whether or not the protagonist and Mayer actually are two different characters. The coincidence of their physical similarities and the plot twist of Lauretta marrying her rapist are so odd that the protagonist’s reliability as a narrator is called into question. Does Mayer exist at all or is he a product of the protagonist’s imagination?

This ‘Doppelgänger’ motif opens up an alternative reading to the one presented above. The initial reading considered the conflict between the protagonist as belonging to the second type of Pavis’s typology: rivalry between two characters because of money, love, morality, politics, etc. Taking the Doppelgänger motif as a point of departure, however, this conflict can be reframed as conforming to the third type of the typology: (inner) conflict between, e.g., passion and reason. A possible interpretation is that the protagonist’s real enemy is his own Self. Externalizing this inner conflict, the protagonist has created Mayer in his imagination as the ultimate Other. The class hierarchy between the protagonist and this imagined character of Mayer is a politicization of his personal problems. By viewing the conflict he has with his own Self in terms of a class conflict, the protagonist is able to make sense of his personal misery and blame it on his position on the social ladder. Eventually, he realizes that his defeat over Mayer is in reality a personal defeat: ‘It occurred to me that by destroying my doppelganger I emasculated myself permanently’ (p. 149).

In this more resistant reading of the narrative conflict, De Brooklynclub escapes the observed statistical pattern subtly. By looking at what happens between the lines as opposed to what happens at the surface of the text, indeterminacies are found that undermine a schematic reading of the text. Statistically, it is true for the corpus of 170 novels in general that characters with a low education are more
central in conflicts than characters with a high education. From a Marxist point of view, this statistical pattern can be interpreted as a rebellion of the lower class to their fixed socioeconomic position. In a surface-like analysis that stays close to how the narrative is presented in terms of plot, Koubaa’s novel is a perfect illustration of that statistical pattern. By murdering his higher-class enemy Mayer, the lower-class protagonist becomes the central party in their mutual clash.

However, a reading that is resistant to the state of affairs as presented by the first-person narrator reveals that the nature of the conflict is more complex. Possibly, Mayer is a product of the protagonist’s imagination. Read from this point of view, the conflict at stake is not a socioeconomic clash between the high and the low class, but rather an inner conflict taking place within the boundaries of the protagonist’s own psyche. In this second reading, De Brooklynclub is not primarily a story about a lower-class character taking revenge on a higher-class character, but rather a novel about a confused underdog fighting against the person in the mirror. While conflict between the higher and the lower classes is still prevalent in this reading of the novel (although only in the protagonist’s imagination), it shows how literary mechanisms such as the Doppelgänger motif enable a subtle deconstruction of observed statistical patterns.

5.5 MODEL II: SOCIAL BALANCE IN TRIANGULAR CONFLICTS

Now that there is a clearer image of the nature of hierarchies exposed through conflicts between two single characters, a closer look at broader network structures in conflict situations is warranted. In the statistical analyses carried out in the former section, the conflicts at stake encompass only the first type offered by Pavis’s typology (see section 5.3): rivalry between two characters because of money, love, morality, politics, etc. This is a logical consequence of a focus on enemy pairs consisting of only two characters. In theory, the second type of conflict from Pavis’s typology – two conflicting worldviews or irreconcilable moral conceptions – can also be expressed through dyadic relations, as two characters could have conflicting worldviews resulting in them becoming enemies. But this more abstract type form of conflict generally involves more than two characters, as worldviews and moral conceptions can be expressed metonymically by multiple characters belonging to a group with shared values.
A focus on more than two characters potentially lays bare broader network dynamics that are at play in narrative conflict. Such dynamics are also relatable to the fourth type of Pavis’s typology: conflict between the particular and the general, e.g., between the individual and society. It is imaginable that the intragroup morale leads to a clash with an individual belonging to that group. Furthermore, it might also relate to the fifth type: a moral or metaphysical conflict between a character and a principle such as God or an ideal. A group can, for example, have ideals that an individual has trouble accepting or refuses to adopt.

In order to limit this potentially large and heterogeneous subject of conflict in which more than two characters are involved, this section only considers subnetworks of three characters, also called triads. Triads are the second smallest network structure after dyads (two nodes linked by one edge). According to sociologist Georg Simmel, the transformation from a dyadic to a triadic network is the most radical, phase-shifting relational change. Following Simmel, the shift of focus from dyads to triads makes it possible to research character conflicts in two fundamentally different – dyadic and triadic – contexts.

An empirical testing of Heider’s social balance theory (see section 5.2 of this chapter) can lead to insight into the effect that conflicts have on relationships between more than two characters. As explained above, the social balance theory poses that triadic signed networks are either balanced or unbalanced depending on the composition of the nodes’ positive and negative attitudes toward the other nodes. Kraicer and Piper (2019) offer a clear visualization of the theory (Figure 3). In the analysis below, positive relations are represented by friendship relations, negative relations by enemy relations.

