

Title:

**Tacit Weaponization of Historical Narratives in Adamawa State, Nigeria:
Towards a Framework and Solution for Epistemic Resilience**

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Tacit Weaponization of Historical Narratives in Adamawa State, Nigeria: Towards a Framework and Solution for Epistemic Resilience

Abstract

In Mubi North, Adamawa State, a physical roundabout bearing symbols of the Gude, Fali, and Fulani ethnic groups compels passersby to acknowledge their coexistence; this paper argues that addressing contemporary digitally-enabled conflict necessitates similar infrastructure to render invisible narratives visible. Drawing on eight in-depth interviews and three ethnicity-specific workshops, this study documents how historically accurate narratives are tacitly weaponized within “Trusted Digital Micro-Publics”, such as family WhatsApp groups and religious networks, where silence functions as assent. The findings reveal that factual stories of migration, specifically regarding origins in ‘Far Cameroon’ transmitted by trusted elders, are deployed to create social exclusion and disqualify political legitimacy, seemingly without “overt” hostility. To address this tacit violence, the paper introduces two design artifacts. First, the Tacit Score Index (TSI), which quantifies narrative weaponization through the formula $TSI = Cw \times Ts \times Ar$, integrating centrality weight, source trust, and affective resonance (defined inversely to conflict intensity: the quieter the narrative, the higher its resonance). Building on this metric, the second artefact, the Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor (DEJM) functions as a ‘digital roundabout’: a dashboard that visualizes which group’s stories dominate shared spaces and whose histories remain archived in silence. By extending epistemic injustice theory into low-visibility digital contexts and demonstrating Design Science as a pre-conflict intervention, this research establishes a framework for identifying narrative capture, positing that sustainable coexistence requires the deliberate engineering of epistemic environments that make the forgetting of plurality impossible.

Keywords: Tacit Weaponization, Trusted Digital Micro-Publics, Epistemic Injustice, Design Science Research, Narrative Conflict, Coexistence.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Quiet Before the Storm

Conflict does not announce itself. By the time violence erupts, misinformation spreads, or public polarization hardens, the epistemic groundwork has already been laid. Moral positions have stabilized. Interpretive alternatives have narrowed. And coexistence interventions arrive downstream, too late to interrupt the processes that made conflict thinkable in the first place.

Consider a WhatsApp group in Mubi North, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Family members share a story: their ancestors migrated from ‘Far Cameroon’ generations ago. The story is accurate. It is told by respected elders. No one disagrees. Over time, this narrative becomes the lens through which political legitimacy is assessed. When a candidate emerges, whose lineage lacks this “Cameroonian link”, the question arises, not in rallies or debates, but in trusted circles: “Can someone without our history truly represent us?”

The narrative never becomes hate speech. It is never fact-checked because it is ‘factually sound’. It circulates not through propaganda, but through inheritance. Yet its political consequence is as devastating as it is unmistakable: it converts belonging into a historical qualification test, deploying collective memory as a criterion of political legitimacy in precisely the pattern Liu & Hilton (2005) describe, whereby shared historical narratives become the prism through which present-day group boundaries and entitlements are judged.

This is tacit weaponization: the subtle mobilization of historically accurate narratives to construct epistemic hierarchies and foreclose political legitimacy without crossing the threshold into overt antagonism. It is invisible to every existing framework for managing conflict.

1.2 The Limits of Current Approaches

Peacebuilding and coexistence initiatives have evolved sophisticated tools: dialogue programs, intergroup contact, educational reform, and fact-checking systems. These approaches share a common assumption, that conflict is discursively available. They presume grievances are articulated, positions are named, and disagreements can be brought into open exchange (Azar, 1990; Galtung, 1969).

But what happens when conflict is pre-discursive? When moral alignment stabilizes inside trusted environments, before positions become arguable or even visible? When historical narratives achieve self-evidence not through persuasion, but through repetition in spaces where correction feels like betrayal?

This reality is met with resistance by current frameworks. As has long been observed in criticisms of deliberative and conflict-resolution models that assume discursive openness and good-faith exchange, participants in dialogue initiatives are frequently branded as irrational, extreme, or acting in bad faith when they encounter disengagement or moral intransigence (Galtung, 1969; Bar-Tal, 2007). However, political psychology research shows that this kind of resistance might be motivated reasoning and affective conditioning rather than just stubbornness (Marcus et al., 2000; Kahneman, 2011), and epistemic injustice research emphasizes how deeply ingrained interpretive frameworks influence what is initially deemed reasonable (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). This research provides an alternative diagnosis: what seems to be intransigence is often a reflection of prior epistemic conditioning. The interpretive work has already happened, in spaces designed for intimacy rather than debate.

The problem is not unwillingness to listen. It is that the epistemic conditions that make listening meaningful have already been foreclosed.

1.3 The Argument and Contribution

This paper advances a central claim: the most consequential drivers of contemporary conflict are epistemic rather than discursive, and infrastructural rather than ideological. If conflict increasingly emerges through the structure of epistemic environments, particularly within what this study terms Trusted Digital Micro-Publics (TDMPs), then intervention cannot rely solely on dialogue, fact-checking, or persuasion. It must operate at the infrastructural level.

Drawing on Design Science Research (DSR) (Hevner *et al.*, 2004; Peffers *et al.*, 2007), this study reframes coexistence as an epistemic engineering problem. Grounded in eight in-depth interviews and three ethnicity-specific workshops (Gude, Fulani, Fali) in Mubi North, it documents the mechanisms through which accurate historical narratives become tacitly weaponized. It then develops two coupled artifacts:

1. The Tacit Score Index (TSI) operationalizes narrative tacitness by integrating trust-weighted diffusion, network centrality, and affective subtlety into a single diagnostic measure. The formula $TSI = Cw \times Ts \times Ar$ captures how narratives gain political force not through volume or virality, but through quiet circulation in high-trust spaces.

