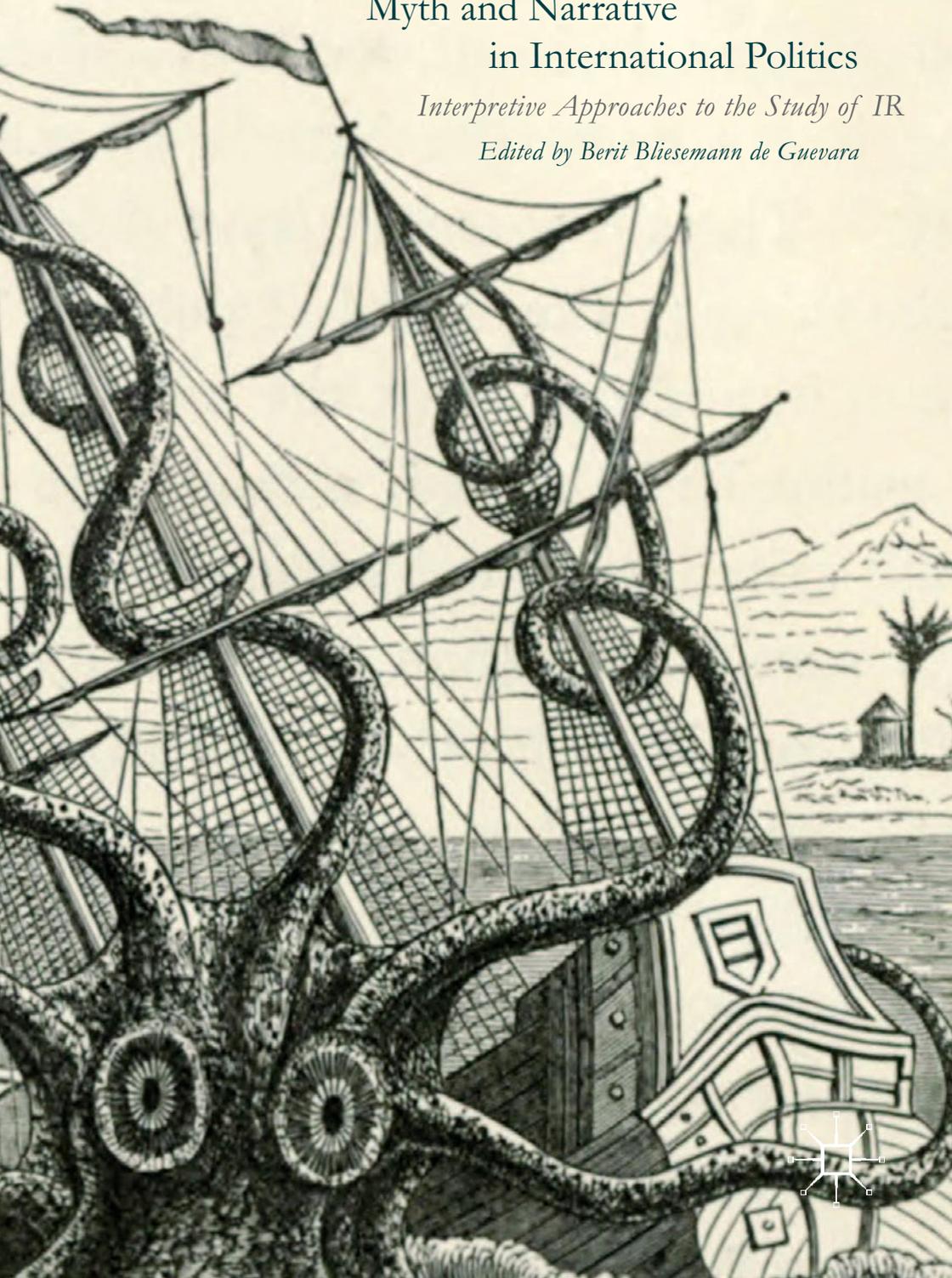


Myth and Narrative
in International Politics

Interpretive Approaches to the Study of IR

Edited by Berit Bliesemann de Guevara



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FOREWORD

Academic studies—international relations (IR), security studies, political science, public policy studies, and other social sciences—are fully taken up with articulating things, ideas, events, and so on in words. Even the renewed attention to the material aspects of the social world and visual methods for studying them has not—and cannot—displace our engagement with spoken and written language as the medium through which we communicate. Such verbalisation requires that knowing and its communication be made explicit. And yet in that focus on the explicit rendering of acts, events, ideas, thoughts, experiences, and so on another dimension of human life is disappeared: tacit knowledge and its place in human affairs.

Both the concept of tacit knowledge and Michael Polanyi's (1966) exploration of it, which are central to this realm of inquiry, remain underutilised resources in analysing the social world and, in particular, its political dimensions. So the notion that we might communicate with one another through silences perhaps seems odd, or even an oxymoron. But this is, as I have argued elsewhere and as the chapters in this book attest, precisely what political, organisational, societal, and what might be called theoretical myths enable.

Not everything worth studying is rendered explicit, in words. Legislators, other state actors, and community and social movement leaders know this. Studying such phenomena also has methodological—that is, both ontological and epistemological—implications. As Polanyi (1967, 306) put it:

The fact that we can possess knowledge that is unspoken is of course a common-place and so is the fact that we must know something yet unspoken before we can express it in words. It has been taken for granted in the philosophical analysis of language in earlier centuries, but modern positivism has tried to ignore it, on the grounds that tacit knowledge was not accessible to objective observation. The present theory of meaning [...] assigns a firm place to the inarticulate meaning of experience and shows that it is the foundation of all explicit meaning.

In collective settings such as communities, polities, and organisations, the public sharing of some ideas may become taboo when sufficient consensus has not (yet) been established to support such articulation. And yet, such ideas can still be known—tacitly, and knowledge is capable of being shared, by being communicated ‘tacitly’. That ideas can be communicated through tacit means underlies the concept of ‘dog-whistling’ in politics (e.g. Safire 2008; Haney-López 2014): a way of communicating to particular population groups while bypassing others for whom those ideas counter widely held values and norms, such that their explicit expression would incur cost of one sort or another (e.g. public sanction, derision, loss of face, etc.).

One of the key modes for the tacit communication of tacitly known ideas may usefully be called myths. As found in polities, organisations, or societies more broadly, such myths work to divert attention from what cannot, or should not, be said—if one wishes to preserve the illusion of commonality, of unity, and of collective peace. Myths are framing devices; they direct attention to certain features of their focus, while diverting it from other features. Myths block further inquiry, redirecting attention from expressions that might pose danger to the collective, because they challenge accepted views, towards things that are perceived to be more palatable, less threatening. Myths can be used to ‘explain’ states’ origins, for example, when these are contested, or to account for organisations’ operations in problematic situations. Myths can certainly be created for strategic purposes. Still, organisational and policy myths are not always intentionally designed with some strategy in mind, but emerge through less consciously explicit, intersubjective processes as people engage problematic situations. An example from my research illustrates this.

During a field study of the Israel Corporation for Community Centers (ICCC; *matnassim* in Hebrew), I found the Executive Director repeating, at the close of the annual meeting of all agency staff, the question,

‘What are our goals?’ That made sense in the first few years, I thought; but why would he still need to ask it in year 10? Wouldn’t—shouldn’t—an organisation know its goals after a decade of operations? I came to see this as an organisational myth: the ICCC had been created to implement certain national policies concerning immigrant integration, through largely non-formal educational programmes; yet the structural problems of ‘absorbing’ immigrants and the limited resources the ICCC had been given constrained their ability to demonstrate achievement of this policy goal. Paradoxically, the ritual of asking that question, annually, in the setting of that meeting, at its high point, effectively blocked further inquiry into the impossibility of the organisation achieving its mandate under the circumstances at hand (Yanow 1992, 1996; Chap. 7).

Another dimension of myths—the indeterminacy of their meaning—is illustrated, inadvertently, in another part of my work. While teaching in The Netherlands in 1994, a series of experiences opened my eyes to the extent to which the state’s Jews lived, still, in a sort of hiding from their Christian and secular Dutch neighbours, something that I could not easily reconcile with what I and other Americans ‘knew’ about the state—that it had been, and was, a great friend and protector of its Jewish residents. Trying to puzzle out where that notion came from, I hit on the role that Anne Frank’s diary—the book, but also its theatre and film versions—played in shaping American Jews’ images of Holland. The diary focused on the role of those who sustained the Frank family and others hiding from the Nazis over many months, at risk to their own lives. At the same time, however, it diverted attention from the fact that a Dutch person revealed them to the authorities, leading to the murder in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp of all but Anne’s father. I entitled my essay on this exploration ‘The Anne Frank myth’ (Yanow 2000). To my utter astonishment and horror, I discovered around 2007 that the title had been taken up by Neo-Nazis as evidence supporting their claim that the Third Reich’s ‘plot’ to eliminate the Jewish people was a mythic invention perpetrated by ... whomever. Not only is meaning indeterminate, then, but myth-creators and -users have no control over how their intended meaning(s) will be read by others.

Myth can be a useful concept not only in analysing societal, policy, and organisational settings, but also in interrogating academic discourses. There, myths enable the perpetuation of theories that have been successfully challenged by other theories and which therefore should have been relinquished, but as they continue to do some sort of persuasive explana-

tory work for some portion of that epistemic community the latter are not prepared to give them up. The example that comes most readily to hand is the continued belief in the unity of science, in falsifiability, in the possibility of objective knowledge from outside the study of human acts—all those ideas that are the heritage of logical positivist and neo-positivist thinking, which continue to bedevil various political science practices. For a current example, see Jeffery Isaac's (2015) editorial arguing against the implications of those ideas for journal practices. To take another example, to the extent that there is also a creation myth for IR, as this volume's editor argues (see Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 1), it most likely persists not only 'despite' evidence to the contrary, but because it does presumably important, or possibly even necessary, work for the discipline, perhaps including bracketing further inquiry that might reveal IR to be naked in some sense, like the emperor parading around without clothes. But as Vickers (n.d.) pointed out with respect to the emperor parading around without clothes, there are times when the crowd needs to believe that their naked ruler is fully clothed, contrary visual evidence notwithstanding.

This is also the downside of myths' work: they are a conservative enterprise, standing in the way of new thinking and social change until the collective is more ready to contemplate it and act accordingly. Consider the civil rights movement in the USA: the myth of the colour line—attributions of negative behavioural and cognitive traits to African Americans and other Americans of perceptually non-European heritage—preserved the status quo, diverting attention from social injustices and constitutional violations, and preventing change; opposition, and consensus around it, grew over time, but their articulation—which fundamentally challenged entrenched ways of doing things—entailed countless physical beatings and loss of life. Making explicit the tacit knowledge underpinning political and other myths, then, is not always without cost.

What are we to make of this book's notion that myths are very real elements of, and indeed central to, contemporary life? The idea, the very language, poses a challenge to the emotionless reason and 'objectivity' that are understood to be the hallmarks of science. Here is where the methodological orientation of interpretive inquiry comes into play, given its central tenet that 'expressive' dimensions of human experience, including myths, are as central to social and political life as rational planning and policy-making, and that these can be studied 'scientifically' even when encompassing not only 'facts', but values (e.g. Rabinow and Sullivan

1985/1979; Polkinghorne 1983; Hiley et al. 1991; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014; Bevir and Rhodes 2016).

The concept of myth has, of course, an ancient history in the study of literature. Consider the Greek and Roman mythologies, of which Edith Hamilton, for instance, wrote. Anthropologists brought a parallel concept to the study of contemporary cultures, studying, for example, the mythical traditions of the Navajos or the Hindus. As interesting as these narratives are, however, they have the effect of exoticising ‘myth’, suggesting that it is something long ago or far away. Moreover, their anthropological-literary treatment features the story character of myths. Stories and narratives and their telling are surely one form of myth. Yet the idea of myth that many of the chapters here explore is not coeval with Hamilton’s Greek and Roman myths, or the myths and mythologies of American Indian tribes that so captivated early generations of anthropologists (on one version of this disciplinary history, see Cowan et al. 1986). Those myths are clearly stories, and they were often recited on ritual or ceremonial occasions.

The sorts of myths engaged in this book—political, organisational, societal—are infrequently storied. Such myths may have no plots; no characters to be developed; no climaxes and resolutions, nor even beginnings, middles, and ends, as so much of the story-telling and narrative methods literature requires, following an Aristotelian approach (see Shenhav 2015, 14, for an argument against that definition, given that we often do not know how political ‘stories’ will end). Consider, for example, what I would posit is a societal myth well entrenched in the state where I currently live: ‘The Netherlands is a tolerant society.’ So much evidence has emerged from the morass of silence, which contradicts this reputed tolerance—from the recovery of the state’s neglected history of slavery, to the acknowledgement of its active role in helping the Nazis to round up Jews and others for transport to concentration camps and certain death, to the demonization of darker-skinned Dutch, including those from Antillean and other backgrounds, which carries over into daily life from the annual embrace of St. Nicholas’ helper *Zwarte Piet*/Black Pete—all of which contradicts this reputed tolerance. The tolerance myth, as I will call it, is a simple statement, not a story, not even an argument. It asserts a truth. And in that assertion, it stops further inquiry into, and discourse concerning, the intolerance embedded in celebrating, annually, ritually, the racialised character of the white-skinned Netherlander putting on the black-face of the slave. In this sort of analytical view of myths and the work they do for collective life, such ritualised acts—those put into practice repeatedly, on

regularised occasions—are seen as the manifestations of the ideas that their associated myths embody.