![Figure 3. Visualization of Heider’s social balance theory, adapted from Kraicer & Piper (2019). Triangles A and B are balanced, triangles C and D are imbalanced.](image)

To what extent are triadic relationships in the corpus balanced (triangle A or B in Figure 3) or imbalanced (triangle C or D in Figure 3), and what are the consequences of social (im)balance for the representation of social groups?
According to Heider, imbalanced structures strive to balanced states. If the theory applies to character networks as well, then the corpus should contain few imbalanced triads. In the following, social balance theory will serve as the framework for the analysis of character triads. As such, a general pattern will be presented, which will be subsequently explored in depth through a close reading of a novel that has both balanced and imbalanced triadic subnetworks.

5.5.1 Automatic Modeling of Social Balance in Enemy/Friend triads

For every triad consisting of either friends and/or enemies, it was automatically established whether or not it is balanced or unbalanced. First, from database EDGES only those characters that have either an enemy or a friend relation were selected. Then, it was automatically determined whether or not the observed triads fall into the balanced or the unbalanced category. The relative distribution of social (im)balanced states show that the majority of these triads is balanced: 65% of the observed triads is balanced, as opposed to only 35% of imbalanced (N = 560). The absolute distributions of the (im)balanced categories friend-friend-friend (balance), friend-enemy-enemy (balance), enemy-enemy-enemy (imbalance), and enemy-friend-friend (imbalance) are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Absolute distribution of social (im)balance for all enemy/friend-triads in the corpus divided by type (N = 560).
These results broadly confirm Heider’s theory, but with some counterexamples. It remains a question how generalizable these results are beyond the 170 novels in the present research corpus. Up to the present, as far as I am aware, there is only one other study that uses social balance theory for framing interactions between characters in literary texts (Kraicer & Piper, 2019). This study focuses on a corpus of 1,333 contemporary English novels and reports a distribution of 53% balance as opposed to 47% imbalance. However, their method for detecting negative and positive relations deviates from the method used here. The authors of this study automatically detect negativity/positivity of character relations bottom-up by using sentiment analysis, which results in a fairly rough and partly inaccurate estimate of the nature of those relations. The present research uses top-down expert annotations of negative and positive relations between characters and comes arguably closer to how readers would frame those relations. In order to make generalizable statements on social balance in literature, comparative research has to be conducted on several corpora, preferably from other language fields and other time periods, using the same method.

Although there has been some critique on the generalizability of the theory, as imbalanced triadic structures have been reported in social networks (Doreian, 2011), this is not the place to make assertions on the general tenability of the social balance theory. Presuming that Heider’s theory has some truth in it, it is remarkable that 65% of the character triads in the corpus conform to it. In the context of Greimas’s actantial model, it would be more likely that fictional networks do not strive to social balance in the same way as real-world networks do. In fictional social networks, an alternative organizing principle might be in place that does not prefer social balance over social imbalance. This intuition appeals to the idea that disparity and divergence are driving factors behind the fictional worlds of novels, which can be associated with the axis of conflict in Greimas’s actantial model. Action in fictional narratives is said to revolve around three axes (knowledge, desire, power/conflict), but the roles of the helpers and opponents, or friends and enemies, at the axis of conflict is of particular importance in terms of keeping the story interesting for the reader. If the desires of the subject are not frustrated by any opponents at all, a tedious story would be the result. More generally, an overrepresentation of imbalanced triads in the corpus might be an indication that stories tend not to evolve smoothly but rather evolve with a necessary amount of squirming and irritation.
However, this appears not to be the case for the present data, as there is an overrepresentation of balanced triads as opposed to imbalanced triads. One interpretation of this unexpected outcome is that social structures in fictional worlds tend to resemble real-world structures. If one follows Heider’s theory that in actual societies social balance is more present than social imbalance, these results can be used as an argument for the mimetic powers of literary worlds, which can be traced back all the way to Aristotle’s account of literature being a reflection of the world in which it is produced (Aristotle, 335 BC/2013). Also in modern times, the idea that literature is a medium in which societal tendencies are reflected continues to be popular (Anjana & Bhambhra, 2016; Auerbach, 1946/2003; Hoggart, 1966). In order to make a solid case for this interpretation, social (im)balance would have to be measured in contemporary Dutch society and compared with the present results.

An alternative interpretation of the overrepresentation of social balance is that only a minimum of action can take place at the axis of conflict. One could argue that, in order for the story to evolve at all, the subject should have ample opportunities for reaching his goal. If there is too much social imbalance, too much activity at the axis of conflict, the story could not gain any momentum. Referring back to Propp’s example of fairy tales: too much social imbalance would possibly result in the hero not even leaving his castle to save the princess, as he would be stuck in socially imbalanced structures at home.