2. The Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor (DEJM) visualizes narrative dominance and archival absence within trusted digital environments. Inspired by Mubi's physical roundabout, which forces visual acknowledgment of plural identities, the DEJM functions as a digital twin: a non-coercive infrastructure that restores epistemic reflexivity by rendering invisible asymmetries perceptible.

The study contributes theoretically by extending memory politics and epistemic injustice scholarship into digital micro-publics, methodologically by demonstrating Design Science as pre-conflict peacebuilding, and practically by offering a scalable framework for identifying tacit narrative capture. It shows that peace can be designed, not by adjudicating truth, but by engineering environments where plurality remains visible and reflexivity remains possible.

Existing scholarship has examined propaganda (Stanley, 2015), misinformation and correction dynamics (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010), polarization in networked publics (Bail, 2021), and narrative conflict in intractable settings (Bar-Tal, 2007). However, these frameworks typically presuppose discursive visibility, whether through falsehood, hostility, elite signaling, or overt framing. This study identifies a distinct mechanism: the tacit weaponization of historically accurate narratives within trusted digital micro-publics, where silence functions as assent and infrastructural asymmetry precedes disagreement, shaping political legitimacy before contestation ever becomes public.

This paper therefore asks: *How are historically accurate narratives tacitly weaponized within Trusted Digital Micro-Publics, and what infrastructural interventions can restore epistemic symmetry in plural societies navigating digital transformation?*

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Trusted Digital Micro-Publics (TDMPs)

TDMPs are closed or semi-closed communicative environments characterized by high relational trust, low adversariality, and strong affective resonance. Examples include family WhatsApp groups, religious study circles, and lineage-based networks. As Fisher et al. (2024) argue, these 'private' encrypted spaces increasingly dictate public political outcomes by incubating narratives away from scrutiny. In the African context, Ooko (2023) observes that such encrypted publics often supplant official media, as users migrate trust from institutions to kinship networks. Unlike public platforms where epistemic authority derives from credentials, TDMPs privilege relational standing and inherited credibility (Hardin, 2002; Levin & Cross, 2004).

Three structural features distinguish TDMPs from public discourse:

1. First, disagreement is socially costly. Challenging a narrative shared by a respected elder or family member risks relational rupture. In Mubi, participants repeatedly described this dynamic using phrases like 'everybody knows' and '*na so e be*' (it's understood to be so), markers of epistemic environments where dissent feels like betrayal.
2. Second, silence functions as tacit assent. In Mubi's Trusted Digital Micro-Publics, this is not an abstract epistemic risk but a well-known local reality: participants consistently described the absence of objection as itself a form of communal ratification, a social practice in which the failure to contest is understood as agreement. When narratives circulate without challenge, they accumulate the weight of consensus; not through persuasion but through the social architecture of the space itself. This dynamic is

corroborated by Rossini et al. (2021), whose empirical analysis of WhatsApp environments demonstrates that corrective responses are systematically suppressed in high-trust group settings, allowing unchallenged content to acquire social authority independent of its factual standing. In Mubi, this mechanism operates with particular force because the epistemic authority of the transmitter means that silence is not merely neutral; it is deferential.

3. Third, correction is interpreted as a moral affront. Because epistemic authority is relationally embedded, fact-checking or alternative interpretations are experienced not as intellectual exercise but as questioning the speaker's integrity (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). As one Fulani workshop participant stated: 'If you doubt the story, you doubt the person.'

2.2 Tacit Weaponization: The Cycle of Quiet Violence

Tacit weaponization is the subtle mobilization of historical narratives to sustain epistemic hierarchies and moral alignments beneath the threshold of overt antagonism (Bar-Tal, 2007). Unlike propaganda or hate speech, tacitly weaponized narratives:

- Need not be false: they are often historically accurate or widely accepted accounts.
- Operate through selection and emphasis rather than fabrication.
- Circulate in trusted rather than adversarial spaces.
- Achieve political force through repetition and moral framing, not incitement.
- Produce epistemic closure (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013): the gradual narrowing of what interpretations feel natural or legitimate, until alternative readings of shared history become not merely unpopular but cognitively inaccessible.

The cycle operates in four phases. First, a historically plausible narrative is transmitted by a high-trust source (elder, religious leader, family matriarch, etc.). Second, it circulates within TDMPs where social costs prevent contestation. Third, repetition transforms the narrative from claim to common sense; from 'what happened' to 'what everyone knows' (Kahneman, 2011). Fourth, this epistemic lock-in – the consolidation of interpretive frameworks to the point where anomalous evidence is automatically discounted and alternative readings become cognitively unavailable (Kuhn, 1970; Stanley, 2015) – constrains future political interpretation, making certain candidates, policies, or alliances feel inherently illegitimate.