These sorts of myths can block critical reflection into aspects of social, political, or organisational life for which public consensus does not (yet) hold. A simple statement—‘Our goals are ...’—can keep inquiry at bay, thereby promoting the surface calm. Its form is neither reasoned argument nor narratively delivered story. Theoretically distancing myths not only in time and space but also in structural form work to ghettoise the concept, keeping us from seeing the work that myth can do in contemporary social, political, and organisational life and removing it from treatment in fields of study other than literature and anthropology.

Some might argue that we should get rid of myths—that they are anti-rationalist, perhaps even anti-scientific (or anti-science). This seems to me to parallel the Aristotelian or more recent Davidsonian arguments concerning metaphors: figures of speech that ‘merely’ decorate language that without them would be transparent, clear, and concise—and closer to the reasoned discourse of science. However, we do not, in fact, live in a technical-rational world, and, much like Monsieur Jourdain in Molière’s play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, we speak in metaphors all the time, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have amply demonstrated—including in our scientific writings and speakings (on this point, see e.g. Brown 1976; Gusfield 1976; McCloskey 1985, 1994; Miller 1985, 1992; Schon 1979). QED—*quod erat demonstrandum*—then, with respect to the relative commonplaceness of myths.

Why do myths persist? Because consensus concerning what the myth masks is not yet sufficient, and because of a widespread fear that ‘speaking truth to power’ (to borrow policy analyst Aaron Wildavsky’s book title) will reveal the societal cracks that belief in that myth works to plaster over. ‘Myth’ need not mean ‘false belief’ in an ideological, consciousness-raising sense. The concept has been theorised, too, in (structural-) functionalist ways, but it need not be. To ask what work myths do may serve similar ends, although that approach shifts the ontological terrain (reinterpreting and reframing the meaning of ‘function’). We need more systematic work thinking through the relationships between ‘myth’ and ‘narrative’, exploring the framing work that myths accomplish, and investigating the conceptual links and distinctions between myths and other framing devices, such as metaphors and rituals. That the concept has analytic purchase, even power, is attested to by the empirical research presented in the chapters in this book, some of which build on the approaches sketched out

here, others of which develop other lines of thought. These several chapters move the project of myth theorising and analysis further in these and other important directions. They should inspire other theorists of contemporary human life to examine the concept's utility for other settings and other avenues of inquiry.

Dvora Yanow

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Introduction: Myth and Narrative in International Politics

Berit Bliesemann de Guevara

Myths are part and parcel of contemporary international politics, and they are all around us. From the invocation of ‘the international community’ to talk of Afghanistan as a ‘graveyard of empires’ or home of ‘warlords’, and from ideas of ‘antiseptic battlefields’ in modern warfare to concepts of ‘coordination’, ‘participation’ and ‘effectiveness’ in the work of international organisations—international politics is replete with powerful narratives and commonly held beliefs that qualify as myths.

Unlike their classical Greek and Roman predecessors, whose narrative personae tended to be recruited from the exclusive circle of gods and larger-than-life heroes, modern political myths are usually less exceptional in nature. Yet, despite their seeming banality, they nevertheless constitute ‘myths’, understood by most modern theorists as either a powerful paradigmatic narrative or a deeply engrained commonly held belief (see Chap. 2).

This book explores how the theoretically informed study of myths can enhance our understanding of international politics.

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

The conceptualisation of myth has a long, complex, and contested history. The etymological and conceptual roots of myth reach back to Ancient Greece, but much of the ‘modern construction of myth’ (Von Hendy 2002) is influenced by eighteenth-century Romanticism’s rediscovery and reinvention of the concept and its subsequent adoption, adaptation, and critique in works of theology, philosophy, psychology, literature, linguistics, social anthropology, and politics [for overviews, see Flood (2013), Lincoln (1999), Scarborough (1994), Segal (2004), and Von Hendy (2002)]. Accordingly, definitions vary along lines of conceptualisations of what myth is, what it does (functions/effects), how it can be studied (methodology), and whether it should be judged as ‘ideological delusion’ or ‘necessary fiction’ (normative evaluation; Von Hendy 2002, 333–6). It may have been due to the dizzying complexity and variety of conceptualisations of myth that the concept has not resonated more widely in the study of international politics so far.

The authors in this book make a virtue of this conceptual complexity. On a theoretical and methodological level, they explore how myth-centred approaches can enhance our general understanding of international politics and world society. On an empirical level, they use these different concepts to analyse specific contemporary myths with regard to the agential-strategic, social-constructionist, and productive-performative sides of myth making and usage, as well as to myths’ ideological, naturalising, and depoliticising and/or their constitutive, enabling, and legitimising functions in different fields of international politics.

The double finding of an ideological and a constitutive side of myths runs through the book like a golden thread. This finding is not a contradiction—indeed, despite all conceptual differences and nuances, twentieth-century theories of myth in different disciplines share a general ‘persuasion that “myth” is the socially significant product of humanity’s irrepressible urge to construct meanings’ (Von Hendy 2002, 333). Ideology and constitution are, in this context, to be seen as two sides of the same coin: ‘The two parties [the esteemers and the denigrators of myth] are at odds only in their moral assessment of this product’ (Von Hendy 2002, 333).

This points to another common denominator of this book: myths are not understood as deviant exception, but as integral part of international politics and the related academic knowledge production, and they are different from dominant logocentric understandings of knowledge. In this

sense, the book challenges conventional understandings of international politics by showing how powerful narratives and commonly held beliefs provide the non-logocentric ‘glue’ for the contemporary sociopolitical order, but possibly also the ‘dissolvent’ that may help altering it. It also encourages rethinking ideas that are widely unquestioned by policy and academic communities and shows what functions and effects these commonly held beliefs have in political and academic imagination and practice. Finally, the book offers conceptual and methodological guidance on how to make sense of different myth theories and how to employ them in order to explore the powerful collective imaginations and ambiguities that underpin international politics today.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS *NOT* ABOUT

With a concept as multi-faceted and widespread in common parlance and academic study as myth, it is useful to briefly outline what this book is *not* about. In International Relations literature, myths are strikingly absent—some very notable exceptions apart (e.g. Loriaux 2008; Lynch 1999; Hobson 2012; Teschke 2003; Weber 2001). As a rhetorical device, however, the term ‘myth’ enjoys some popularity in academic book titles, where it is mainly used to denote the opposite of ‘reality’ or ‘truth’, thus often entailing notions of hollowness, (self-)deception, or outright lie.¹ What distinguishes those works from the contributions to this book is not necessarily the critical impetus that the myth-as-rhetoric connotation carries, because a large number of modern myth theories have to be understood as profound critiques of the ideological, naturalising, and depoliticising functions of myth making, but rather their lack of foundation in any myth theory. The contributions in this book are not about the ‘uncovering’ of objective ‘truths’ behind the myths of international politics, like this sort of positivist understanding of ‘myth’ would suggest. Rather, authors are interested in the productive side of powerful narratives and commonly held beliefs, which are neither true nor false but point to different, more complex relationships between *mythos* and *logos*, and how they crystallise in sociopolitical conditions. They also assume, to different degrees, that their own knowledge production about international politics is affected by, and contributes to, myth making.²

The contributions in this book are akin to studies of national myth making, but the focus is decidedly *not* on national myths or their international

dimensions. National myths have garnered much more attention than their international counterparts, most likely due to the shared origin of myth and nation in Romanticism. National political myths are ubiquitous. They are often encountered as represented in legend-like, historically simplifying, or selective stories about the founding of the state or the homeland of the nation, told around specific historical figures and events that were crucial in these processes, and re-enacted in state rituals and ceremonies on a regular basis (Bouchard 2013; Hosking and Schöpflin 1997; Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 22–4). In the United States, for instance, such foundational myths include the ‘discovery’ of America, the ‘Founding Fathers’, the USA as a ‘melting pot’, and ‘the American West’ (Paul 2014).

National myths can have international dimensions or implications, especially when they are at the heart of international disputes over contested state borders, territories, or citizenship, usually competing against contestants’ counter-myths. In the long-standing political conflict between Ukraine and Russia, for instance, a ‘myth of ethnogenesis’ of the Ukrainian people competes with the myth of a common origin of Ukrainians and Russians in an ‘Old Rus nation’ (Smith et al. 1998). The ‘1389 Battle of Kosovo’ myth at the heart of Serb national identity is another example of a foundational myth with international implications, namely in the Kosovo war and intervention in 1998–1999 (Kolstø 2005; cf. also Mertus 1999). Despite their international ramifications, however, the competing myths about Crimea and the Battle of Kosovo are first and foremost nationally confined narratives, meaningful to Ukrainians and Russians, or Serbs, respectively. On these grounds, they can easily be rejected as a sign of ‘historical revisionism’ or ‘ethnically grounded backwardness’ by Western policymakers and scholars.

Mythology at the international level, however, where interactions between states and societies are usually thought of in more rational-utilitarian, rather than cultural-ideational terms, is much harder to pin down. The contributions in this book make an effort to readjust the focus to similarly powerful, but unrecognised myths at the international level. The political myths studied here are *international* in that the groups who share these myths are border-transgressing and/or in that the myths have effects on the political conditions of world society, understood as the totality of the international sociopolitical order with all its inherent contradictions and inequalities.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS BOOK

The book is organised into three parts. Part I—*Theoretical and Methodological Foundations*—explores different theories and methods for the study of myth in international politics. *Berit Blieseemann de Guevara* develops a conceptual framework for the study of myth in international politics. The chapter gives an overview of the different myth theories drawn upon in the book, whereby it focuses on three dimensions: myths' narrative and non-narrative forms; their sources in strategic calculation or unconscious social construction; and their effects ranging from ideological delusion to necessary fiction. It then explores four different categories of sociopolitical functions of myth in politics, namely determining, enabling, naturalising, and constituting functions. The author discusses how the myth concepts pertaining to these categories can be employed to study international politics and what their respective promises and limits are. The chapter concludes on a reflexivist note about myths in the discipline of International Relations, arguing that academia's institutions and knowledge are inescapably based on myths and calling for an extension of mythographical enquiry into the ideological delusions and necessary fictions of the discipline itself (Chap. 2).

Sybille Münch explores the insights that the 'interpretive turn' in policy analysis has provided into the study of myth. Interpretive policy analysis highlights how language and discourse shape our knowledge of the social world and influence policymaking. In challenging the traditional assumption that problems are part of a pre-given neutral reality to which policymaking responds, authors have started to pay attention to argumentation and persuasion and to those elements such as narratives and myths that structure discourse. Münch shows that advocates of this post-positivist kind of research, which includes interpretive-hermeneutic and poststructuralist approaches, have been very prolific in developing conceptions of myths. She argues that, since policymaking is not restricted by national boundaries, interpretive policy analysis can also make a very valuable contribution to the study of myth in international politics (Chap. 3).

Robert Cooke strives to comprehend both the possibilities and limits of the mythographical approach to knowledge production through an exploration of its meta-theoretical conditions of possibility. The chapter questions the understanding of myths in terms of the dichotomy *mythos/logos*, in which myths have come to embody the creative fiction contrasted

with the facticity of historical narratives or the immanent experience of reality, forming the ‘other’ of logos and logocentric metaphysics. Cooke employs the philosophical contributions of Jacques Derrida and Albert Camus to argue that ‘to know’ is itself a myth that silently haunts logos and logocentric discourse. The acknowledgement of the impossibility of logocentric discourse, however, enables the potential expansion of myth analysis to all forms of knowledge. In this sense, myths are not to be excluded but embraced, since they remind us of the necessity of constant suspicious reflexivity (Chap. 4).

Based on the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu, *Catherine Goetze* suggests a post-structuralist methodology to study myth and power in world politics. She introduces Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist methodology to study myths and Bourdieu’s development of a sociological analysis of patterns of power and domination based on Lévi-Strauss’ work. She suggests that this methodology can be used to analyse contemporary myths of world politics. Goetze’s chapter retraces Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist methodology and Bourdieu’s post-structuralist critique in order to show their contributions to the analysis of power and discourse in contemporary world politics (Chap. 5).

Franziska Müller discusses qualitative approaches adequate and promising for empirical studies of myths with regard to their methodological potentials and possible caveats. She starts from the observation that, in order to study myths, the discipline of International Relations has to resolve a number of methodological questions arising both from the fuzzy nature of myths and from some long-standing methodological neglects that have pervaded the discipline. Based on epistemological and (meta-) theoretical reflections, and on an auto-ethnographic self-reflection, Müller outlines methodological demands for a mythographical research agenda with respect to: (a) myth as a concept that pervades the IR discipline, thereby creating certain narratives and monolithic dogmas; and (b) myths as an analytical and empirical focus within IR (Chap. 6).