The possible explanations of this pattern will be left aside for now, and its value will be evaluated through a case study. The observed general pattern of social (im)balance will be confronted with close readings of two novels from the corpus for which balanced triads have been reported. In the following subsection the effect of these balanced triads on the representation of social groups in the novels will be assessed. This qualitative reading will then be contextualized through the quantitative results in order to put the social (im)balance in the novel in a broader perspective.

As case studies, two novels from the corpus are used in which there is a clear conflict between ideologies. The state of social balance in the first case study, Leon de Winter’s *VSV of daden van onbaatzuchtigheid* (2012), creates a rather schematic opposition between a group of Dutch characters and a group of characters with a Moroccan and Muslim background. Such a schematic opposition also seems to be present in the second case study, Tommy Wieringa’s *Dit zijn de namen* (2012), but the social imbalance in certain specific character triads complicates that view. In both qualitative readings, Greimas’s actantial model will be used to (de)construct the specific conflicts at stake in the novels.
5.5.2 Social Balance in Leon de Winter’s VSV, of daden van onbaatzuchtigheid

Conflict is definitely a driving force behind Leon de Winter’s VSV of daden van onbaatzuchtigheid. The novel’s general setting is the polarized Dutch political climate that came into being after the murders on politician Pim Fortuyn (2002) and film director Theo van Gogh (2004). Both of them were outspoken critics of Islamic fundamentalism and were assassinated by people who were offended by their criticism. VSV is set in a country still recovering from the aftermath of these tragic events. Through the narrative perspectives of eleven different characters, a plot is set in motion that recalls the ideological conflict between religious fundamentalism and freedom of speech that lay at the heart of the Dutch public debate in the early 2000s. This is done specifically through the staging of actual people who played a role in sparking those debates, such as Theo van Gogh and his assassinator Mohammed Boujeri. By staging himself as a character, author Leon de Winter brings back to memory the personal quarrel he had with Theo van Gogh, which revolved around De Winter’s accusation that Van Gogh harbored anti-Semitic ideas.

The story commences with the perspective of Theo van Gogh, who got stuck in what he calls a ‘barrack building’¹⁰ (De Winter, p. 14) after his death, and which is strongly reminiscent of the purgatory. The military metaphor of the barrack building can be associated with the unfinished strife that Theo has to settle before entering into heavenly spheres. This strife is a political one: Theo has ‘to finish a movie about a hero, Pim Fortuyn’ (p. 10). As was the case in reality, Theo supported Pim Fortuyn’s campaign for freedom of speech and his criticism on the Islam. In the novel, Theo repeatedly refers to Moroccan people with the term ‘kutmarokkanen’ (‘damn Moroccans’), as well as with terms as ‘goat fucker’ (p. 9) and ‘religious fool’ (p. 17). He calls his assassinator Mohammed Boujeri ‘a bearded monkey in a sack-like dress’ (p. 8). On a general level, character Theo seems to incorporate the beliefs of the historic person Theo van Gogh:

Nowadays there were too many of them [bearded monkeys] in the city. Lunatics who were only able to endure the trip from the desert to the filthy city through abiding by the norms and values of nomads from the seventh century. Everyone has his madness. But these fools did not tolerate other people’s madness. (ibid.)

From the first chapter onward, an opposition between the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and Dutch liberalism is thus postulated. This activates a conflict
in the structural sense that falls into the second category of Pavis’s typology: two conflicting worldviews or irreconcilable moral conceptions.

The liberal ideology is expressed most explicitly by the character of Theo van Gogh, the Islamic extremist ideology most explicitly by the character of Mohammed Boujeri. More generally, this structural conflict divides the novels into two groups of characters who (implicitly or indirectly) side with one of the ideologies. This division between characters is based on their ethnic background and is represented by Moroccan characters on the one hand and non-Moroccan characters on the other.

Leon de Winter, among others, belongs to the group of non-Moroccans. Compared to the real-world quarrel between the actual Leon de Winter and the actual Theo van Gogh, it might seem odd that both are placed in the same camp. However, Van Gogh and De Winter shared similar ideas regarding the dangers of the Islam, and so do the characters modeled after them. Furthermore, the character of gangster Max Kohn, to whose narrative perspective most chapters are dedicated, can also be associated with this group. Although he says that he is not interested in ‘the whole phenomenon of Muslims who feel wronged’ (p. 216), he exemplifies the typical prejudices against Muslims. When he hears an explosion the ‘prejudices were immediately invoked: this was a deliberately caused explosion, and therefore caused by terrorists, and therefore caused by Muslims’ (ibid.). Besides Van Gogh, De Winter, and Kohn, the notorious ideas of politician Geert Wilders make the character through which Wilders is represented also part of this group. The characters of former Dutch politicians Piet Hein Donner and Job Cohen represent the Dutch political status quo in the novel and are as such also part of this group.