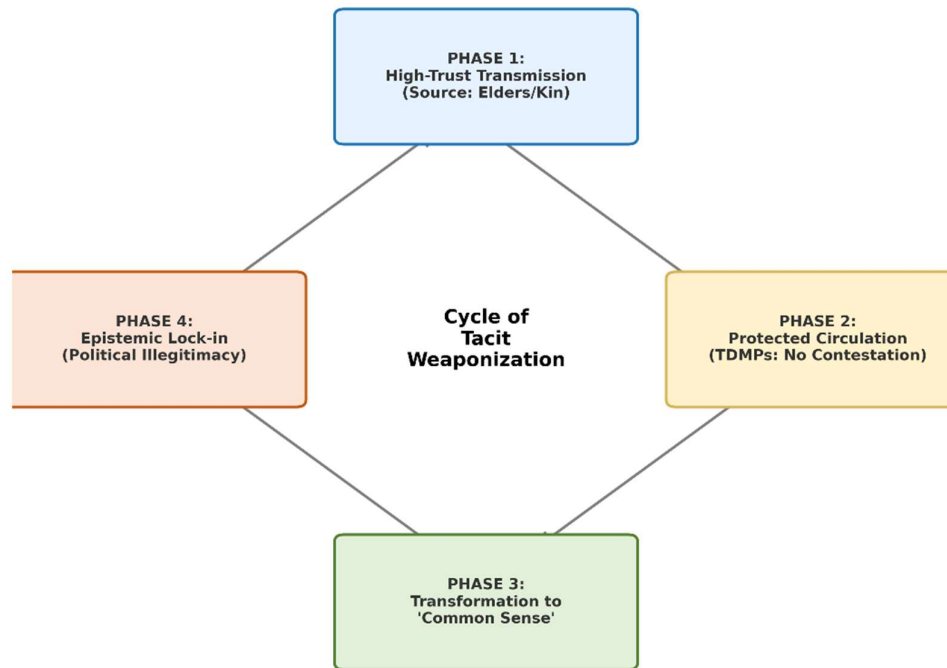


Figure 1: The Four Phases of Tacit Weaponization

Crucially, this process operates prior to polarization, prior to mobilization, and often prior to conscious intent. Its political force lies not in persuasion but in the pre-shaping of what becomes thinkable.

2.3 Digital *Epistemicide* and Archival Asymmetry

Epistemic injustice theory demonstrates how certain knowers and knowledge forms are systematically marginalized without overt silencing (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). Santos (2015) extends this to *epistemicide*, the erasure of entire ways of knowing. In digital contexts, this process accelerates through what we term archival asymmetry.

Digital infrastructures privilege searchable, standardized, and institutionally validated knowledge. Histories transmitted through writing or official documentation are algorithmically amplified. Conversely, as Mbembe (2001) notes regarding the postcolony, power operates by determining what constitutes the ‘archive’, rendering oral, local, and relationally transmitted narratives infrastructurally invisible. The silence of indigenous narratives is therefore not accidental; it is a structural reproduction of colonial epistemologies where only the ‘written’ is accorded the status of fact.

The consequence is profound. When one group’s migration story is repeatedly invoked in TDMPs while indigenous groups’ land tenure narratives remain orally transmitted but digitally absent, the asymmetry is not just representational, it is infrastructural. The TDMP becomes an echo chamber not through algorithm or filter bubble, but through the differential archival status of competing narratives.

This is why dialogue alone cannot resolve such conflicts. The problem is not that parties disagree, it is that one party’s epistemic resources are infrastructurally privileged while others are structurally erased before disagreement even becomes possible.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Rationale

This study adopts Design Science Research (DSR) as both methodology and intervention strategy (Hevner *et al.*, 2004; Peffers *et al.*, 2007). DSR is particularly suited to problems that are simultaneously theoretical and practical, where understanding emerges through the act of building solutions (Walsham, 2017). For tacit weaponization, a phenomenon that becomes visible only when infrastructure is designed to detect it, DSR transforms research into a form of epistemic intervention (Gregor & Hevner, 2013).

The study follows DSR's iterative cycle: problem identification, solution design, demonstration, and evaluation. However, it departs from traditional DSR in one critical respect, the artifacts (TSI and DEJM) are designed not to optimize efficiency, but to restore reflexivity. They function as what Jasanoff & Kim (2015) call sociotechnical imaginaries: infrastructures that make alternative futures thinkable by making current asymmetries visible.

3.2 Research Context: Why Mubi North

Mubi North Local Government Area in Adamawa State, Nigeria, provides an ideal context for studying tacit weaponization for three reasons:

First, it is ethnically plural. The Gude and Fali are recognized as indigenous groups with documented land tenure histories. The Fulani, while comprising a significant population, trace their presence to migration from neighboring Cameroon, a historical fact that is uncontested but interpretively consequential.

Second, it exhibits high institutional trust in traditional authority. Traditional rulers command tremendous epistemic authority that often exceeds that of elected officials or media institutions. This creates ideal conditions for trust-weighted narrative diffusion.

Third, it has visible symbolic infrastructure acknowledging plurality. The roundabout built by a former Local Government Area (LGA) Chairman, bearing symbols of Gude, Fali, and Fulani, functions as a physical precedent for the digital solution this study proposes.



Figure 2: The Lokuwa roundabout at Mubi, the physical precedent for this paper's digital solution.

Importantly, unlike areas plagued by active banditry, Mubi North has not experienced recurrence of violent conflict in the post-insurgency decade. This makes it an ideal site for pre-conflict intervention, the study aims to prevent epistemic lock-in, not resolve existing violence.

3.3 Data Collection: Interviews and Epistemic Provocation Workshops

Data collection occurred in two phases: in-depth interviews and ethnicity-specific workshops.

Phase 1: Eight In-Depth Interviews (December 2025)

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders representing diverse epistemic positions:

- Interview 1 (I1): Elected Local Government Official from Mubi North.
- Interview 2 (I2): Gude traditional leader (indigenous land tenure authority).
- Interview 3 (I3): Fulani community elder (narrative custodian of migratory history).
- Interview 4 (I4): Fali youth leader (perspective on indigenous identity from the younger generation).
- Interview 5 (I5): Female Fulani community mobilizer (gendered dimensions of narrative transmission).
- Interview 6 (I6): Local historian (documentary perspective on contested timelines).
- Interview 7 (I7): Indigenous Christian religious leader, (moral framing of historical claims).
- Interview 8 (I8): Diaspora member (Yola-based Fulani IT professional), (dynamics of digital transmission).

Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were conducted in participants' preferred language (Hausa, English, or Fulfulde with translation). Questions focused on how historical narratives

circulate within families and communities, who holds epistemic authority, and how digital platforms mediate remembering.

Phase 2: Three Ethnicity-Specific Workshops (December 2025 – January 2026)

Rather than convening mixed-group dialogues, we conducted separate workshops for Gude, Fulani, and Fali communities (12-15 participants each). This ethnicity-specific approach was deliberate. Mixed settings often produce performative consensus or strategic silence. Homogeneous spaces allow participants to articulate taken-for-granted assumptions without fear of offense, what Medina (2013) calls ‘epistemic friction.’