Part II—*Empirical Explorations*—assembles eight case studies of myths in contemporary international politics. The authors use different conceptual approaches explored in the first part of the book and cover a range of different topics in international politics. In the first case study chapter, *Catherine Goetze* implements the post-structuralist methodology for the study of myth developed in Chap. 4. She starts with the observation that in many cases of armed conflict inside states, newspaper articles and scholarly work will refer to armed actors as ‘warlords’. She then deconstructs

this discourse as a contemporary myth of the international system by drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures of myths. Based on the structuralist analysis of newspaper articles as well as selected scholarly works, she shows that the warlord myth represents a strongly stereotyped narrative of violence in countries where international interventions take place (and fail to bring peace) in its syntagmatic (apparent) structure; and that it represents a strongly stereotyped narrative of the orderly function of states in the international system in its paradigmatic structure (Chap. 7).

Florian Kühn provides a concise application of Hans Blumenberg's work on myth to analyse Western interpretations of Afghanistan. In portraying historical 'facts' as myth, he shows how these are not false or correct but in a productive way shape our understanding by selecting what can be considered relevant and what is dismissed. The chapter demonstrates how myths' relative indeterminacy allows integrating incongruences, tying together historical analogies and selected real-world experiences. Myth helps structure knowledge, which Kühn illustrates using examples such as the myth of Afghanistan as 'graveyard of empires', as 'safe haven' for terrorists, and fame for Afghan 'fierce fighters'. Explaining how these myths intersect to create an image of Afghanistan taken for real, he shows how Blumenberg's ideas can be fruitfully applied to analyse contemporary politics (Chap. 8).

Katharine Millar explores the mutually implicated myths of the democratic control of the armed forces (DCAF) and militarism in international security politics. She starts from the observation that, in the post-war era, international organisations have increasingly promoted the democratic control of the armed forces in new and transitional states. As DCAF employs the language of accountability, rationality, and peace, the principle has an explicitly normative character. Utilising Foucauldian theory, Millar argues, however, that the purportedly pacific nature of DCAF is a potent policy myth, which is subtly dependent upon a secondary myth, namely militarism. The chapter examines the implication of academics and policymakers in the construction and reification of these mutually reinforcing myths. Overall, Millar argues that the discourse of militarism identifies the valorisation of violence by democratic societies as 'deviant' exceptions to the generally pacific nature of DCAF, thereby normalising the quotidian reliance of democracies upon the (potential for) political violence (Chap. 9).

Alastair Finlan explores the role of myth in contemporary warfare. Inspired by Barthes, he argues that myths are vital enabling narratives to democratic societies to legitimise and sustain military campaigns, veiling the horrors caused by war. The chapter explores three dominant myths: the antiseptic battlefield, precision killing, and killer applications/drone warfare. It frames these myths in the context of the Global War on Terror and the fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq by predominantly military forces from the United States and the United Kingdom. Finlan critically interrogates the related narratives of collateral damage, human shields, war by satnav, and remote-control killing in media and popular depictions and discusses their broader social implications and significance for the perpetuation/legitimacy of making war in the modern age (Chap. 10).

Katarzyna Kaczmarek's chapter interrogates the production of the idea of 'the international community' in the context of international statebuilding. She argues that in the conundrum of discourse and practice of statebuilding, the international community works as a political myth. This myth enables, legitimises, and shapes statebuilding practices, which, in turn, reinforce the idea of the international community. The international community becomes both an imagined whole and an agential entity. It is agential when it is equated with donors, but discourse produced by donors upholds the vision of some universal international community, which should be valued and protected. Kaczmarek relies on discourse analysis of policy documents and illustrates the argument with localised examples of statebuilding practices in Central Asia with special reference to Kyrgyzstan (Chap. 11).

Charlotte Dany and Katja Freistein challenge the idea of civil society participation as a natural part of global governance. Pointing to the crucial role of political myths that make politics pervasive and even appealing to a broad public, the chapter shows how civil society participation has been politically legitimised. A narratological analysis of pertinent documents issued by global governance fora serves to reconstruct the mythical elements of these narrations, such as the role of protagonists and the historicity of civil society participation. The social function of these mythical narratives, Dany and Freistein argue, is to render global governance, as an inherently political project, acceptable and desirable through its constant re-telling as myth (Chap. 12).

Franziska Müller and Elena Sondermann analyse myths in development cooperation and focus on the aid effectiveness discourse. Empirically, they

begin with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005 and critically examine the developmental terminologies that have been brought up in the declaration and unfolded during the follow-up process. With a focus on the High-level Forum in Busan in November 2011, where emerging (or ‘new’) donors played an important role, they ask to what extent the myths have been retold and diversified. For their analysis, the authors refer to Barthes’s structuralist understanding of myths bearing silencing, harmonising, depoliticising, or emancipatory functions as well as to the reception of political mythology in poststructuralist IR theory (Chap. 13).

Stephan Hensell analyses the coordination problem as a myth in international intervention politics, starting from the question of why coordination is widely supported but seldom implemented. Building on sociological institutionalism, he argues that the principle of coordination has become a rationalised ‘myth’ in the sense of an uncontested organisational formula. The chapter maps the multitude, or ‘Babylon’, of international and local organisations and agencies involved in international interventions, and explores their managerial difficulties in coordination. Hensell specifically draws attention to the political roots of the coordination problem and explores the ways of downplaying political conflicts through the adoption of the coordination principle in official statements and institutions. The chapter includes a case study on Albania, where donor-to-government coordination is widely endorsed in the realm of public-sector reform (Chap. 14).

Part III—*Reflections*—offers more general thoughts on the mythographical approach to the study of international politics suggested and explored in this book. *Michael Loriaux and Cecelia Lynch* revisit ‘myth’ as a word that inscribes a line of separation between the ‘provincial’ and the ‘universal’. The questions they explore are: Can that line be transcended? Can one exit the provincial and attain to the universal? In their conclusion, Loriaux and Lynch address these questions with the help of Ernst Cassirer, who answers in the affirmative; Jens Bartelson, who expresses scepticism; and R.B.J. Walker, who observes that the question itself has the effect of re-inscribing the line of separation in agonistic debate. With the aid of Stephen Toulmin, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricœur, and Jacques Derrida, the authors then ask if that line of separation can be destabilised, moved, blurred, or otherwise rendered porous, and indicate strategies that can help pursue that end (Chap. 15).

Acknowledgements The idea for this book started with a conference panel on ‘Myths and IR’, co-organised by Dr Florian P. Kühn, at the International Studies

Association (ISA) Annual Convention 2013 in San Francisco, where first drafts of some of the chapters assembled in this book were presented and discussed. In the meantime, more ‘IR mythologists’ have joined the group of colleagues contributing to this book, and a lot of work has gone into the chapters, which have all been peer-reviewed to ensure the highest quality. Thanks to all who have helped in the process from idea to ready-to-read product—it has been a fantastic experience!

NOTES

1. There are too many of these books on the market to give a comprehensive account. Sotomayor’s (2013) book on ‘the myth of the democratic peace-keeper’ may serve as an example of a valuable contribution to the literature, but one which uses the term myth only in the sense of untruth and something that needs to be debunked.
2. The question of how a researcher’s epistemological standpoint affects the study of myth is addressed in all case studies, where authors make their specific epistemological position transparent, as well as more generally in the contributions in Part I of this book.

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PART I

Theoretical and Methodological
Foundations

Myth in International Politics: Ideological Delusion and Necessary Fiction

Berit Bliesemann de Guevara

The study of myth has been a desideratum in academic explorations of international politics and studies of the discipline of International Relations (IR). Where the idea of myth has figured, it has been mostly reduced to a ‘myth-busting’ or ‘uncovering’ role of sorts. Historically, it is indeed impossible to ignore that central constitutive beliefs and narratives about international relations have been revealed to be factually wrong (Buffet and Heuser 1998; Little 2007). Notable examples include the idea of the Westphalian Peace of 1648 as the birth moment of the international system of sovereign states (Teschke 2003), or the notion that Europe is the source and centre of modern international relations (Hobson 2012). From a theory perspective, Weber (2010) has pointed out the unquestioned, unconscious ideological beliefs that make mainstream theories of IR appear to be ‘true’. In this sense, for instance, ‘the IR myth “international anarchy is the permissive cause of war” is the *apparent truth* upon which realism and, these days, neorealism, depend’ (Weber 2010, xxi, original italics). Equally, Carvalho et al. (2011) have put into question the ‘myth of 1919’, commonly represented as the ‘noble birth moment’ of the discipline of IR, arguing that it masks the ‘dark side’ of the discipline,

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that is, its racist roots and inherent Western-centrism (Vitalis 2015; cf. also Müller, Chap. 6).

By focussing either on a true/false dichotomy or on uncovering unspoken assumptions on which IR scholarship rests, these and similar studies have endeavoured to shake the very foundations of how international politics is being thought about, although so far with limited effects on disciplinary dogmas (Carvalho et al. 2011). The full potential of a mythographical approach to international politics is yet to be realised. Based on a discussion of different conceptualisations of myth, this chapter claims that mythographical approaches focussing on the ideological, naturalising, depoliticising, and the constitutive, meaning-making, and legitimising functions of myth offer substantial contributions to our understanding of the cultural side of international politics, the reproduction and contestation of the international sociopolitical order, and the academic knowledge produced about it. The study of myth contributes a perspective to research in/about IR that decidedly avoids dead-ends of abstract philosophical understandings of ‘science’ and ‘truth’ and instead provides historical and sociological pathways to international politics and the IR discipline’s own role in the world (cf. Hamati-Ataya 2016; Elias 1978). Mythological approaches to IR are able to take account of the ambiguities of politics and its academic exploration, which cannot be decided through abstract philosophical definition (cf. Cooke, Chap. 4).

Providing a framework for the contributions to this book, this chapter addresses the following questions: How can myth concepts be typologised regarding the sociopolitical functions of myth? How can we extend the study of myth to international politics through these types of concepts? And what does a mythographical research agenda mean for the academic discipline of IR? These questions are discussed on the basis of the myth concepts drawn upon in this book by Roland Barthes, Hans Blumenberg, Chiara Bottici, Ernst Cassirer, Jacques Derrida, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Claude Lévi-Strauss, John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, Georges Sorel, and Dvora Yanow.¹

The first section discusses conceptualisations of myth through the exploration of different myth theories. It concludes that there are roughly four categories of conceptualisations of ‘myth’ that can inspire mythographical studies of the powerful imaginations that drive international politics and the ills that beleague it. These four categories differ according to the sociopolitical functions they ascribe to myth, which can be determining,

enabling, naturalising, or constituting. Based on this categorisation, the second section discusses contributions that myth concepts enable in studying international politics. In the final section, the chapter concludes on a reflexivist note about myth in the ‘ivory tower’ itself. It argues that academic institutions and knowledge are inescapably based on myths and calls for an extension of mythographical enquiry into the ideological delusions and necessary fictions of the IR discipline itself.

CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF MYTH

Those looking for an authoritative definition of myth in the related literature, which spans a wide range of disciplines and epochs, will be disappointed. There is an absence of a common denominator tying the universe of definitions together, apart perhaps from a broadly conceived ‘persuasion that “myth” is the socially significant product of humanity’s irrepresible urge to construct meaning’ (Von Hendy 2002, 333). This is certainly due to the different contexts in which myth concepts have been invoked since, as Bottici (2007, 4) suggests based on Cassirer, ‘[m]yth...is a sort of enchanted mirror in which scholars have found the objects with which each is most familiar’.

One obvious starting point to systematise myth conceptualisations is the connection between myth and narration. Some theorists share the idea of myth as narrative; however, few look at stories in a purely narrative-analytical sense. For others, narratives do not play an explicit role. Instead of focussing exclusively on the non-/narrative form of myth, I use two additional aspects to map conceptualisations of ‘myth’: (1) the *sources of myth*, which oscillate between strategy and social construction, and (2) the *performative effects of myth*, which range from ‘ideological delusion’ to ‘necessary fiction’ (Von Hendy 2002, 333–6).² These two dimensions are important because they reside at the heart of the debate about the sociopolitical functions of myth. I start by discussing the connections between myth and narrative before turning to theories of myth as structure and sign system, the role of powerful images and (counter-) myths in sociopolitical change, myth and critique in political philosophy, the interplay of myth and societal values in organisations, and finally, the pervasiveness of myth in knowledge. The results of this discussion are summarised in Fig. 2.1.