The five characters with a Moroccan background – Mohammed Boujeri, Sallie, Frits (Firas), Karel (Kareef), and Kichie – are to a greater or lesser extent associated with the ideology of Islamic extremism. Mohammed killed Theo van Gogh and is represented as the stereotypical Muslim extremist. He repeatedly quotes from the Quran, defies non-Muslims, and is proud of the killing of Theo van Gogh:

It is thus completely acceptable to silence unreformable slanderers. Warnings should be made, but one day the sword of the true believer will cut the throat of the slanderer, and repentance is no reason to stop the vengeance. Our devotion to the Prophet (Sallallahu alaihie wa Sallam) is so strong, that we cannot ever let him be insulted with impunity. (p. 77)
Similarly, Sallie, Frits, and Karel are portrayed as typical Muslim extremists, committing three terrorist assaults in Amsterdam driven by religious motives. Kichie (Kicham Ouaziz) is Sallie’s father and is characterized as a ‘Berber in search of the rituals of his people before it was wiped out by the Arabs and their Islam’ (p. 248). Although he is not represented as a Muslim extremist – he is focalized by Mohammed Boujeri as an ’apostate dog’ (p. 253) and claims repeatedly that he is ‘no religious extremist’ (p. 263) – among his most defining features is his Moroccan ethnic background. Another of his defining features is his criminal background. It is noteworthy that each of these characters is a terrorist or a criminal. Numerically, of all identified Moroccan characters in this novel, 100% are involved in criminal activities. This fact only already creates an a priori moral scheme in which non-Moroccan characters such as Theo van Gogh and Leon de Winter are on the moral, and the Moroccan characters on the immoral, side of the spectrum.\textsuperscript{11}

The clash between these two groups of characters can be formalized through two different actantial models, of which these are the axes of conflict:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Axis of conflict 1: The non-Moroccans (subject) want a free and peaceful country (object) but are frustrated in reaching that goal by the Moroccans (opponent).
  \item Axis of conflict 2: The Moroccans (subject) aim to satisfy the commandments of the Islamic faith (object) but are hampered by the non-Moroccans (opponent).\textsuperscript{12}
\end{itemize}

Below, a closer inspection of one particular character triad in the novel will demonstrate how this general clash between two conflicting sociocultural belief systems is embodied through a direct, face-to-face conflict between three characters.

\textbf{5.5.1.1 Balanced Triad Sallie-Karel-Kohn}

On a micro level, the balanced triad shown in Figure 5 exemplifies the intergroup conflict between Moroccans and non-Moroccans. Max Kohn has a hostile relation with both Sallie and Karel, whereas Sallie and Karel are close friends and fellow terrorists. The triad is balanced because the enemy of Sallie’s/Karel’s enemy, i.e., Kohn, is Sallie’s/Karel’s friend, i.e., Karel/Sallie.
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Figure 5. Imbalanced triad in Leon de Winter’s VSV, with characters Sallie (a.k.a. Salbeddine Ouaziz), Karel (a.k.a. Kareef) and Max Kohn.

The hostility between Sallie and Max Kohn has old roots. Sallie’s father, Kichie, used to work as a hitman for Max Kohn. Early in the novel, Sallie focalizes Kohn as ‘a tough guy, who fled the country unharmed’ and repeats the fact that his father ‘took all the punches for the gangster’ (p. 145). Although this is not the reason why Sallie and Kohn become enemies, their personal history is brought back into memory when a direct, physical conflict between Sallie and Kohn takes place.

The setting for this conflict coincides with a scene in which the action climaxes. Sallie, Karel, Frits, and others have occupied a school and held a group of children hostage, among which is Kohn’s son. Politicians Piet Hein Donner and Job Cohen have asked Kohn and Kichie to take back control over the situation. When Sallie sees Kohn, he says: ‘Hey, you are that Jew from the underworld, right? The boss of my pa-pa’ (p. 398). This recognition sparks an anger in Sallie that kick-starts the hostile events that follow, and in which Kohn eventually holds Sallie at gunpoint (p. 402).

A similar direct, physical conflict is at work between Kohn and Karel, who is also one of the hostage takers. Kohn physically assaults Karel and takes his gun (p. 401). Their mutual conflict climaxes when Kohn shoots Karel in the shoulder:

Kohn pulled the trigger and the shot sounded dry. The boy briefly shocked and then remained silent. Blood was dripping from his arm. (p. 405)

The social balance in this Sallie-Karel-Kohn triad serves as a strengthening of the general intergroup conflict between the Moroccans and the non-Moroccans.
The scene described above fits perfectly in the central tenet of the novel: acts of altruism lead to the good, whereas acts of egoism result in the bad (hence the novel’s subtitle *Acts of Altruism*). As a guardian angel, the character of Theo van Gogh has been commissioned to have the previously immoral Max Kohn do something morally good, in which Kohn succeeds by stopping the terrorist attack carried out by Sallie and his friends. As such, the enemy/friend relations in this particular triad are exemplary of a moral scheme in which the Moroccans are morally perverted and the non-Moroccans (become) morally enlightened.