Each workshop employed interpretive provocation: participants were presented with alternative historical timelines and asked not to debate their accuracy, but to reflect on why certain narratives feel self-evident. For example, Fulani participants were shown archival evidence of Gude land tenure predating Fulani settlement and asked: ‘How does this change what we know?’ The goal was not to challenge anyone’s history, but to highlight the epistemic infrastructure that makes certain histories feel unchallengeable.

Workshops were audio-recorded and transcribed. Analysis followed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), with particular attention to moments when participants used collective pronouns (e.g. ‘we all know,’ ‘everyone understands’) or expressed discomfort with historical alternatives.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Working with contested histories in plural societies raises profound ethical questions. This study followed three principles:

First, no attempt was made to adjudicate historical truth. The study was not concerned with which narratives are accurate, but how these narratives become weaponized.

Second, participants were informed that their narratives would not be publicly challenged or corrected. The study sought to understand epistemic infrastructure, not to fact-check oral tradition.

Third, findings were shared with all participant communities. Several participants requested specific phrasings be adjusted to avoid misrepresentation, these requests were honored.

4. Findings

4.1 The Founding Narrative: Migration from ‘Far Cameroon’

The foundational narrative among Fulani participants centered on migration from ‘Far Cameroon’. This account is historically accurate, oral histories, colonial documents, and anthropological research confirm pastoral Fulani movement from Cameroon into what is now northeastern Nigeria across multiple generations.

Interview 3 (Fulani elder, age 68) described the narrative’s transmission:

“My grandfather told us, his grandfather came from the land beyond the mountain, where the Benue turns. They followed the cattle routes, as our people always have. Every elder knows this. It is not hidden. When we gather for naming ceremonies or marriages, the genealogies are recited. Everyone hears where we came from.”

[TRANSLATED]

This narrative exhibits maximum trust-weight. It is transmitted by elders during ritual occasions, verified through genealogical recitation, and uncontested within the community. Applying the TSI framework:

- Centrality Weight (Cw): High, the narrative is foundational to community identity
- Source Trust (Ts): Maximum, transmitted by genealogical authorities during sacred occasions
- Affective Resonance (Ar): High, framed as heritage, not as political claim; no explicit conflict language

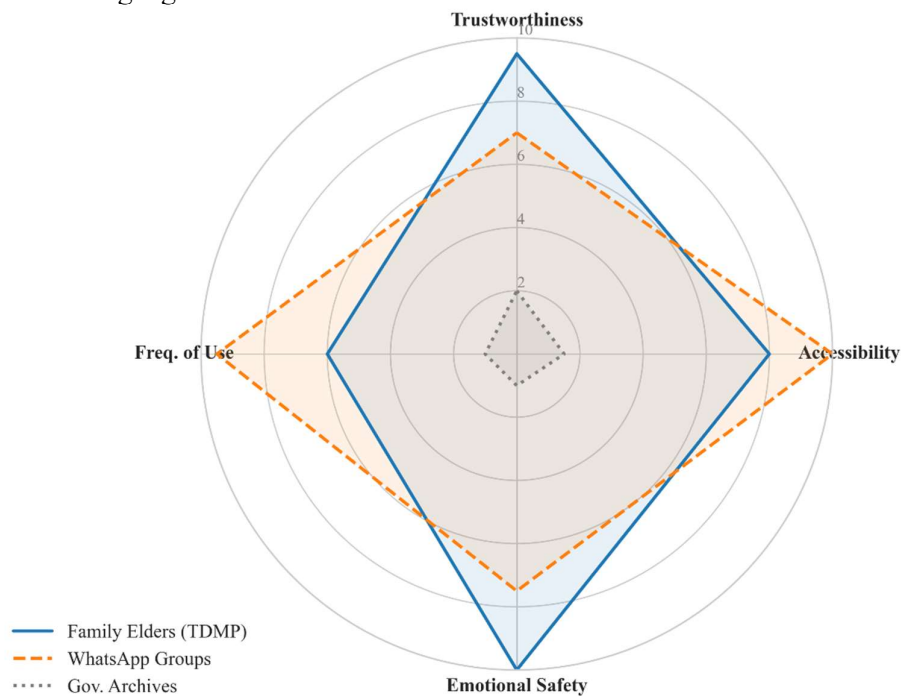


Figure 3: Epistemic Authority Topology in Mubi North

The result: a maximum Tacit Score. The narrative is historically plausible, deeply trusted, and affectively framed as cultural memory, making it invisible to standard hate-speech or misinformation detection.

4.2 From Memory to Disqualification: The ‘We All Know’ Phenomenon

The political deployment of this narrative emerged not through explicit statements, but through what participants called ‘understood things’. During Workshop 2 (Fulani participants), a discussion about political representation produced the following exchange:

Participant A: “We need leaders who understand the land.” Participant B: “Yes, those who know the struggles from the beginning.” Participant C: “Not everyone can know these things. You have to have lived it.” Researcher: “Lived what, specifically?” Participant C: [Long pause] “The migration. The settlement. The agreements with the land. We all know this history.” [TRANSLATED]

Interview 8 (Diaspora member) made the political implication explicit when asked about recent electoral controversies:

“When [name redacted] ran for office, people asked different questions. Not in public, in families. On WhatsApp. ‘Is he one of us? We don’t know where he really comes from. But his forefathers were not part of our migration, can he really represent us?’

This is tacit weaponization in operation. The Cameroonian migration narrative, uncontested, historically accurate, affectively neutral, becomes a political filter. Candidates are assessed not on policy or competence, but on genealogical alignment with ‘the journey.’ Critically, this assessment never articulates itself as exclusion. It is simply ‘understood.’