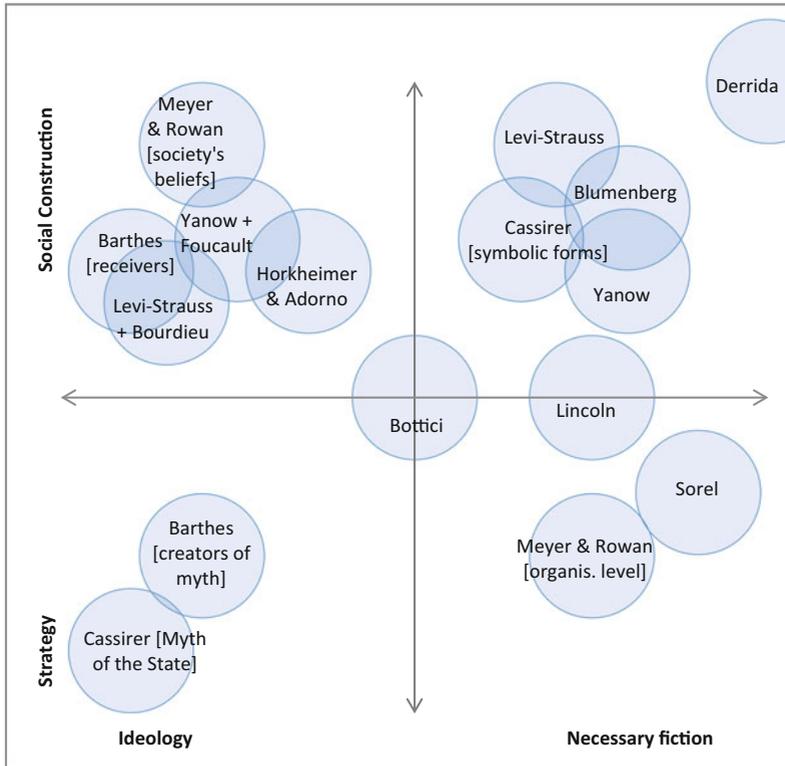


Fig. 2.1 The Conceptualisations of ‘myth’³.

Myth and Narrative

Following from Plato’s philosophy and later folkloristic studies, myths are often understood to be stories about significant events of the past, present, or future presented in the form of a *narrative* or story that involves specific characters (actants, *dramatis personae*); consists of a beginning, a middle and an end; and is structured by a specific plot (cf. Segal 2004, 4–6; Flood 2013, loc 860; Lincoln 1989, 24; Gabriel 2004; Münch, Chap. 3).⁴ Through the act of emplotment, a narrative “grasps together” and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered

events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole' (Ricoeur 1984, preface).⁵ Making use of the differentiation between standard forms of emplotment in the Western literary tradition (romance, comedy, satire, tragedy), White (1973) has famously used a narrative approach in order to explain how historiography makes sense of events through plots that resonate with its (Western) audience. In analogy, for a narrative approach to the study of political myth, the emplotment of discrete events and actions into a significant story and the cultural repertoires such emplotment draws upon are a central focus of exploration (cf. Hall 2006).⁶

For some authors, such as Midgley, metaphorical concepts, like the mechanistic imagery of the clockwork, are more important in myth than emplotment:

They are living parts of powerful myths—imaginative patterns that we all take for granted—ongoing dramas inside which we live our lives. These patterns shape the mental maps that we refer to when we want to place something. [...] They are the matrix of thought, the background that shapes our mental habits. They decide what we think important and what we ignore. They provide the tools with which we organise the mass of incoming data (Midgley 2004, Chap. 1).

For Lincoln, the decisive characteristic of myth is that it is a narrative that not only claims truth and credibility (which 'history' does, too) but also disposes of unquestioned authority. Myth is then 'a narrative...for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth, but what is more, to the status of *paradigmatic* truth' (Lincoln 1989, 24, original italics). In this sense myths stabilise social patterns between people, maintaining 'society in its regular and accustomed forms' but, as we shall discuss below, myths can also help 'those agitating for sociopolitical change' (Lincoln 1989, 25).

Where narrative-focused approaches to the study of myth are used, such as in many interpretive policy analysis works, they have contributed powerful insights into the cultural and social constitution of politics: how an issue comes to be seen as political problem, how certain versions of 'problems', 'causes', and 'solutions' come to resonate culturally with their audiences, and which tangible effects these understandings have. Here, myths are one of the structuring elements of broader discourses which construct political problems and legitimate policy solutions (Münch,

Chap. 3). Cecelia Lynch (1999), for instance, has used an interpretive approach to critique dominant mythological narratives about peace movements in the interwar period. She shows that, while these narratives maintain that interwar peace movements are to be blamed for appeasement in Britain and isolationism in the USA, and hence for world war, they are so compelling not because they reflect historical truths but because they are incomplete and analytically confused. Based on an in-depth historical study, Lynch offers an alternative narrative about interwar peace movements' social agency and normative influence, capturing rather their constitutive enabling role in building the United Nations (cf. also Loriaux and Lynch, Chap. 15).

Some authors connect the narrative approach to myth more explicitly to sentiment evocation (Lincoln 1989, 8–11)⁷ and the formation of subjectivities in order to explain social effects. Representatives of the poststructuralist Essex School, for example, point to different beatific or horrific types of narratives in order to analyse how dominant social practices and regimes succeed in veiling the contingency and inequality of social relations. Under the label 'fantasmatic logic', they show how narratives teach us what to desire, thus creating ideological coherence and concealing that existing social relations are of a non-necessary character (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth and Griggs 2012; in this book see Münch, Chap. 3; Dany and Freistein, Chap. 12). For example, Glynos discusses how 'fantasmatically structured desires' help sustain unequal or exploitative work relations and practices through 'the prospect of big profits, generous pay packets, career advancement, consumption of prize commodities, and hobbies' (Glynos 2008, 11).

A focus on the narrative side of myths can illuminate *why* specific socio-political conditions prevail by looking at how certain understandings and beliefs come into being, gain traction, and ultimately even appear to be desirable.

Meaning, Significance, and Cultural Socialisation

Among the theorists used in this book, *Chiara Bottici* presents the most conceptually open, narrative-centred definition of myth as the 'work on a common narrative by which the members of a social group (or society) provide significance to their...experience and deeds' (2007, 14). In order to qualify as *political* myth, the narrative has to 'affect[s] the specific political conditions in which this group operates' (Bottici 2007, 179);

that is, the way a narrative is ‘used’ or ‘worked on’ under the conditions of the specific situation makes it political and also decides on whether it is a form of ideological regression or a means of progressive social imagination (Bottici 2007, 129, 180f.).

What distinguishes myth from other narrative forms, according to Bottici, is that it creates ‘significance’ for those involved in its reproduction, whereby ‘significance’ denotes what ‘brings things closer to us’, being located between mere everyday questions of ‘meaning’ and profound religious questions of ‘sense of being’ (Bottici 2007, 125). Being part of the human strife for ‘significance’, a myth is therefore ‘not a single narrative that is given once and for all, but is a process, a process of continual work on a basic narrative pattern that changes according to the circumstances’ (Bottici and Challand 2006, 318).⁸ With reference to Elias and Scotson (2008 [1965]), one should add that significance-creating narratives or myths, while bringing things closer to the group sharing them, usually have the downside of driving people of different groups apart. For example, Bottici and Challand (2006) analyse the ‘clash of civilizations’ as a modern political myth with an old narrative core, born out of people’s anxieties about challenges to US power, and show how the work on this myth has created very tangible cognitive, practical and aesthetic-emotional effects in international politics. Similarly, Kaczmarek (Chap. 11) traces ‘the international community’ as a central myth legitimising and, at the same time, ‘being worked on’ through the international politics of statebuilding.

The idea of myth as ongoing process of significance creation through narration, a constant ‘work on myth’, derives from *Hans Blumenberg’s* book of the same title.⁹ Blumenberg distinguishes between work *of* myth (its function) and work *on* myth (its actualisation over time). The basic function of myth consists in naming the unknown and explaining the inexplicable—in ‘converting the numinous indeterminacy into nominal determinacy’ (Blumenberg 1979, 32), thereby providing orientation in the world (Blumenberg 1979, 11–12, 40–67) and ‘interposing a merciful veil of explanation between humankind and its dread of the unknown’ (Von Hendy 2002, 321). Myth is thus understood as a product of logos (cf. Kühn, Chap. 8).

Blumenberg defines myths as ‘stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation’ (1979, 40). The fundamental significance of their narrative core is what makes myths survive, while their variation

stems from alternative versions created through the ‘work on myth’ over time. While we cannot know myths’ very origins since they lie before our historical time, we can study how myths have been or are being ‘worked on’ (Blumenberg 1979, 68).

In this latter sense, myth is flexible and therefore antithetical to dogma (Blumenberg 1979, Chap. III); yet myth can transform into dogma when it ‘succeeds in inducing widespread notional assent’ (Von Hendy 2002, 216). Von Hendy (2002, 325) sees in this juxtaposition of myth and dogma Blumenberg’s main contribution to understanding ‘the issue of how to evaluate humanity’s double-edged power to construct the fictions by which it lives’, namely myths’ capacity to be both necessary fiction, providing explanations about the world, and ideological delusion, veiling the radical contingency of our sociopolitical conditions. While Blumenberg’s concept is non-political, it is in this ‘double-edged power’ that its value for a study of *political* myths may lie.

A second major value of Blumenberg’s theory is its usefulness as social(isation) theory, since it shows that,

“work on” myth in the modern West is a matter of nothing more mysterious than intertextual allusion inspired by the cultural prestige of the stories already most impressively entrenched. Here is a *social* explanation [...]. Certain traditional stories strike us as peculiarly meaningful and moving for the good reason that we have been subliminally conditioned, if not actually trained, to experience them thus (Von Hendy 2002, 326, original italics).

Referring to the example of international intervention in Afghanistan, Kühn (Chap. 8) shows how myths, understood in Blumenberg’s sense as such meaningful assumptions about reality that need not be questioned, coalesce in the process of historiography with other forms of (reasonable) knowledge in indistinguishable ways, providing the truth base for entrenched understandings of ‘the other’ and ‘the problem’—regardless of their often ‘high phantasy’ content—, and building the basis for the formulation of international politics.

Myths as Hidden Paradigmatic Structure or System of Signs

Turning to social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and semiotician Roland Barthes, we leave the centrality of a narrative plot for myth concepts behind. Even though Lévi-Strauss finds his material in stories collected by

anthropologists in non-European societies, for him the essence of myth is not to be found in the plot, but in an underlying structure that the mythographer needs to unearth. And while Barthes looks at everyday representations and stories as aspects of mass culture, he is not interested in the stories as such but in uncovering the ways ‘social stereotypes [are] passed off as natural, unmasking “what-goes-without-saying” as an ideological imposition’ (Culler 1983, 23). What ties these quite different approaches together is their authors’ interest in uncovering the underlying mechanisms of *how* myths work (cf. Segal 1996).

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1978) assumes that what surfaces in oral or written stories are only elements of myth, since for him a myth is made up of the totality of a theme’s variants. He is not interested in the chronological order of the plot (syntagmatic structure) but in the underlying structures that appear when a myth is studied as a system of stories (paradigmatic structure)—understood as an unconscious form of human classification ‘subject to laws of thought but on a level unknown to its utterers’ (Von Hendy 2002, 234; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1978, Chap. 2). To study the paradigmatic structure of myth, Lévi-Strauss develops a complex classificatory system of pairs of oppositions, which are ‘resolved’ by myth ‘by providing either a mediating middle term or an analogous, but more easily resolved, contradiction’ (Segal 2004, 114; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1955; Leach 1970, Chap. 4). The fundamental contradiction the opposites can be reduced to in this perspective is ‘nature’ (man as animal) versus ‘culture’ (man as human being) as the fundamental binary at the heart of humans’ encounter with the world (Segal 2004, 114–15; Leach 1970, Chap. 3). For Lévi-Strauss, myths are not only made up of binary pairs but they themselves are also mirrored by opposite myths, meaning that a study of the entirety of myths provides us with a highly orderly and intellectual understanding of the world through what other anthropologists have classified as ‘primitive’ stories or beliefs.

While the opening up of myth to scientific study is perhaps Lévi-Strauss’s biggest achievement, there is nothing inherently political about his concept. It is only when his structuralist approach to myth is read through theories that point out the positionality of those who invoke certain myths, like Pierre Bourdieu showed in his critique of Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, that a discussion of power and domination can be brought in to reveal ideological biases through this structuralist method. Goetze (Chap. 5) shows how a combination of Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu’s works can be used to analyse central myths in international politics, and she

employs this methodology to study the myth of the ‘warlord’ and its hidden mirror, the myth of the ‘state’ (Chap. 6).

In contrast to Levi-Strauss’s value-neutral approach to myth, which needs to be harnessed to be able to uncover ideological assumptions, for *Roland Barthes* ideology is the essence of myth.¹⁰ In his early semiotic work, myth is ‘a type of speech’, ‘a system of communication’, ‘a message’, and ‘a mode of signification, a form’ (2013 [1957], 217). Based on the semiological core principle of a relation between an empty signifier and something that is signified, which together create meaning as a sign, Barthes holds that

myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it *is a second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second (2013 [1957], 223).

Barthes uses the terms form (signifier of myth), concept (signified of myth), and signification (message of myth) to describe the positions in this second-order semiological system. Important for Barthes’s concept is that the signifier of myth is ambiguous, since it is both the sign of the first-order system and thus full of meaning, *and* the signifier (form) of the second-order system and thus seemingly ‘empty’. In this way, a myth deforms or alienates the meaning of the original sign by building it into a new semiological system and veiling its historical coming-into-being.