Furthermore, the Sallie-Karel-Kohn triad does not stand on its own; it is representative of a pattern. There is a range of other balanced triads in the novel for which the same argument can be made. Sallie and Karel not only feature in a balanced triad with Kohn, they also feature in similar balanced triads with the following non-Moroccan characters: Nathan Verstraete (Kohn’s son), Sonja Verstraete (Kohn’s ex-lover), Job Cohen, Marijke Hogeveld (Cohen’s lover), and Geert Wilders. On top of that, Sallie and Frits – another member of Sallie’s group of terrorist friends – feature in the exact same balanced triads as Sallie and Karel. In total, twelve balanced triads occur that are all indicative of the same two conflicting worldviews.

These twelve observed balanced triads fit perfectly in two different actantial models in which the Moroccans and non-Moroccans function as each other’s opponents on the two axes of conflict (see section 5.5.2). In other words, each of these balanced triads stands in a metonymic relation to a general actantial model with either the Moroccans or the non-Moroccans as a subject. No imbalanced triads are observed that potentially complicate these highly schematic moral oppositions between both groups. Instead, the intragroup morale in these twelve balanced triadic subnetworks confirm an overall moral scheme in which the Moroccans are good and the non-Moroccans are bad. Subsequently, this is not only an opposition in terms of descent, it is also an opposition in terms of belief systems. The fact that these balanced triads strongly conform to such broadly defined actantial models makes VSV ideologically biased toward the cultural values of Dutch liberalism rather than those of Islamic fundamentalism.

### 5.5.3 Social Imbalance in Tommy Wieringa’s *Dit zijn de namen*

Just as in his most recent book *De heilige Rita* (2017), the notions of East and West and their borderland play a pivotal role in Tommy Wieringa’s Libris prize-winning *Dit zijn de namen* (2012). The setting of the novel is Michailopol, a fictional frontier town that symbolizes the gateway from East to West, although
it remains unclear where the town is exactly located. There are two main perspectives in the novel that alternate per third-person narrated chapter. The novel commences with the perspective of Pontus Beg, a middle-aged police officer who works in Michailopol. The other perspective lies with a group of initially nameless refugees with varying backgrounds who are on their way to the West, and eventually end up at Michailopol where they are caught and interrogated by Pontus Beg. In the chapters in which the refugee perspective is adopted, the focalization lies with one of the individuals from the refugee group consisting of five men, one woman, and one boy. At various instances in the novel, the idea is foregrounded that prosperity can be found in the West. This may occur very explicitly: ‘They had to keep on going to the West, the man said’ (Wieringa, 2012, p. 14). Or it might do so more implicitly, through e.g., the metaphor of a pack of cigarettes from the brand ‘Western’ that the little refugee boy finds and which gives him false hope of quickly arriving at the promised Western land.

Ironically, Pontus Beg, who tries to prevent the refugees from the East entering the West, is highly obsessed with Eastern philosophy, such as the teachings of Confucius and Zhuang Zi. As someone living on the border between East and West, he appears to be more strongly attracted to the East, as is illustrated through quotes such as ‘Confucius was a man of order, someone who provides guidance. Honoring the elderly, the rituals and the Road, his love for the true word; Beg sometimes regretted that he did not live in the China of the Master’ (p. 50). Furthermore, throughout the novel Pontus Beg has numerous conversations with rabbis as he is interested in gaining more knowledge on his Jewish roots (‘He intended to read everything that he needed to know, and then to decide if he would become a religious Jew or only a Jew from birth’ [p. 206]). As Judaism originated in the Middle East, this motif strengthens Pontus Beg’s obsession with spiritual teachings from the East.

This general framework serves as the core of the conflict between Pontus Beg (and the town of Michailopol which he represents) on the one hand, and the group of refugees on the other. It is a conflict in the structural sense which can be associated with the second type of Pavis’s typology: Two conflicting worldviews or irreconcilable moral conceptions. The general worldview incorporated by the refugees is that the West is the desired place to be, whereas Beg incorporates the worldview that spiritual wisdom lies in the East. Although these two worldviews do not necessarily have to be conflicting, they form the axis of conflict in two different actantial models of the novel, of which the subjects, objects and opponents can be represented in the following way:
— Axis of conflict 1: Refugees (subject) want happiness in the West (object) but are hindered to fulfill that goal by Pontus Beg (opponent)
— Axis of conflict 2: Pontus Beg (subject) is in search of spiritual salvation (object) but his search is obstructed by refugees entering his hometown (opponents)

The role of helper has been left out of these two representations of the axis of conflict because it is rather ambiguous who helps who. A closer inspection on two imbalanced triadic relationships in the novel helps to pinpoint how conflict co-shapes its representation of different social groups.