4.3 The Absent Counter-Narrative: Indigenous Land Tenure

While the Cameroonian migration narrative circulates extensively in Fulani TDMPs, Gude and Fali land tenure narratives remain structurally different in form and reach.

Interview 2 (Gude traditional leader) explained:

“Our history is in the land itself. We do not need to speak it constantly because it is visible. The stones, the burial grounds, the way we farm, these are our stories. When we (elders) gather, all of us know these things. Which one is WhatsApp? [Laughs] Everything is in front of our eyes.” [TRANSLATED]

This reveals a critical asymmetry. Indigenous land tenure is epistemically grounded in physical place, farms, stones, trees, and ancestral graves. It is transmitted through embodied practice: farming inherited plots, maintaining sacred sites, performing location-specific rituals. This form of knowledge has high local authority but low digital portability.

This distinction maps onto Assmann’s (2011) dichotomy of memory figures. The Gude rely on ‘embodied’ memory anchored in physical space — what Connerton (1989) theorizes as habit memory transmitted through bodily practice and ritual performance, and what Halbwachs (1992) characterizes as collective memory sustained by the material environment. This form of knowledge carries high local authority but low digital portability. Migration narratives, by contrast, function as portable ‘figures of memory’ (Assmann, 2011) that exist independent of location. They are transmitted through genealogical recitation, which translates seamlessly to voice notes and WhatsApp forwards. The very structure of the narrative is optimized for digital retelling, granting it a decisive transmission advantage over place-bound history.



Figure 4: Interpretive Provocation Heatmap

4.4 The Physical Roundabout: A Model for Digital Justice

The study's most striking finding emerged from Interview 1 with an elected Local Government official. When asked about coexistence initiatives, he described the construction of the town's central roundabout:

"The Chairman knew what he was doing when he built that roundabout. It has three sections, one with Gude, one with Fali, one with Fulani. Anybody who enters Mubi must see it. Whether you are driver, or passenger, you must see it. You cannot enter this town without seeing all the three tribes represented equally. This way, everyone feels like he has something (stake) in this town. Once you pass the roundabout, you will know that this town is for the Gude, Fali, and Fulani."

This physical monument provides the conceptual blueprint for the Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor. Just as the roundabout makes ethnic plurality unavoidable in physical space, the DEJM seeks to make narrative asymmetry unavoidable in digital space.

This became the study's guiding design principle: epistemic infrastructure that visualizes asymmetry without adjudicating truth.

Taken together, these findings reveal a structural epistemic problem: narratives of high trust, affective neutrality, and cultural centrality achieve maximum political force precisely because they are invisible to conventional conflict-detection systems, while the counter-narratives of indigenous communities remain structurally erased from shared digital spaces. The following design artifacts address this asymmetry directly, not by adjudicating historical truth, but by making the imbalance visible and measurable, thereby restoring the epistemic conditions under which genuine coexistence becomes possible.

5. Design Artifacts

5.1 The Tacit Score Index (TSI): Operationalizing Quiet Violence

The Tacit Score Index quantifies narrative weaponization through three weighted components:

$$TSI = Cw \times Ts \times Ar$$

Where:

Centrality Weight (Cw): Measures how foundational a narrative is to community identity. Calculated through network analysis of how frequently a narrative is referenced as justification for other claims. In Mubi, the Cameroonian migration narrative scores maximum centrality, it is the premise for dozens of downstream assertions about belonging, leadership, and land use.

Source Trust (Ts): Quantifies the epistemic authority of narrative transmitters. Operationalized through participant rankings of information sources. Traditional leaders score 8-10; family elders 7-9; elected officials 4-6; media 3-5; anonymous social media 1-3. Narratives transmitted by high-trust sources during ritual occasions receive maximum weight.

Affective Resonance (Ar): This is the paper's key theoretical innovation. Ar is defined as inversely proportional to explicit conflict language: the quieter and more heritage-

framed a narrative, the higher its political resonance score. This operationalization draws on three converging bodies of evidence. First, Mendelberg's (2001) empirical demonstration that implicit political appeals consistently outperform explicit ones precisely because they do not trigger counter-argumentation or defensiveness in recipients: the mechanism this study extends from racial politics to ethnic historiography. Second, Marcus *et al.*'s (2000) affective intelligence framework, which shows that low-threat emotional environments reduce motivated scrutiny, allowing narrative content to be absorbed rather than evaluated. Third, Nyhan & Reifler's (2010) backfire effect research, which demonstrates that correction attempts in high-trust contexts can strengthen rather than weaken the original belief. Together, these establish that political force and explicit conflict language are not positively correlated (in trusted spaces, they are inversely related). Operationalized through linguistic analysis:

- Narratives with explicit antagonism ('they invaded,' 'they stole') score low (1-3)
- Narratives with neutral historical framing ('they migrated,' 'they settled') score medium (4-7)
- Narratives framed as cultural heritage with positive affect ('our journey,' 'our ancestors' wisdom') score maximum (8-10)

Table 1: TSI Computations of Selected Narrative Statements

Narrative Category	Example Statement	Centrality (Cw) (1-10)	Source Trust (Ts) (1-10)	Resonance (Ar) (1-10)	TSI Score	Interpretation
Benign	<i>“Cattle prices have risen in the Mubi market.”</i>	4	5	5	100	Low Risk. Standard information flow. No identity framing.
Explicit Hostility	<i>“These [Outsiders] are invaders.”</i>	5	3	2	30	False Negative. Standard hate speech filters catch this, but it scores <i>low</i> on TSI because the overt conflict language reduces its “tacit” resonance.
Political “Fit”	<i>“Does the candidate truly understand our journey?”</i>	7	8	8	448	Medium Risk. A “soft” weaponization used to police group boundaries without naming the outsider.
Silence	<i>“Our history is written in the stones and the land.”</i>	2	9	9	162	Archived Silence. High <i>potential</i> force, but structurally erased from digital circulation.
Tacit Weapon	<i>“Our forefathers came from Far Cameroon.”</i>	9	9	9	729	Maximum Risk. High trust, high ubiquity, zero conflict language. Invisible to hate speech filters but creates durable exclusion.