Barthes gives the example of a magazine cover of *Paris-Match* that shows a young Black soldier wearing a French uniform and giving the military salute while looking at the French national flag. In the second-order system, the black soldier is the seemingly ‘empty signifier’ of French nationalism, exemplifying all French soldiers and rendering this a normal scene in which the problematic history of colonialism disappears in an image ‘that France is a great empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, serve faithfully under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal this young black shows in serving his so-called oppressors’ (Barthes 2013 [1957], 225). This is the purified, innocent myth. As sign of the first-order system, however, the black French soldier is already ‘full of meaning’, symbolising French colonial history and inequalities in contemporary French society; this meaning, however, is diluted in the myth (Barthes 2013 [1957], 228–9; cf. Culler, Chap. 3).

For Barthes (2013 [1957], 240), this deformation of meaning is the ‘very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature’, it naturalises what is essentially historical and thus ideological. It is in this sense that Barthes also speaks of myth as depoliticised, ‘stolen language’, as ‘speech *stolen and restored*’ (2013 [1957], 236, original italics, 258). The ideology Barthes detects in ‘myth today’ is that of (French) bourgeois society during a particular period of time, shaped by modernist notions of a monolithic, progressive society with mass-produced pleasures right at hand, where myths are constantly created in manifold forms by ideologically biased ‘producers of myth’—journalists and other creators of everyday mass-cultural artefacts—and unconsciously and uncritically consumed by the mass of ‘readers of myth’. Mythography thus becomes a means for leftist social critique and the mythographer its main bearer. Although Barthes concedes that there can be ‘myth on the Left’, overall he sees the Left as being rather immune: ‘[t]he bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; Revolution announces itself openly as Revolution and thereby abolishes myth’ (Barthes 2013 [1957], 259). While myth is defined as depoliticised speech, the language of the Left/revolution is seen as political and non-mythical—an obvious weak point in Barthes’s concept given the deep implications of the West-European Left in its own progress mythology. Barthes thus employs a Marxian understanding of ideology as opposed to other possible modes of thought (science, knowledge, consciousness, revolution) through which ‘outside’ critique and demystification are possible (Lincoln 1989, 5–7).

Powerful Images, Counter-Myths and Sociopolitical Change

In this last assumption, Barthes’s myth concept is diametrically opposed to that of French syndicalist *Georges Sorel*, for whom myth ‘serves not to bolster society but to topple it’ (Segal 2004, 128), or as Sorel writes in a letter to Daniel Halévy, ‘contemporary myths lead men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things’ (Sorel 2004 [1908], 29). Myth is here a form of progress, a moving force of history, in that ‘the action engaged in by human beings in big social movements cannot be explained without powerful images such as myths: the more dramatic the action, the more powerful these images’ (Bottici 2007, 160). The power of myths comes from the ‘intuitive’—internal and empathetic—knowledge and understanding they enable, and shows itself in that

‘those who live in the world of myths are “secure from all refutation” and cannot be discouraged’ (Jennings in Sorel 2004 [1908], xiii–xiv).

It is not important which elements the myth is made up of in detail or whether it ultimately materialises: ‘Myths must be judged as a means of acting on the present; all discussion of the method of applying them as future history is devoid of sense. *It is the myth in its entirety which is alone important*’ (Sorel 2004 [1908], 116–17, original italics). What counts is that, ‘[i]t is only because people taking part in big social movements can represent their action as an event within a narrative that assures the triumph of their cause that they engage in such actions’ (Bottici 2007, 161; cf. also Shantz 2000; Münch, Chap. 3). Whether it be Greenpeace’s belief in the possibility of ‘protecting the earth’ or the peace movement’s ultimate goal of achieving ‘world peace’, these ideas and the narratives into which they are embedded provide a fiction of a better future, based upon which members of the movements can act in the present (cf. Cooke, Chap. 4, on the notion of hope). Among the concepts discussed here, Sorel’s reflections represent perhaps the purest form of myth as strategically formulated, socially shared and fervently believed ‘necessary fiction’ in the service of a greater cause.

Underscoring this agential understanding of myth making and remaking, Lincoln (1989, 25–37) specifies three ways in which myths—authoritative narratives representing paradigmatic truths—can effect sociopolitical change. First, actors can employ new or counter-myths to ‘contest the authority or credibility of a given myth, reducing it to the status of history or legend and thereby deprive it of the capacity to continually reconstruct accustomed social forms’. Second, actors ‘can attempt to invest a history, legend, or even a fable with authority and credibility, [...] and thereby make of it an instrument with which to construct novel social forms’. Third, actors ‘can advance novel lines of interpretation for an established myth [...] and thereby change the nature of the sentiments (and the society) it evokes’ (Lincoln 1989, 25; for illustrative examples, see Lincoln 1989, Chap. 2). Read through Sorel or Lincoln, myths can become instrumental and enabling in different ways in evoking sociopolitical change.

An academic example for this, perhaps, is Michael Loriaux’s (2008) study of the referential power of the ‘Rhineland frontier’ as a myth of place that has haunted the European Union in its attempt to generate legitimacy amongst its citizens. Loriaux argues that, ‘EU debate, from the beginning, has occurred within a linguistic framework of named spaces, named peoples,

and the “naturalness” of the frontiers that separate them. This discursive frame has had the effect of hiding, or of distracting deliberation from, European Union’s original purpose’ (Loriaux 2008, 2). The study deconstructs the EU’s mythical references of place in order to reveal ‘the contours of a Europe that is not simply about using markets to tame frontiers, but about deconstructing frontiers so as to bring to light a civilizational space that is, like daily life in today’s Europe, intensely urban, cosmopolitan, multilingual, and less hierarchical than in the past’ (Loriaux 2008, 2). In this sense, Loriaux’s work pursues an enabling and constitutive, in addition to a deconstructing aim (cf. also Loriaux and Lynch, Chap. 15).

Political Philosophy and Critique

Other important scholars who like Barthes are closely associated with an ideology-critical conceptualisation of myth are political philosophers Cassirer, and Horkheimer and Adorno.

Ernst Cassirer represents the unique case of a theorist whose evaluation of myth changed drastically from his early writings on symbolic forms to his posthumously published *The Myth of the State*. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1953 [1923], 1955 [1925], 1957 [1929]), Cassirer is interested in the evolution of human thought. Man is seen as *animal symbolicum*, since he cannot grasp the world immediately but only through different ‘symbolic forms’ that mediate between him and reality (cf. also Elias 2011). Myth is an early, primitive, pre-logical symbolic form; other species of the same genre are language, art, poetry, history, and science. All these forms objectify reality. What distinguishes myth on one pole from science on the other is that myth intuitively objectifies emotions (Cassirer 1955 [1925], part II), while science is the objectification of analytic reasoning and therefore seen to be on a higher level. ‘Indeed’, as Cassirer (1955 [1925], xiii) suggests, ‘the history of philosophy as a scientific discipline can be regarded as a single continuous effort to effect a separation and liberation from myth.’¹¹

Cassirer’s judgment of the harnessing of myth in the modern civilised West changes dramatically with the experience of the role of modern political myth in Nazi Germany, which is the topic of *The Myth of the State* (1967 [1946]). Here, myth is an irrational force that surfaces in times of crisis, when people are more prone to make sense of these unplanned conditions through irrational symbolic forms, as myth ‘is always there, lurking

in the dark, waiting for its hour and opportunity' (Cassirer 1967 [1946], 280). What characterises modern political myths in this reading is that,

here we find myth made according to plan. [...] [The new political myths] are artificial things fabricated by very skilful and cunning artisans. It has been reserved for the twentieth century, our own great technical age, to develop a new technique of myth. Henceforth myths can be manufactured in the same sense and according to the same methods as any other modern weapon—as machine guns or airplanes (Cassirer 1967 [1946], 282).

Modern politicians as the manufacturers of modern political myth 'fulfil the functions that, in traditional societies, were performed by the *homo magus* and the *homo divinans*' (Bottici and Challand 2006, 321), by employing techniques such as the magical use of words, the use of rituals, and the recourse to prophecy (Cassirer 1967 [1946], Chap. XVIII; cf. Klemperer 2006 [1957]). Understood in this way, myth amounts here most strongly to manufactured (strategic) totalitarian ideology.

While for Cassirer the totalitarian resort to myth is a regression and thus an exception in the process of enlightenment confined to times of crisis, for *Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* 'myth' and 'enlightenment' build the very core of the permanent struggle of modernity, as expressed in their two dialectically related theses: 'myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973 [1944], xvi). Reconstructed out of the context of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "[m]yth" signifies, approximately, any form of oppressive belief or cultural standard that creates a despairing sense of fatality' (Von Hendy 2002, 294). Classical myth, as a form of understanding the world 'before' philosophy, 'is already enlightenment' because it 'intended report, naming, the narration of the Beginning; but also presentation, confirmation, explanation' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973 [1944], 8). Mythical narration thus articulates a will to entrench the world in a binding, god-made order, which transforms what is unfathomable to men into something intelligible, reducing our fear of the unknown. In this sense, myth is enlightenment, irrationality is reason (cf. Cooke, Chap. 4). At the same time, however, the binding, god-made order also appears unrelenting and unalterable to the individual (Hetzl 2011, 391).

It is the seeming fatality and irreversibility present in myth, which for Horkheimer and Adorno also characterises the disenchanting world of enlightenment, where reason reverts to irrationality and violence (cf. Cooke,

Chap. 4). The highly scientific, positivist myth of facticity creates new conditions of coercion, in which societal organisation appears imperative rather than contingent. ‘Positivism’ here means broadly

a cognitive tendency, which dominates the worldview of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This tendency is characterised by an extreme scientific trustfulness: all major conundrums of humanity could ultimately be solved through scientific methodology, and in the long term scientific progress would also solve the practical problems of humanity (Hetzel 2011, 392; translation BBdG; cf. also Midgley 2004).

It is in the sense of this unrelenting and unalterable positivist worldview that ‘enlightenment reverts to mythology’: to ‘hegemonic identity-thinking that will tolerate no thinking-otherwise’ (Von Hendy 2002, 297). Only critical thinking can, for Horkheimer and Adorno, keep enlightenment flexible and humane.

Organisations and Societal Values

In their critique of the myth of positivism, some core ideas of Frankfurt School representatives Horkheimer and Adorno resonate surprisingly closely, albeit in a completely different theoretical context, with the myth concept developed within the Stanford School of international sociology. For its representatives *John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan* myths in modern societies have ‘two key properties’:

First, they are rationalized and impersonal prescriptions that identify various social purposes as technical ones and specify in a rulelike way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally. Second, they are highly institutionalized and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization. They must, therefore, be taken for granted as legitimate, apart from evaluations of their impact on work outcomes (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343–4).

The authors suggest that myths are both: the unconscious, widely held beliefs about rationality in modern Western society that impact on the generation of formal organisational structures; and elements such as professions, programs, and technologies in which these beliefs are institutionalised by organisations in a ‘dramatic enactment’ of the rationalised myth pervading modern Western society. They distinguish between ‘production

organizations under strong output controls whose success depends on the management of relational networks' and 'institutionalized organizations whose success depends on the confidence and stability achieved by isomorphism with institutional rules' (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 355).

This latter type of organisation, whose legitimacy depends on judgement by society, is prone to engage in ceremonial activities at the structural level to display similarity with societal beliefs about rationality. As these structures are often not best suited to produce the desired organisational work outcomes, however, the organisations adopt a simultaneous informal strategy of decoupling in order to keep functioning at an operational level (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 355–9). The myth is thus an external façade, which reflects and responds to mythical beliefs in society and hides the informal ways in which an organisation functions behind this façade. Hensell (Chap. 14) uses this approach to look at 'coordination' as a pervasive rationality myth in contemporary international interventions and its tangible effects at the organisational level.

While for Meyer and Rowan the modern rationality myth exists within the environment that an organisation needs to strategically adapt to in order to be legitimate, thereby causing internal tensions, for *Dvora Yanow*, in contrast, unconsciously created myths allow organisations to carry on with their work despite deep unspeakable 'verboden goals' at their heart. Yanow defines an organisational or policy myth as 'a narrative created and believed by a group of people that diverts attention away from a puzzling part of their reality' (1992, 401). Narrative here only designates the idea that myths are 'not propositions of logic or arguments of rhetoric', even though they usually consist of matter-of-fact statements.

As social constructions, myths are public, always rooted in particular cultures, times and spaces, and reality for those who believe in and reiterate them. In that sense, '[c]onstructing the myth is not done explicitly or necessarily with the intention of deceiving or manipulating; rather, the myth is a product of tacit knowledge that is created tacitly and communicated tacitly' (Yanow 1992, 402). The function of organisational and policy myths is to veil tensions between incommensurable values of an organisation that would undermine not only its work, but perhaps its very existence, if discussed publicly (cf. also Yanow, foreword; Münch, Chap. 3). As socially constructed beliefs, these myths are not only reproduced in discourse, but also enacted in organisational rituals and practices.