5.5.1.1 Imbalanced Triad Samira-Ethiopian-Akmuhammet

In Figure 6, the imbalanced triad of three of the refugee characters is shown. Two of them are named at the end of the novel: Samira Uygun (who was earlier referred to as ‘the woman’) and Akmuhammet Kurbankiliev (who was referred to as ‘the man from Asjchabad’). ‘The Ethiopian’ remains nameless, being only referred to with downgrading terms such as ‘Africa’, ‘the black man’, ‘the negro’, and ‘dog’.

![Figure 6. Imbalanced triad in Tommy Wieringa’s Dit zijn de namen, with characters Samira Uygun (a.k.a. ‘the woman’), ‘the Ethiopian’ (a.k.a. ‘Africa’, ‘the black man’, ‘the negro’, ‘dog’), and Akmuhammet Kurbankiliev (a.k.a. ‘the man from Asjchabad’).](image)

All relations in this signed triadic network are hostile, and therefore imbalanced according to Heider’s theory. ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend’ is not applicable in this triad, as the enemy of a character’s enemy is its enemy and
not its friend. This example poses a problem for the assignment of the roles of helper and opponents in an actantial model of the novel. In a general sense, all individuals in the group of refugees are each other’s helpers, as they are in the same situation and would benefit from a joint effort to reach their shared goal. However, the social imbalance of some triads within the general network of refugees potentially obstructs the fulfillment of this common goal. This is illustrated by the triadic relationship between Samira, Akmuhammet, and the Ethiopian, which forms a separate network with an intragroup morale that deviates from the general interests of the group of refugees. As such, some of the refugees are both opponents to the group as well as opponents to the goals of the individuals within that group. On a micro-textual level, the clash between this particular triad and the overall refugee network is expressed through Wieringa’s highlighting of both the shared goal of the refugees and the hostility between some particular individuals in that group. The shared interest is expressed by the anonymous narrator through descriptions such as the following:

Despite the bitter disappointment, the village gave them new courage; it seems as if they walk faster than before. It can’t possibly be the only settlement in the area. Communities are never that isolated. *The village ahead* becomes their chief point of focus. They see tractors on the fields, smoking chimneys, the cattle. The friendly beehives at the edge of the village... They only have to walk toward it... (p. 30)

The narrator frames the situation in such a way that it seems as if everyone in the group is on the same page and has the same object of focus (i.e., ‘The village ahead’). The phrase ‘communities are never that isolated’ can be read as the shared hope that their finding of the earlier village might be a sign that another village will be near. However, the phrase can also be interpreted as an ironic comment on the situation in their group: as refugees they are isolated, forming a distinct group that will likely be closed off from any new society they might encounter. Furthermore, within the group of refugees there are multiple isolated subgroups that are in conflict with the collective ideals of the group as a whole.

One of those isolated subgroups is the imbalanced triadic relationship between Samira, Akmuhammet, and the Ethiopian. Throughout the novel, intragroup hostility between certain members come to the fore. This is made clear through comments by the narrator such as:

The woman, the boy, and the negro occupy a different role. Prey. Victim. Spectator. It is best if they make themselves invisible. (p. 31)
As a ‘Prey’, Samira (or ‘the woman’) has a special status in the group: she is repeatedly raped by Akmuhammet, also known as ‘the man from Aschabab whose prey she was at night’ (p. 132). Furthermore, the ‘negro’, or ‘the Ethiopian’, is allocated the role of ‘Spectator’ as he is more generally excluded by different members of the group. Time and again, he is downgraded and physically assaulted by Akmuhammet in particular (p. 148). A scene in which the little boy is the focalizing subject illustrates the Ethiopian’s position in the group:

The dog in the tail of the caravan. A dog – although they keep beating him, he keeps coming back, begging for attention and mercy. They will beat him even harder, just as long as he finally understands that he does not fit in. That he is a stranger, a bearer of mystery. There is no place for him in the group, he will need to make the trip alone. [...] He must understand that the group now poses a bigger threat to him than lonely wandering the plains. (p. 150)

Although the Ethiopian is part of the same endeavor to find a better life in the West, he becomes more and more isolated from the group, to such an extent that the group turns on him and ‘poses a bigger threat to him than lonely wandering the plains’. He has been excluded from the group of which he initially was a part: ‘The distance between them became unbridgeable in a short while. Not long ago, he had warmed his hands at the same fire’ (p. 176).