This inversion is theoretically essential. Tacit weaponization operates precisely because it avoids antagonistic language. A polite, heritage-framed narrative that never mentions conflict can be far more politically potent than explicit hate speech, because it circulates in trusted spaces without triggering defensive responses.

Application to Mubi Data:

The Cameroonian migration narrative yields:

- $Cw = 9$ (foundational to community identity)
- $Ts = 9$ (transmitted by genealogical authorities)
- $Ar = 9$ (framed as heritage, positive affect, zero conflict language)

$TSI = 9 \times 9 \times 9 = 729$ (maximum tacit weaponization potential)

This score indicates a narrative that is deeply trusted, affectively resonant, and structurally invisible to conventional conflict detection systems, yet politically consequential in constraining who can legitimately claim belonging or leadership.

5.2 The Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor (DEJM): Visualizing Absence

The DEJM is a dashboard-based visualization system designed for deployment within TDMPs. It functions as the digital equivalent of Mubi's physical roundabout, making narrative dominance and archival absence perceptible.

Core Design Principles:

1. **Non-Adjudicative:** The system never labels narratives as 'true' or 'false.' It visualizes frequency, source trust, and affective framing, not accuracy.
2. **Comparative:** Displays multiple group narratives simultaneously, showing which achieve circulation and which remain archived in silence.
3. **Temporal:** Tracks narrative evolution over time, revealing when specific stories spike in circulation (e.g., before elections).
4. **Trust-Weighted:** Incorporates source trust scores rather than treating all voices as equivalent.

Technical Architecture:

The DEJM would operate through opt-in integration with TDMP platforms (WhatsApp groups, community forums). Participants consent to narrative tracking in exchange for reflexivity tools. The system:

- Scans messages for historical keywords and narrative structures
- Calculates TSI scores for identified narratives
- Generates weekly 'narrative balance' reports showing which group's histories dominated discussion
- Flags periods of extreme asymmetry (e.g., one group's narratives comprising >80% of circulation)

Critical Feature, The Silence Visualization:

The most powerful element is what the DEJM makes visible through absence. When Gude land tenure narratives score high on potential TSI (high centrality for that community, high source trust) but show zero circulation in shared digital spaces, the dashboard displays this as 'archived silence.' It asks: 'Why are some foundational stories never told in our shared conversations?'

This is epistemic restitution, not through adding marginalized voices (which can feel performative), but through making their infrastructural absence noticeable and undeniable.

5.3 DEJM Application Architecture and Processing Logic

While the DEJM dashboard would illustrate the output using infographics (charts, graphs, tables), two additional diagrams specify how the system would function in practice: Figure 5

presents the application’s three-layer architecture connecting social media groups to output reporting, and Figure 6 provides a step-by-step logic flowchart governing the journey from group connection to TSI infographic generation. Together they constitute the system design specification that guides prototype development.

DEJM Application Architecture:

The system is organized across three layers.

1. The Input Layer (left) aggregates messages from opt-in social media groups and community forums through a mandatory consent and privacy gateway that anonymizes all content before processing.
2. The Processing Engine (center) runs three parallel scoring modules: NLP theme extraction, source trust weighting (Ts), centrality analysis (Cw), and affective resonance scoring (Ar), feeding the TSI calculation core and a four-band risk classifier.
3. The Output Layer (right) delivers the TSI infographic, archived silence alerts, narrative balance reports, and a longitudinal trend monitor to community administrators.

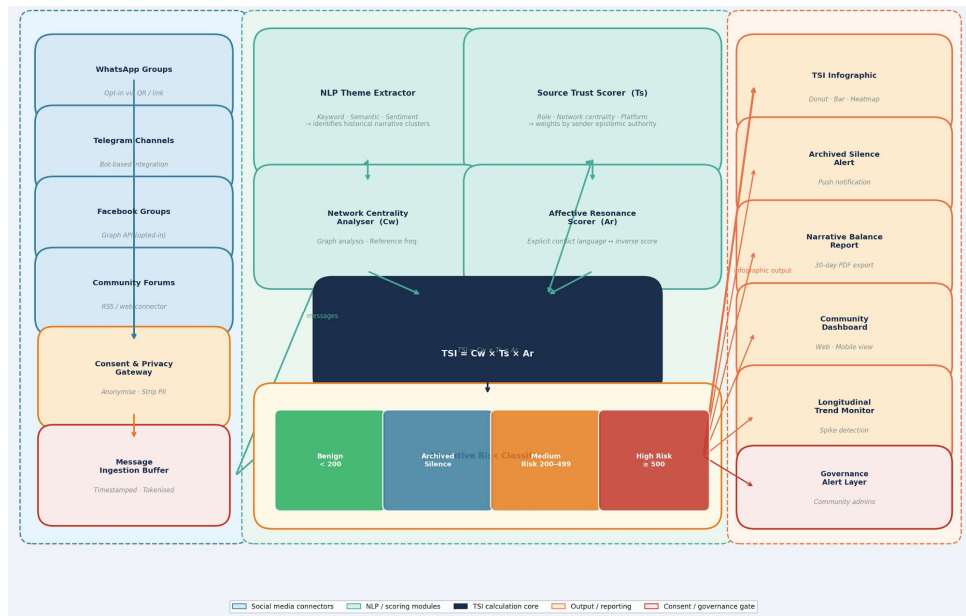


Figure 5: DEJM Application Architecture.

DEJM Processing Logic

The DEJM system follows ten steps:

- Step 1: A community administrator installs the DEJM connector.
- Step 2: participants complete the opt-in consent gate; Personally Identifying Information (PII) is stripped before any processing.
- Steps 3–4: messages are ingested, timestamped, tokenized, and scanned by the NLP narrative detector. If no historical narrative cluster is identified, the message is bypassed.