Yanow's concept has been used, for instance, to explore the myths designed to mask tensions in the non-negotiable beliefs of the *International*

Crisis Group, a major transnational think tank reporting on violent conflicts. Through the myths of ‘field facts’, ‘flexible pragmatism’, ‘uniqueness’, and ‘neutrality/independence’, the organisation is able to hide three incommensurabilities, namely between problem orientation and success orientation in its knowledge production; between its moral claims and its lack of a clearly defined moral standpoint; and between its claims of independence and its deep entanglements in the international policy community. If discussed publicly, these incommensurabilities would undermine the group’s expert authority and thereby its *raison d’être* (Bliesemann de Guevara 2014).

Knowledge, Power, and the Pervasiveness of Myth

Two contributions in this book take Yanow’s core ideas a step further. In her study of the international policy of the ‘democratic control of the armed forces’, Millar (Chap. 9) combines Yanow’s concept with *Michel Foucault’s* ideas of productive power and normalisation to explain the perseverance of policy myths. She suggests that, rather than searching for the ‘success’ of myths in the vague notion of belief, myths should better be seen as an integral part of the construction of ‘truths’, understood in the Foucauldian sense as the product of a diffuse, productive form of power that creates meaning and subjectivities (Foucault 1980). The function of myths, in this reading, goes beyond mere belief in that they construct ‘truths’, which are depoliticised, naturalised, and thus not perceived as historically contingent or particular. Being ‘outside’ of myth is impossible in this reading, and critique thus a constant task of enquiry into the genealogy of today’s truths.

Resorting to *Jacques Derrida*,¹² Robert Cooke (Chap. 4) draws parallels between Yanow’s ‘incommensurable values’ and the Derridean concept of *différance*. Looking at myth from this postmodern perspective, he questions the understanding of myths in terms of the dichotomy *mythos/logos*, in which myths have come to embody creative fiction contrasted with the facticity of historical narratives or the immanent experience of reality. Rather, he argues that myth has to be understood on its own terms as something that is neither true nor false, thus always based on incommensurable principles, which cannot be decided through simple logocentric acts of naming or definition without doing violence to this fundamental ambiguity. Taken to its most extreme conclusion, this reading suggests ‘myth’ as the proper term to designate *all* of our cultural constructions,

including scientific and philosophical knowledge, and reminds us to always remain ‘suspicious’ of the logocentric ideas of ‘knowing’ and ‘truth’.

THE MYTHOGRAPHY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Based on the discussion of sources and effects of myths—understood by most authors as a powerful significance-creating narrative or a paradigmatic ‘truth’—, the myth concepts used in this book can be seen to roughly form four broad categories which speak to myths’ different socio-political functions: (a) determining functions (strategy/ideology), (b) enabling functions (strategy/necessary fiction), (c) naturalising functions (social construction/ideology), and (d) constituting functions (social construction/necessary fiction) (see Table 2.1).¹³

In very general terms, concepts that grant myths a determining or enabling function stress the instrumental side of myths and the agency of their creators/users but evaluate this use of myth differently, as either the (re-)production of a dominant or accustomed social form, a coping mechanism in view of social constraints, or an instrument of sociopolitical change. Concepts in which myths fulfil a naturalising or informing function, in contrast, stress the structural, constitutive, and productive side of myth beyond agency, but differ in their evaluation of whether knowledge and consciousness ‘outside’ of myth are possible and what role the mythographer has.

Determining Functions of Myth

Understanding myth as a determining factor is perhaps the narrowest perspective on the functions of myths in international politics. The idea of myth is that of an instrument in the hands of (ideologically) dominant actors who spin stories, distort language, and stage rituals with the aim to impose/maintain a hierarchical sociopolitical order (Cassirer, Barthes [creators of myth]). Studies of the determining functions of myth typically start from an observation of inequality and hierarchy, and explore who the

Table 2.1 Socio-political functions of myth

	Ideology	Necessary fiction
Strategy	Determining	Enabling
Social construction	Naturalising	Constituting

myth creators are (politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, experts, academics, economists etc.); how, faced by complex sociopolitical conditions hardly under their control, they employ myths to create/maintain the hierarchical sociopolitical order (through second-order semiological systems, spinning of powerful narratives etc.); and what motives and interests exist behind the instrumental myth re-/production.

Methodologically,¹⁴ this sort of mythography focuses on written/spoken text and other symbolical representations and practices, and analyses their content and effects. While not necessarily relying on the false/true dichotomy underlying ‘myth busting’, this perspective nevertheless assumes that myths depend predominantly on conscious acts and have more or less direct and explicit causal links with politics. While in this sense being limited in its analytical scope and possible contribution to knowledge about the social world, this approach is compatible, for instance, with current research into the strategic side of political communication (e.g. Miskimmon et al. 2013) and may add interesting takes on *how* ‘strategic narratives’ work socially (e.g. through socialisation, work on significant cultural narratives) to the debate.

Through its underlying reliance on an instrumentalist understanding of myth (as narrative or ideology), this category also entails that the mythographer can posit herself ‘outside’ of myth production, as exemplified in Barthes’s ‘non-mythical language of the Left’. She should be aware, however, that the idea of an ‘outside’ of myth creates a taxonomy understood as ‘not only an epistemological instrument (a means for organizing information) but [...] also (as it comes to organize the organizers) an instrument for the construction of society’ (Lincoln 1989, 7–8, cf. 131–70). In this sense, myth concepts such as Barthes’s constitute an ideology in themselves, which, albeit counterhegemonic, is inherently unable to escape the hierarchy-creating effects of classification (Lincoln 1989, 7).

Enabling Functions of Myth

Concepts focussing on the enabling functions of myth open the analytical aperture to the creative, proactive, and subversive sides of myth. Myths are understood here as clever coping strategies for organisations or individuals dealing with societal influences or dilemmas (Meyer and Rowan, Lincoln), or are attributed the potential of a mobilising force or strategic instrument for sociopolitical change (Sorel, Lincoln). In both cases, myths work as ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985), or ‘the lost’, for actors unable

to change, or unprivileged by, the conditions surrounding them (Lincoln, Chap. 2).

The ‘work of myth’ (its effects) and the ‘work on myth’ (its actualisation) are seen as multi-sited interactions of actors with different sociopolitical positions engaged in public and hidden discourses and practices (Scott 1992). The link between power struggles, changing power relations, and associated myths is conceptualised as a complex relationship in which categories like dominant/subordinate become blurred. While often a form of coping or an instance of gradual change, myths may gain broader emancipatory potential through the possibility to harness the power of narratives and their ability to evoke sentiments.

Methodologically, an analysis of the enabling functions of myths in international politics would identify central significance-creating narratives or paradigmatic beliefs; trace the ‘work on’ them over time and/or by different actors, including counter-narratives; and explore whether changes in, or substitutions of, myths have taken place and to which effects.

For example, Dany and Freistein (Chap. 12) point to the agency of civil society organisations that, albeit limited, has become possible through the myth of civil society as constituent part of global governance. The potential or hope of a different future the myth carries is enough for civil society actors to cling to this powerful narrative despite its as-yet meagre tangible results. Müller and Sondermann (Chap. 13) show how the continuous ‘work on myth’ in the case of development aid provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has gradually expanded the agency of non-Western states in development matters. Since the goals of development aid are always yet to materialise in the ‘near future’, the constant need for work on myths such as ‘aid effectiveness’ has opened up new possibilities for non-traditional donors to participate in aid governance structures.

Studies of this emancipatory or enabling side of myths contribute to our understanding of international politics in that they highlight the power of ideas not only in maintaining but also in gradually altering the social world.

Naturalising Functions of Myth

With concepts stressing the naturalising, depoliticising, and dehistoricising functions of myth, we enter the field of myths as social constructions. Here myth is part of the diffuse, productive power that structures knowledge and thereby sociopolitical conditions in certain, hierarchical ways

while at the same time hiding the political and historical nature of these processes. The orders to which myths, among other forms of productive power, contribute seem natural and without alternative rather than contingent and a product of historical and political processes.

‘Myth’ here either designates widely held societal beliefs, such as the modern Western belief in rationality (Meyer and Rowan) or the related, even broader enlightenment belief in the power of positivist science (Horkheimer and Adorno); or ‘myths’ are the medium through which ‘truths’ about social reality are created and transmitted, such as the ‘warlord’ myth that cements the hierarchy between (civilised) Western and (non-civilised) non-Western states (Lévi-Strauss read through Bourdieu, see Goetze, Chap. 7), the myths of bourgeois society transmitted through everyday cultural products (Barthes), or the ‘truths’ about militarism that underpin the international policy of security sector reform (Yanow read through Foucault, see Millar, Chap. 9). This category of myth concepts is compatible with post-positivist strands in IR research and may add additional research angles and methodologies to these strands.

The role of the mythographer here is mainly that of an ‘uncoverer’. Weber’s unearthing of myths that underpin mainstream IR theories offers an illustrative example. Drawing on the notion of unconscious ideology, she defines an IR myth as ‘an *apparent truth*, usually expressed in slogan form, that an IR theory relies upon to *appear to be true*’ (Weber 2010, 2). The function of IR myths reflects Barthes’s conceptualisation of myth as depoliticising force:

The *myth function* in IR theory is the transformation of what is particular, cultural, and ideological [...] into what *appears* to be universal, natural, and purely empirical. It is naturalizing meanings—making them into common sense—that are the products of cultural practices. Put another way, the myth function in IR theory is making a “fact” out of an interpretation (Weber 2010, 6–7, original italics).

‘Uncovering’ myths through critical enquiry and theorising, in Cox’s (1981) sense, aims at questioning, historicising, and re-politicising accepted ‘truths’, and it is to this understanding that most studies in this book seek to make a contribution. At the same time, however, concepts that point out the naturalising functions of myth also set certain limits to the role of the mythographer as ‘uncoverer’, since she can neither be outside language nor outside society.

Constituting Functions of Myth

In their understanding of myth as socially constructed, necessary or unavoidable fiction, concepts that stress the constituting functions of myth represent the broadest and most radical perspective. They point to the unavoidable social urge to create meaning and significance through powerful narratives or widespread paradigmatic beliefs (Blumenberg, Cassirer, Yanow, Horkheimer and Adorno, Lévi-Strauss); highlight the socialisation and cultural conditioning through which myths take effect in all of us (Blumenberg, Lincoln); and lead to the realisation that all our knowledges are cultural constructions from which there is no ‘outside’ and no escape (Derrida).

From the ‘constituting’ perspective on myths, Weber’s critique of the unspoken side of IR theory falls short of accounting for the true scale of her claims. While she acknowledges that ‘alternative perspectives on international politics’ have their own biases and their own ‘mythologized understandings of the world’ (Weber 2010, 222), she nonetheless concludes that these are to be the preferred mythologies as they represent ‘deviant’, subordinate knowledge. From a ‘constituting’ myths perspective, however, myths cannot be exempt from too close scrutiny just because they work for the subaltern and the critical; if myth is everywhere and all knowledge is imperfect, this is just as true for ‘critical’ thinking as it is for ‘problem-solving’ theory.

Millar (Chap. 9), for example, points to the dangers implied in myth-unaware critique, showing how critical voices are complicit in fostering the myth of militarism as a fundamental building block of an understanding in which violence by democratic states is seen as ‘deviant exception’ to a general rule of peaceful democracies. Thereby, critical voices also become complicit in naturalising the everyday reliance of democracies upon the (potential for) political violence.

If we subscribe to the ‘constituting’ view on myths, this ultimately means that we also have to bid farewell to the idea that we can ‘explain’ the world and ‘solve’ its problems based on advances in scientific and philosophical knowledge. This realisation is the biggest contribution the ‘constituting’ category can make to the study of international politics. Be it due to our human urge to create meaning, our socialisation, or the cultural constructedness of our knowledge about the world, we cannot completely escape exposure to, and complicity in, myth making. Rather than being treated as a marginal concept, ‘myth’—and all the ambiguities

it represents—should therefore be embraced as a central way of looking at international politics.

MYTH AND IR SCHOLARSHIP

Since universities are part of the sociopolitical order that produces, reproduces, and challenges the mythology of international politics in its different dimensions, the four categories of myth concepts outlined above also have far-reaching implications for the discipline of IR. In concluding this chapter, I want to discuss some of these implications, whose acknowledgment would constitute an important step towards more reflexive IR scholarship. These implications include the myths the discipline manufactures about itself, academia's deep implications in wider societal myths, and the inescapable mythology of knowledge production.

Determining Myths in IR

With regard to the determining function, the 'myth of 1919' about the birth moment of the IR discipline with the establishment of the world's first Department of International Politics at the University of Wales¹⁵ in Aberystwyth after World War I is certainly one of the most powerful myths in the discipline. It is the constitutive narrative underpinning the public and self-image of IR as 'a noble discipline that was born in order to solve the tragedy of war for the benefit of all peoples' (de Carvalho et al. 2011, 749). As Carvalho et al. demonstrate, however,

the overall noble image obscures an "inconvenient truth": that the overwhelming majority of international theory throughout its existence has been imbued with a specific moral/political purpose—to defend and promote western civilisation—and that the narratives of the discipline have in one way or another always constituted a "West Side Story" (2011, 750).