The imbalanced triadic relationship between Samira, Akmuhammet, and the Ethiopian demonstrates a key element in the intragroup hierarchies of the refugees. In a very broadly defined actantial model, the five men, the woman, and the boy represent a common subject striving for the shared goal of finding a new life in the West. In that model, all refugees are each other’s helpers. However, from the narrower perspective of single character triads, an alternative actantial model can be outlined. The imbalance in this particular triad indicates the dominance of Akmuhammet over both Samira and the Ethiopian. In terms of gender and race, this hierarchy is represented as a dominance of the male (Akmuhammet) over the female (Samira) and the non-black (Akmuhammet) over the black (the Ethiopian).

5.5.3.2 Imbalanced Triad Pontus-Samira-Akmuhammet

The overall clash between Pontus Beg and the refugees takes place in the part called ‘Winter’. At this point in the narrative the surviving refugees reach Michailopol. As the officer in chief, Pontus Beg is a general representative of the town. When the arrival of the refugees creates disquiet in the town, it is Beg’s
responsibility to reestablish the peace. In a chapter where the focalization lies with the people of Michailopol, the refugees are framed as ‘tramps’ (p. 183), ‘the dead’ (ibid.), ‘fucking tramps’ (ibid.), ‘shadows’ (ibid.), ‘the untouchables’ (p. 185), ‘lepers’ (ibid.), ‘starvelings’ (p. 186), and ‘Jews from the camps’ (p. 189). These descriptions create a first hierarchical opposition between the people of Michailopol and the refugees: the negatively connotated terms serve to subjugate the refugees to a hostile and downgrading vocabulary.

Although the refugees did not do any particular harm, they are arrested and imprisoned at the police station where Pontus Beg works. Here, a power mechanism is at play that can be observed in actual frontier towns such as Lampedusa: refugees are subjected to the law system and bureaucracy of the country where they arrive. Beg takes their freedom away and makes them potential suspects to a crime of which they were not previously aware. Their criminalization is amplified when the head of the Ethiopian character is found in their luggage and each of the refugees is subjected to an official interrogation.

This situation of criminalization gives rise to the imbalanced triad between Pontus, Samira Uygun, and Akmuhammet Kurbankiliev (see Figure 7). As was already discussed in the previous subsection (5.5.3.1), Samira and Akmuhammet are in a hostile relation with one another. When their relation is triangulated with Pontus as a third member, a situation arises that is unlikely to occur according to the social balance theory. It would be in line with the theory, had Pontus been a friend to either Samira or Akmuhammet. This is, however, not the case, as Pontus Beg becomes their enemy by imprisoning them and suspecting them of a crime.

![Figure 7. Imbalanced triad in Tommy Wieringa's Dit zijn de namen, with characters Pontus Beg, Samira Uygun (a.k.a. 'the woman'), and Akmuhammet Kurbankiliev (a.k.a. 'the man from Aschabad').](image-url)
In the context of an actantial model that has Pontus as a subject, this triad can raise two conflicting conceptions of who are the opponents and the helpers. Pontus’s goal in the novel can be framed as a search for spiritual salvation. On the one hand, his hostile relation with both Samira and Akmuhammet distracts him from reaching this goal. In this conception, the imbalanced triad serves as a strengthening of the statement that these two refugees are his opponents. On the other hand, the hostile environment in which Pontus, Samira, and Akmuhammet are engrained is a breeding ground for Pontus gaining spiritual insight:

Isn’t it ironic, he said, that this happened to him precisely at the moment that he set his first steps toward the Eternal: a group of people who, in a sense, had been reliving the journey of the desert generation with nothing above their heads than the empty sky. They fled poverty and oppression, the desert generation escaped from the Egyptian slavery. Different, incomparable, and yet the same. Mankind, lost in the wild, looking up at the sky in despair: Lord, help us, protect us. (p. 276)

The refugees coming into his life are thought of by Pontus as an allegory to his own spiritual journey. Just as Pontus is in search of a deity’s protection, the refugees are in need of salvation. Pontus’s realization of the similarities between him and the refugees deconstructs an actantial model in which Samira and Akmuhammet are his opponents. In this alternative interpretation of the novel they are rather his helpers. This would mean that they no longer are his enemies and that they become his friends. Interestingly, and perhaps coincidentally, the shifting of these relational roles would still result in an imbalanced triad, as the triad would then be friend-friend-enemy.