- Step 5: detected narratives are simultaneously scored on Cw, Ts, and Ar.
- Step 6: The TSI engine computes $TSI = Cw \times Ts \times Ar$ for each cluster.
- Step 7: scores are classified into four risk bands (Benign, Medium Risk, High Risk, Archived Silence).
- Steps 8–9: narrative profiles are aggregated, and an output package is generated.
- Step 10: If narrative asymmetry exceeds 80%, a governance alert is issued to community administrators.

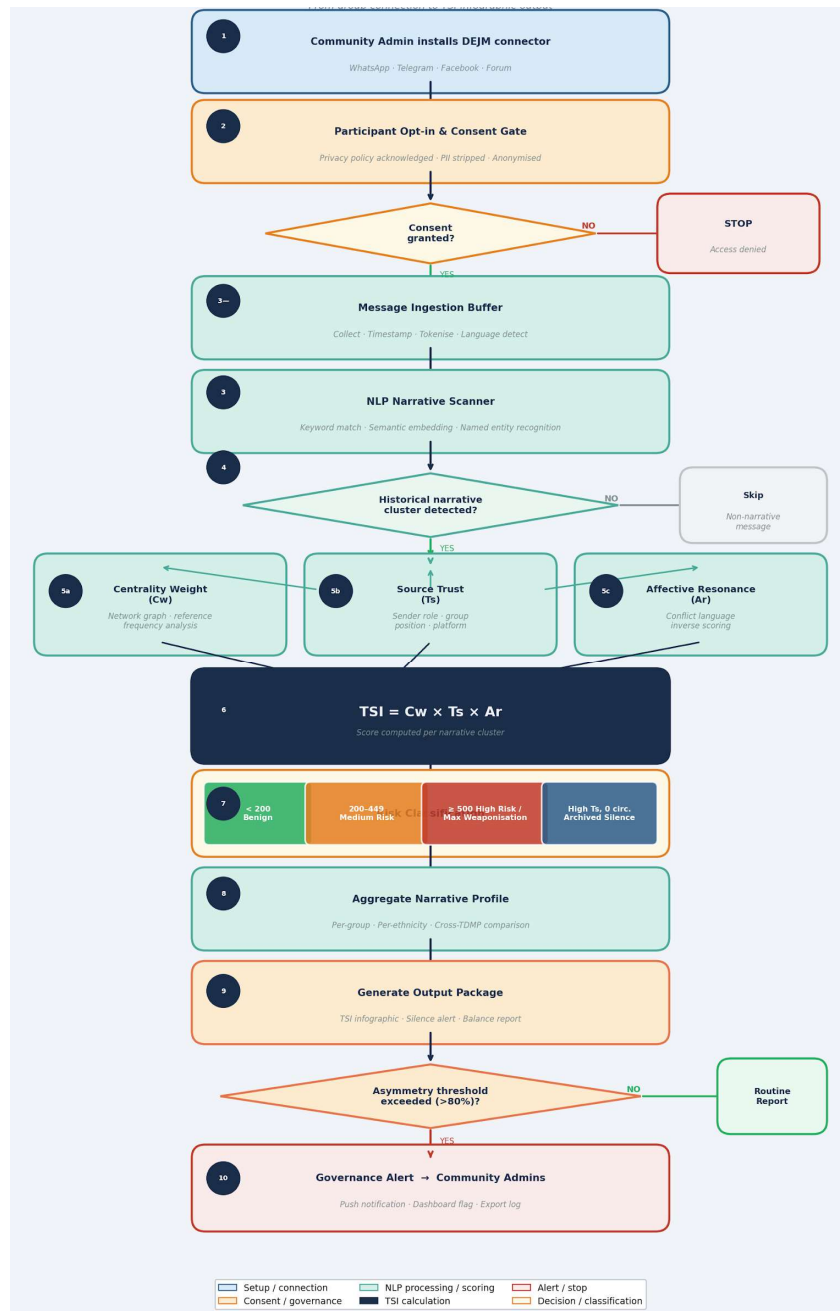


Figure 6: Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor (DEJM) Processing Logic Flowchart.

6. Discussion

6.1 Why Dialogue Cannot Solve Epistemic Infrastructure Problems

The findings reveal why conventional coexistence interventions struggle with tacit weaponization. Dialogue presumes commensurability, that parties can articulate positions and engage in reasoned exchange. But when one group's epistemic resources are structurally amplified while others are infrastructurally erased, dialogue becomes "speaking past each other with good intentions."

Consider a hypothetical dialogue session bringing together Fulani and Gude participants to discuss political representation. Fulani participants reference the Cameroonian journey as context for their leadership claims. This narrative has been circulating in their WhatsApp groups for years, reinforced through ritual recitation, achieving the status of common sense.

Gude participants, meanwhile, possess equally valid land tenure claims, but these have not circulated digitally. They exist in embodied practice, not portable narrative. When they attempt to articulate these claims in dialogue, they must perform epistemological translation on the spot: converting place-based knowledge into a story-form that matches the Fulani narrative's rhetorical structure.

The asymmetry is not in the validity of claims; both are historically grounded. It is in the infrastructural preparation that each group has undergone. One enters dialogue with a narrative refined through years of TDMP circulation. The other enters with knowledge that has never needed to justify itself until this moment. Dialogue, in such contexts, does not level the field; it reveals how unlevel it already is.

6.2 Epistemic Restitution as Peace Infrastructure

Epistemic restitution offers an alternative approach. Rather than asking 'How do we bring parties together?' it asks 'How do we restore epistemic symmetry so that meaningful exchange becomes possible?'