There are reasons why the '1919 myth' is nurtured. For the discipline as a whole, the '1919 myth' is convenient since it gives it a *raison d'être* and its members a shared identity. This explains why the myth has been constantly retold in IR textbooks (de Carvalho et al. 2011, 752–5, 757; cf. Ashworth 2014). In this sense, the '1919 myth' has a constituting function for the IR discipline, a point I shall return to below. For the geographically marginal Department of International Politics in the small

Welsh town of Aberystwyth, being the ‘birthplace of the discipline’ is as much a current marketing tool in a neoliberalised education market as it has been a long-standing source of reputation, which has impacted on its position in the academic and, to some extent, the political field, and thus constituted a form of symbolic capital, which the department has used in order to position itself amongst intellectual (and now economic) competitors.

Aberystwyth is, of course, not the only university nurturing its myths; all universities—indeed, all organisations—do, some more successfully than others. The obvious danger of the strategic employment of any myths, understood in the determining sense as a strategic tool, by academic disciplines and institutions lies in the impact that their narratives may have, through their teaching activities and publications, on how the world is imagined by generations of IR students who staff the governmental and non-governmental institutions of world politics. A first task for a self-critical discipline is therefore to uncover the strategic use of powerful narratives about itself, which hide built-in ideologies such as, in the case of the ‘1919 myth’, the Eurocentric outlook of a discipline that claims to be world-encompassing.

Enabling Myths in IR

From the perspective of concepts that stress the enabling, creative side of myths, the IR discipline has possibilities to contest and challenge such dominant (meta-) narratives by offering alternatives. In this sense, the ‘work on myth’—understood as the altering, challenging, or replacing of dominant paradigmatic truths—may offer potential for critique, resistance, and emancipation not only in IR theorising¹⁶ but also in how the discipline organises itself and how it engages with social and political actors outside of academia.¹⁷

Often, academics engaged in these debates understand themselves not as academics in an ‘armchair’ sense but as political activists within and/or outside of academia. Academics straddling the scholar/activist divide—such as Judith Butler or Michael Hardt—are examples of how alternative narratives are used to make interventions into the discipline and into the sociopolitical conditions it studies, and how political activism reflects back on theorising. Myth concepts may help in making sense of such interventions and fathoming their possibility space.

What ties the determining and enabling categories of the strategic use of (or work on) myths in IR together are the ethical questions attached to the way in which narratives are instrumentalised strategically. While there seems to be a difference as to whether the use of myth is meant to conceal an ‘inconvenient truth’ or to effect ‘change for the better’, both uses of myth should raise concerns insofar as they build on the idea of a possibility of non-ideological knowledge and agency based predominantly on choice. As the remaining two categories of myth concepts suggest, however, these two assumptions may be misleading.

Naturalising Myths in IR

What is true in terms of the depoliticising, naturalising functions of myth in international politics also pertains to the discipline of IR. The university today is an example *par excellence* of the type of organisation ‘whose success depends on the confidence and stability achieved by isomorphism with institutional rules’ (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 355). While the self-image of many IR academics stresses independence from politics and the economy, universities’ ways of functioning are deeply implicated not only in the neoliberal structures of contemporary (world) society, but also in the myths that underpin it. Acknowledging the deep implications of academia with broader societal myths seems essential when studying the mythology of international politics, for it would be hypocritical to ‘uncover’ the myths that naturalise the sociopolitical order without reflecting upon the myths that influence the very way in which academia presents itself.

Academic ‘myths at work’ (Bradley et al. 2000) in a narrower sense include those accompanying the neoliberalisation and new public management of the global university (Academic Rights Watch 2014; Schrecker 2010). ‘Student satisfaction’ is one of the powerful narratives that have accompanied these processes, now providing a benchmark against which academic performance is measured. The fee-paying student is seen as customer, knowledge and ‘skills’ as products, and the academic as paid provider of services geared to ensure client happiness. Whether this should be the task of a university, however, is questionable (Collini 2012).

‘Impact’ is another example. With the impact-oriented policies of many research funding bodies, and the REF-related impact agenda in the UK more specifically,¹⁸ research is expected to yield results that have some bearing on the broader society. This pushes research projects in IR closer towards the logics of the policy world, where only certain knowledges and

their representation qualify as ‘impacting’ or are considered ‘useful’¹⁹—categories which furthermore differ from country to country depending on political culture (Jasanoff 2005). This has hierarchising effects on ways of knowing and values of scholarly knowledge. Messiness and complexity, for instance, seldom make their way into advice to policy circles, where actors prefer simplicity and ‘evidence’—with often appalling results (Law 2004).

In a broader sense, ‘the myths we live by’ (Midgley 2004) as academics are shaped by, and in return reproduce, the fundamental myths of modern Western society such as rationality, positivism, individuality, and effectiveness. Midgley discusses three central enlightenment myths—the ‘social contract’, ‘progress’, and ‘omnicompetent science’—and shows how they interrelate in detrimental ways, ‘not only because they are all over-dramatic and need rethinking, but because the last of them impedes our efforts to deal with the first two, and with many other problems as well’ (2004, Chap. 1).

To be sure, the enlightenment myths discussed by Midgley did, of course, play a major role in challenging and changing previous sociopolitical orders characterised by religion, feudalism, monarchy, and so on. In this sense, they can be seen to have had an enabling or deterministic sociopolitical function, and it is very much the context in which such myths operate which determines their specific function under specific circumstances. What Midgley’s discussion hints at, however, is that dominant generalised myths of society at any specific time (in this case: in modern Western society) tend to affect knowledge production in that they make up part of the ‘imaginative structure of ideas by which scientists contrive to connect, understand and interpret...facts’ (Midgley 2004, Chap. 1)—consciously but more often unconsciously. It is in this sense that the myths we live by as scientists naturalise certain understandings of the world over others with a tendency to reproduce the modern sociopolitical order as it is.

Constituting Myths in IR

In the ‘constituting’ understanding, myths are inevitable. This is doubtlessly the most radical implication that myth concepts have for the IR discipline and how it understands itself and its work. Myths are the powerful narratives or beliefs through which meaning and significance of the academic’s profession is created (such as the ‘1919 myth’); they are a part

of the academic's habitus through socialisation, and they entail the realisation that all of our academic knowledge is socially constructed, thus flagging the need for constant reflexivity.

This perspective also suggests that no matter how much and how precise the knowledge is that we produce about the world, scientific knowledge may not be able to ultimately and unanimously solve the sociopolitical problems of our world (Zehfuss 2014), which has deep implications for the self-understanding of a discipline that has, by and large, relied on the '1919 myth' as its *raison d'être*. Since international politics and its academic exploration involve undecidable ambiguities, which may not be explained or decided by abstract, logocentric discussions around ontology, epistemology, and methodology, the mythographical approach to international politics may offer a new way of thinking about the discipline and its object of study. In this sense, we might best understand all scientific knowledge as 'myths with footnotes' (Lincoln 1999, 209), whereby the footnotes hint at the ethico-political decisions, the 'leaps of faith' in the Derridean sense (Zehfuss 2014, 619) that we have taken in the face of the undecidable or unsolvable.²⁰

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NOTES

1. I discuss the range of theorists that have been used by the contributors to this book, which only represents a fraction of myth conceptualisations available in different disciplines (and certainly has its own biases). On other myth theories, cf. Bottici (2007); Flood (2013); Lincoln (1999); Scarborough (1994); Segal (2004); Von Hendy (2002).
2. On different epistemological understandings, forms, and functions of myth cf. also Münch (Chap. 3).
3. The positions mapped in the graph represent my reading of the myth conceptualisations and their relation to each other. The graph is thus necessarily a subjective, and highly simplifying, visualisation .

4. In the English language, ‘narrative’ is often used in the broad sense of ‘frames’ that structure an overarching meta-narrative (e.g., narrative 1 = white, narrative 2 = black, meta-narrative = colourfulness). In contrast, German authors tend to use ‘narration’ to denote the process/activity of storytelling, while the ‘narrative’ is the product and structure of this activity, describing, in the narrower sense, the plot which establishes a relation between different statements (Gadinger et al. 2014, 21). I use this latter understanding.
5. In *Narrative and Time*, Ricœur (1984) uses the Aristotelian *muthos* to signify emplotment, but does not discuss myth as genre. In his earlier work *The Symbolism of Evil* (Ricœur 1967, part II) he engages with myths in more detail in his aim to explore the human condition, uncovering the intentions behind traditional myths. See also Cooke (Chap. 4); Von Hendy (2002, 306–13).
6. In this book, myth-as-narrative concepts are used by Dany and Freistein (Chap. 12); Goetze (Chap. 7).
7. See also the burgeoning literature of the ‘emotional turn’ in IR; for overviews e.g. Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) and Crawford (2000).
8. Müller and Sondermann (Chap. 13) trace the ‘work on’ the ‘aid effectiveness’ myth.
9. Kühn (Chap. 8) uses Blumenberg’s concept to explore myths regarding the international intervention in Afghanistan.
10. Müller and Sondermann (Chap. 13) draw on Barthes’s ideas in their analysis of the myth of ‘aid effectiveness’ in international development cooperation; Finlan (Chap. 10) uses them as inspiration to explore myths of contemporary warfare.
11. On the futility of such endeavour, see Cooke (Chap. 4).
12. Cf. Loriaux (2008) on another use of Derrida to deconstruct myths; on Derrida, see also Loriaux and Lynch, Chap. 15.
13. Cf. Neumann and Nexon (2006) on four possible constitutive effects of popular culture on politics.
14. On the methodology of mythographical approaches to international politics, see Müller (Chap. 6).
15. Now Aberystwyth University, where I happen to work.
16. See e.g. Kiersey (2012).
17. See, for example, the critical blog ‘The Disorder of Things’ (<http://the-disorderofthings.com/>), which regularly features interesting discussions around these questions.
18. REF—Research Excellence Framework—denominates a ‘system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions’ (see <http://www.ref.ac.uk>). It measures the quality of research outputs (publications), the research environment provided by higher education institutions, and the impact of research in wider society.

19. This is, worryingly, a ‘decivilising process’ in Norbert Elias’ sense, as Andrew Linklater has remarked upon reading this chapter.
20. For further discussion of how to deal with the mythology of IR, see the conclusions by Loriaux and Lynch, Chap. 15.

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Beyond National Policymaking: Conceptions of Myth in Interpretive Policy Analysis and Their Value for IR

Sybille Münch

‘Family’, ‘homecoming’, ‘growing together’—in trying to reconstruct how European identity was discursively imagined in Germany’s EU enlargement discourse during the 1990s, Hülse (2006) argues that metaphors like these primordialise Europe and establish a binary opposition between insiders and outsiders. ‘In this way, European identity looks very similar to German identity. Obviously, there is nothing postmodern about it—it is very much in line with modern, nationalist ways of constructing identity’ (Hülse 2006, 415). What this finding is missing, however, is how the EU differs from nations as ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991). As opposed to the EU, nations’ construction of identity often relies on the existence of myths (Langewiesche 2014, 14). These myths in the sense of founding stories are expressions of a primary ethnocentrism and serve the self-representation and identity of societies. As such they are an important part of both the communicative as well as the cultural memory of groups and societies (Beer 2014, 9). Myths in this sense are

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like a society's autobiography, as they only stress what is positive about it. Langewiesche (2014, 18) maintains that the limited amount of acceptance of the European Union cannot be traced back only to its lack of democratic legitimacy; the limited acceptance was attributable most of all to a lack of shared myths that could justify political decisions in a pre-political way. Myths can create a common ground that does not need to be backed up politically. 'Unlike most nation-states, the EU faces the challenge of actively creating and sustaining myths about its polity' (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010, 133). The underlying assumption is that a political system that cannot shape its own myths is going to have great difficulties in generating support for its rule (Della Sala 2010, 3). This is not limited to myths as origin-stories but holds true for other concepts of myths as well.

How metaphors, myths, and arguments construct not only identity but also reality itself and thereby shape policymaking has been the main focus for authors working in the tradition of interpretive policy analysis (IPA). This chapter takes stock of the contributions of IPA to the study of myth and discusses how they could be compatible with questions of International Relations (IR). The chapter does not pretend to do justice to the general concept of cosmologic myths often studied by social anthropologists or to myths in literary studies. Neither is it limited to those political myths that focus on the birth and development of a nation (Segesten 2011, 76). Instead, it argues that the application of IPA's sophisticated conceptualisations of discourse and myths and how they relate to political action offer a rich conceptual and analytical toolset whose usefulness is not limited to local or domestic policymaking [see, for instance, Lynch (2014), on how interpretivism can inform IR].