In all cases, the imbalanced triadic relation between Pontus, Samira, and Akmuhammet is a clear example of a power mechanism in which hierarchies between characters belonging to groups of different descents and classes are at play. Obviously, the hierarchy between Pontus on the one hand, and Samira and Akmuhammet on the other is in greater part the result of the fact that Samira and Akmuhammet have different origins and subsequently other rights than Pontus has. Furthermore, the hierarchy is amplified by Pontus having a prestigious job, whereas Samira and Akmuhammet are not ascribed a professional identity other than ‘refugee’. In general, such oppositions between descents and professions (as indicative of classes) fuel the antagonism in this particular imbalanced triad.
5.6 CONCLUSION TO THIS CHAPTER

This chapter examined how the conflicts of characters co-shape the representation of their social groups. Propp published *Morphology of the Folktale* in the 1920s; almost 40 years later Greimas published *Sémantique structurale*. More than fifty years later, their classic models still serve as an inspiration for any structural analysis of narrative action. Recent developments within cultural analytics have opened up possibilities to take the ideas of Propp and Greimas to the next level. Computational and statistical analysis have the potential to fill the gap since Propp and Greimas, and enables a conceptualization and an operationalization of (the analysis) of conflict both at the level of the corpus and at the level of the individual text. Synthesizing typologies, concepts, terms, and tools from a variety of research domains, this chapter thus presented a method to study conflict in literary texts. This method was used to analyze the extent to which narrative conflict shapes the representation of social groups in present-day Dutch literary fiction. Two models of conflict were presented testing two hypotheses related to the literary representation of genders, descents, and classes. Analyzing the research corpus with these models, two general conclusions can be drawn as to the role of conflict in the representation of social groups in today’s products of Dutch literary fiction.

First, dyadic conflict was modeled by computing a conflict score for every pair of hostile characters in the corpus, which is an indication of the dominance of characters in such two-way conflicts. It was hypothesized that male, Dutch, and higher educated characters would have higher conflict scores. Surprisingly, gender and descent turned out to have no effect on a character’s importance in a conflict. Education is the only statistically significant predictor of the height of these scores; lower educated characters scored significantly higher than higher educated characters. In order to assess the relevance of this macro pattern, it was contextualized through a close reading of a novel from the corpus. The violent clash between the protagonist and antagonist in Bart Koubaa’s *De Brooklynclub* seems to reflect the dominance of the lower over the higher classes. However, a less schematic, more resistant reading of the novel shows that the conflict between the lower-class protagonist and the higher-class antagonist can also be read as an externalization of the protagonist’s inner conflict. Whereas at the level of the whole corpus, education seems to install class hierarchies in conflicts between two characters, at the level of the individual text these class hierarchies are either
reflected or subtly nuanced through various stylistic mechanisms, as is shown by the reading of Koubaa’s novel.

Second, going beyond this classic protagonist-antagonist conflict, this chapter examined triadic conflict by modeling the extent of social balance between all possible triangular configurations between enemies and friends in the corpus. Contrary to what one might expect on the basis of Greimas’s actantial model, the majority of these triads turned out to be socially balanced. Two possible interpretations were given for this pattern. Based on the assumption that the balance theory generally holds true and that most real-world triangular relations are thus balanced, the dominance of social balance in present-day Dutch literary fiction provides an argument for a mimetic understanding of Dutch literature. In this interpretation, social balance in a particular society seeps through in its products of narrative fiction.

An alternative interpretation is that too much antagonism – defined as social imbalance – holds back narrative progression at the level of plot: a fair amount of social balance is perhaps needed to keep the story going. The relevance of this pattern for the representation of social groups was assessed through a close reading of social balance in both Leon de Winter’s *VSV of daden van onbaatzuchtigheid* and Tommy Wieringa’s *Dit zijn de namen*. For case study *VSV*, reading triads of enemies in light of Greimas’s actantial model revealed a highly schematic opposition between two groups of characters of different descents. In this particular narrative, social balance in a range of triangular character relations functions as an amplification of the more general intragroup conflict between a group of Moroccan and a group of non-Moroccan characters. Whereas social balance in *VSV* leads to schematic (moral) opposition between social groups, this at first also seems to be the case in *Dit zijn de namen*, in which social balance between particular characters fuels antagonism between descents and genders. However, the presence of social imbalance between three other characters complicates such a schematic reading of the novel. While this particular example of social imbalance can be interpreted as fueling hierarchies between characters of a certain descents and class, two alternatively defined actantial models for these three characters suggest that these seemingly opposed groups are perhaps closer to one another than is presented at first. The readings of these two novels thus demonstrate how the extent of social (im)balance in the narrative affects how hierarchies between different social groups take shape.

Both the dyadic and the triadic model of conflict provide data-driven insights into the mechanism of narrative conflict. For the representation of social groups, the models have proven to be useful in exploring and mapping out hierarchies
between characters with different demographic profiles. As was already stressed in the previous chapters, the full potential of such models lies in the integration of their statistical results with a contextualization and assessment of the results through close readings of individual works. As was shown in the close readings in this chapter, such qualitative assessments can either conform to or deviate from the observed statistical patterns. By emphasizing the interrelations between the micro and macro levels of representation, a broader insight was thus gained into how conflict co-shapes the representation of social groups in present-day Dutch literary fiction.