The DEJM implements this principle. It does not facilitate dialogue, it creates the conditions under which dialogue can be more than performance. By making narrative asymmetry visible, it transforms the taken-for-granted into the questionable. When Fulani participants see visualizations showing their migration story comprises 85% of historical references in shared WhatsApp groups, it prompts reflection: 'Why do we tell this story so often? What are we not hearing?'

Crucially, this happens without accusation. The system does not label the Cameroonian narrative as propaganda. It simply reveals its dominance, and in revealing dominance, creates space for curiosity about absence.

6.3 Scalability and Transferability

While empirically grounded in Mubi, the framework's logic extends to any context where:

1. Historical narratives circulate in trusted rather than public spaces
2. Epistemic authority derives from relational standing rather than institutional credentials
3. Different groups' knowledge systems exhibit structural asymmetries in digital portability

4. Conflict remains latent, moral positions are forming, but violence has not yet erupted

These conditions characterize numerous global contexts: diaspora communities navigating homeland politics through WhatsApp, indigenous groups contesting settler narratives in digital forums, religious communities interpreting theological tradition through social media, and polarized democracies where partisan narratives circulate in ideological echo chambers.

The TSI formula and DEJM architecture are designed for portability. The specific historical content changes, the structural mechanism remains constant.

6.4 Limitations and Ethical Concerns

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment:

First, the artifacts remain conceptual. The TSI has been tested through demonstrative evaluation (applying it to interview data), but not through longitudinal implementation. The DEJM exists as a design specification, not a deployed system. Work is ongoing to translate these concepts into functional prototypes.

Second, the study focuses exclusively on historical narratives. Other forms of tacit weaponization, religious doctrine mobilized to question citizenship, gendered narratives used to constrain political participation, and moral rumors that circulate as ‘open secrets’, remain to be examined.

Third, ethical questions surrounding consent and potential misuse require sustained attention. What prevents the DEJM from being weaponized itself, used not for reflexivity but for strategic narrative suppression? The study proposes community governance models, but implementation will require careful ethical deliberation.

Fourth, the framework assumes participants value epistemic symmetry. In contexts where dominance is the explicit goal, where one group seeks to silence others, visualization may provoke backlash rather than reflexivity. The approach is designed for latent conflict, not active suppression.

7. Conclusion: Engineering Peace Through Epistemic Infrastructure

This study began with a roundabout in Mubi, a physical monument that forces every passerby to acknowledge ethnic plurality. It ends with a proposal for its digital twin: infrastructure that makes narrative asymmetry impossible to ignore.

The core argument has been straightforward but far-reaching: contemporary conflict increasingly originates not in public discourse but in the pre-discursive epistemic work that happens within trusted digital micro-publics. Historical narratives, even when accurate, can be tacitly weaponized through selective emphasis, trust-weighted diffusion, and affective framing. By the time such narratives produce political consequences, disqualifying candidates, constraining policy options, shaping electoral outcomes, the epistemic lock-in is complete.

Conventional approaches miss this phase entirely. Dialogue, fact-checking, and contact programs operate downstream. They presume conflict is already visible, positions are already articulated, and parties are willing to engage. But when the real work has happened in WhatsApp groups, family gatherings, and religious study circles, spaces where disagreement is socially impossible, these interventions arrive too late.

The solution, this study argues, is infrastructural. If conflict emerges through epistemic architecture, then peace requires epistemic engineering. The Tacit Score Index provides diagnostic capacity, a way to quantify how narratives achieve political force not through volume but through trust, centrality, and affective quietness. The Digital Epistemic Justice Monitor provides intervention capacity, infrastructure that visualizes asymmetry without adjudicating truth, restoring reflexivity without requiring consensus.

The theoretical contribution extends across multiple domains. For memory politics scholarship, the study demonstrates how collective remembering operates differently in TDMPs than in public commemoration, trust-weighting accelerates consensus while inhibiting contestation. For epistemic injustice theory, it reveals how digital infrastructures amplify certain knowledge forms (portable narratives) while erasing others (place-based knowing). For Design Science Research, it shows how artifact-building can function as pre-conflict intervention rather than post-hoc optimization.

Methodologically, the ethnicity-specific workshop approach offers a model for studying taken-for-granted assumptions. Mixed dialogues often produce strategic silence. Homogeneous spaces, paired with interpretive provocation, allow participants to articulate what normally remains implicit, the ‘we all know’ logic that stabilizes tacit weaponization.

Practically, the framework offers pathways for plural societies navigating digital transformation. As communication increasingly shifts to encrypted micro-publics, the risk of epistemic capture grows. Communities need tools not for policing speech, which triggers defensiveness, but for visualizing what stories circulate and whose remain silent. The DEJM prototype represents one such tool, designed for community governance rather than state control.

The study’s most profound insight may be this: sustainable coexistence in the digital age cannot be secured through goodwill, dialogue, or education alone. These remain essential, but insufficient when operating within epistemic environments that systematically privilege certain narratives while erasing others. Just as cities require physical infrastructure (roads, water systems, electrical grids) to function, plural societies require epistemic infrastructure to sustain reflexivity.

Mubi’s roundabout demonstrates this principle in concrete form. It is not a peace treaty. It is not a dialogue forum. It is simply infrastructure, physical architecture that makes forgetting plurality functionally impossible. Every driver must navigate the three sections. Every pedestrian sees all three ethnic symbols.

The digital equivalent would function similarly. Not by forcing agreement, but by making asymmetry visible. Not by censoring dominant narratives, but by surfacing absent ones. Not by adjudicating historical truth, but by restoring the conditions under which multiple truths can coexist without one silencing the others.

This is the work ahead: building digital roundabouts. Designing systems that preserve what physical monuments achieve, the impossibility of forgetting that we share space, history, and future with those whose stories differ from our own.

Peace, ultimately, is not a state to be achieved but an infrastructure to be maintained. And in an age where conflict begins in encrypted spaces, that infrastructure must be deliberately, carefully, and collaboratively built.

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