The following section introduces the reader to interpretive policy analysis and its different framings of agency in discourse. It then turns to IPA's different conceptualisations of myth, which are discussed with regard to three dimensions of myth analysis. The first concerns the question whether myths should be treated as social constructions, as consciously deployed strategies, or as expressions of a wider power/knowledge system. The second dimension is guided by the question of what particular forms myths—understood by the majority of IPA authors as a specific form of narrative—can take on. The third dimension, finally, differentiates myths by their aims or functions. The chapter suggests that a coherent mythographical study into any politics-related question needs to start with mythographers' conceptual and methodological decisions regarding these three dimensions of myth analysis.

ARGUMENTATION AND PERSUASION IN POLICYMAKING: THE INTERPRETIVE TURN

Traditional policy analysis with its interest in ‘what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes’ (Dye 1976) tends to conceptualise public policymaking ‘as a coherent process of solving known problems’ (Colebatch 2005, 15). Public problems in this mainstream perception are regarded as part of a pre-given neutral reality, distinct from political opinion, to which public policy simply responds (Schram 1993, 252; Hofmann 1995, 128). This perspective on policymaking is also reflected by the policy cycle model as the core heuristics of policy analysis (May and Wildavsky 1979). The formation of a political agenda then appears to be ‘a virtually automatic process’ (Howlett et al. 2009, 94), with government portrayed ‘as a machinery for solving problems’ (Colebatch 2005, 17). Admittedly, since the 1970s scholars in the field of public policy started challenging these assumptions by stressing politics, interest, and power involved in agenda-setting (cf. Cobb and Elder 1971). Nevertheless, problem definition itself remained mostly a black box (Stone 1989, 281). Meanwhile, authors in a sociology of knowledge tradition such as Blumer (1971) or Spector and Kitsuse (2006 [1977]) had long established a basis for a constructionist¹ approach to social problems by asking how problems were (discursively) constructed. Yet ‘the ghost of positivism’ (Dryzek 1993, 217) continued to haunt policy analysis for some time.

Since the early 1990s, however, a growing body of literature that emerged with the ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer and Gottweis 2012a)² or the ‘interpretive turn’ (Healy 1986; Yanow 1995) in policy studies has highlighted the importance of concepts such as discourse, knowledge, and interpretation. In spite of their very heterogeneous theoretical foundations, the different strands in interpretive policy analysis usually share the social-constructionist assumption ‘that there is nothing in the world whose meaning resides in the object itself’ (Loseke 2003, 18). What is regarded as an incontestable reality in positivist theory is comprehended by post-positivist scholars as being based on interpretations that involve choices and judgments (Bacchi 1999), and that are hence inherently but not obviously normative and political (Herrmann 2009, 24). What is regarded as a policy problem is both historically and culturally contingent (Loseke 2003, 63). Constructionism resists the essentialist assumption that ‘problems’ have objective and identifiable foundations. Instead, they are constructed by means of argumentation and persuasion.

This does not imply, however, that they are ‘merely’ constructions and do not really exist. On the contrary, these constructions have far-reaching consequences, as policies, interventions, and controls are built upon them (Groenemeyer 2003, 7).

Post-positivist authors such as Bacchi (1999, 2, 2015) have suggested speaking of ‘problematizations’ rather than ‘problems’ in order to emphasise that problems acquire their meaning through discursive processes. With discourse being a vague and ambiguous concept to guide empirical observation, many interpretivists have turned to those elements that structure discourse, such as narratives and, consequently, myths. Yet different approaches in interpretive policy analysis differ to a high degree in their understanding of meaning, discourse, and agency—and thus also of the role of myths in constructions of political and social ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’. The following section identifies three different approaches that could inspire a first guiding question for researchers when entering a myth analysis: Do we treat myths as social constructions, as conscious creations, or as constitutive for subjects themselves?

ANALYTICAL DIMENSION I: HERMENEUTIC, STRATEGIC, AND DISCURSIVE NOTIONS OF MYTH

As opposed to the interpretive paradigm in sociology with its micro-sociological focus, interpretive policy analysis is home to both interpretivists with a hermeneutic understanding of meaning and poststructuralist authors with a discursive understanding that traditionally would not be referred to as interpretive (Wagenaar 2011). Three different major strands of how the relationship between agency and structure is understood and what this implies for the understanding of discourse and myth can be distinguished.

For interpretivists in the hermeneutic sense, ‘political subjects are seen as “agentic”, that is, as sovereign or foundational subjects, who stand outside of and shape “reality”’ (Bacchi 2015, 3). According to this approach, meaning is located in the intentions, motifs, or beliefs of political actors. Drawing from Berger and Luckmann, they maintain that social order is a human product, or rather an ongoing production by humans that is institutionalised, legitimised, externalised, and perceived as natural, objective, and other than human-made (Knorr-Cetina 1989, 87). To treat myths as social constructions implies that they are not individual inventions but are collectively shared and believed. ‘Myths are *constructed* explanations, not *authored* ones. No one says, “Let’s sit down and make a myth!” They

evolve in much the same socially constructed way that the rules of society do, over time, drawing on societal knowledge known tacitly' (Yanow 1996, 192–193, original italics). Rather than searching for universal laws like neo-positivist social science, the interpretive-hermeneutic approach then tries to reconstruct how policymakers create, communicate, and understand meaning which is located in practices, artefacts, and texts alike (Gottweis 2006, 465).

A subgroup among the interpretive-hermeneutic authors maintains that subjects are not only prior to discourse but that they are also strategists. Discourses and myths then become a resource and a weapon in the struggle over ideas. Authors in the tradition of the so-called argumentative turn stress how argumentation and persuasion is central to policymaking. One of the main goals is not only to change an existing reality but also to consciously establish a common understanding of a problem (Fischer 1998, 12). This approach focuses on how actors use ideas to gather political support and diminish the support of opponents, all in order to control policy (Stone 2002, 34). Authors in this tradition regard the 'struggle over ideas' as the essence of policymaking (Stone 2002, 1). In a similar vein, Segesten (2011, 77–8) highlights the political agency behind the use of myth, the strategies of those that she calls myth entrepreneurs. While criticising Cassirer for overemphasising the role of elites in myth making, she emphasises how myth entrepreneurs give myths a coherent form: by 'placing them in an understandable narrative, for instance to some extent, introducing logos into the mythos, these artisans allow myth to have a political effect. One of the qualities of myth, which justifies its quasi-universal appeal, is the vagueness of its content and its focus on symbols and rituals' (Segesten 2011, 79). In policymaking, 'perpetuating cultural myths allows policymakers to influence the moral limits within which policy debates take place' (Marston 2000, 367). Myths attempt to fix meaning by claiming the status of self-evident 'truths'. The strategic construction of moral identities in policy discourse is 'most powerful when they accord with myths at the sociocultural level' (Marston 2000, 367).

A third strand of reasoning explicitly wants to go beyond this focus on how political actors understand their social worlds or policy problems more specifically. These authors reject the idea of treating policymakers as unified subjects who enter decision-making 'with an identity already formulated in terms of his or her preference' (Gottweis 2006, 465). Instead, discourses are seen as constitutive not only of the object world but also of identities and subjects. In Foucault-influenced poststructuralist policy analysis, political

subjects are constituted in discourses understood as broad, socially produced forms of knowledge. While this approach was rather weak in Fischer and Forster's fundamental work in 1993, it has grown to become a significant element of post-empiricist policy analysis. Advocates of poststructuralist policy analysis stress the power of overriding structures of knowledge and meaning that do not rest on the wishes, interests, and interpretation of acting subjects but are prior to them. These proponents of poststructuralist policy analysis (cf. Howarth and Griggs 2012) also work under the label Political Discourse Theory or Essex School. Their notion of myth is informed by Ernesto Laclau's work and its focus on how myths help constitute social movements (see below). More generally speaking, they try to capture the purposes, rules, and ontological presuppositions that render a practice or regime possible, intelligible, and vulnerable. Their analysis of discourse and myth focuses not only on the linking together of demands into wider political projects and forces but also on how certain practices grip subjects and render them complicit in covering up the radical contingency of social relations (Glynos et al. 2009, 11–12).

A clarification of what kind of understanding of meaning and myth guides one's analysis of myth should be considered a first step of analysis. A second dimension is provided by the question of what particular form a myth takes on. Here again, the researcher can draw from IPA's conceptualisation of discourse, narratives, and myths.

ANALYTICAL DIMENSION 2: MYTHS AS DIFFERENT FORMS OF NARRATIVE

The notions of 'myth' in works of IPA are manifold, yet most of them treat myths as specific forms of narratives or stories (for an exemption see Yanow 1992). These narratives then are the specific patterns that structure a discourse. According to the Dictionary of Discourse Analysis, 'myth' refers to stereotype narratives, chivalric stories, and founding stories alike (Wrana et al. 2014, 276). What these definitions have in common is how myths are characterised by narrative structures. 'Fundamentally, narrative story-telling reveals or conveys an experience structured as a sequence of events or occurrences (e.g., beginning, middle, and ending) through which individuals relate their experiences to one another' (Fischer and Gottweis 2012b, 12–13). This emplotment is both chronological and more or less explicitly causal. Narratives provide orientation, identity, distancing, justification, and coping (Wrana et al. 2014, 276). It is the power of narrative

to link different elements, events, or agents and thereby limit the set of plausible political action (Gadinger et al. 2014, 25). When it comes to problematisation, narratives are central. Neustadt und May (1986, 274) suggest: ‘Don’t ask “What’s the problem?,” ask “What’s the story?” That way you’ll find out what the problem really is.’ The choice of a beginning for a problem-setting story can already be an act of politics. In the portrayal of a conflict, for instance, the choice of a starting point of events decides what to include in the ‘total account of blame and revenge’ (Koschorke quoted by Gadinger et al. 2014, 12). Political narratives and myths simplify by relating otherwise disparate events, creating specific constellations of actors—protagonists and antagonists in particular—and thereby portray a certain kind of action as the right one (Gronau and Nonhoff 2011, 4).

Hein-Kirchner (quoted in Elter and Köhler 2015, 395) distinguishes political myths-as-narratives according to their content into individual, event-related, spatial, and temporal myths. *Individual* myths personalise history; they attribute a certain event to a single person. This is common for the foundation of a social movement, a certain heroic deed, or sacrifice. When charged with a key moral message, a myth becomes a fable—a story that tells of the overcoming of a problem by heroic intervention that results in a happy ending. ‘By presenting policy actors with actions that find their resolution in a desired set of outcomes, such fables also offer them a place within the story, requiring, as well as justifying, their intervention’ (Cornwall et al. 2007, 6).³ Myths relating to an *event* mark a certain incident as turning point or caesura. ‘D-Day’ and ‘Sarajevo 1914’ are just two of the many examples of such event-related myths in international politics.⁴ *Spatial* myths relate to places and territories but also to intangible boundaries. Naming a specific place, such as ‘The West’ in American history, implies an entire story. Naming ‘The West’ in world history evokes quite a different story, but one which is very powerful no less.⁵ *Temporal* myths focus on certain eras that are credited with outstanding positive or negative economic, cultural, or political developments, for instance, ‘the Golden 1920s’, ‘the Age of Enlightenment’ (Elter and Köhler 2015, 395) or ‘the Cold War’. These categories of myths can overlap or complement each other. They are conveyed by all sorts of media, be it in political speeches, literature, film, or writings, during memorial days, and so forth.

One of the most prominent forms of political myth is myth as founding or origin story. Myths and narratives have been described as structuring principles of discourse. According to Lyotard, narration has the function of providing legitimacy. Whereas narratives look for legitimation in the

future, myths look for legitimation in a primal founding act (Viehöver 2004, 234). Elter and Köhler (2015, 394) equate political myths with emotionalised collective narratives that interpret history in a selective and stereotypical manner. Rhetoric instruments to be found in myths are exaggeration, glorification, and repetition. Authors in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis have analysed how myths in media and schoolbooks help dealing with a traumatic past, how myths hide fractures, civil war atrocities, and conflicts (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 20).

Myth in this understanding is always an account of a ‘creation’; it relates how something began to be. In referring to these myths, groups are united with a primordial time. This is not to shed light on a past event, but on the present. According to this notion of ‘myth’, myths are stories told by societies or groups to design a specific picture of their imagined past (Beer 2014, 8). Again, this need not be limited to national identity or domestic policymaking. As stated above, it has been argued that the limited amount of acceptance of the European Union could be attributed to a lack of shared myths that could justify political decisions in a pre-political way. On the other hand, the German–French reconciliation and end to ‘hereditary enmity’ following WWII has become a strong origin story to constitute this special cooperation as ‘twin engine’ or ‘core countries’ of European integration.

This second dimension—what kind of form a myth has—is closely related to the last dimension, which directs attention to the question of what myths do.

ANALYTICAL DIMENSION 3: FUNCTIONS OF MYTHS

Authors in the tradition of IPA have attributed different roles to myths that are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, often overlap. These include myths as means to mask tensions, as discursive context, as a different form of rationality, as naturalisation and universalisation, and as animating action. To make the picture even more complex, these functions need not necessarily correspond with certain forms of myth, nor with one specific constructivist, strategic, or poststructuralist notion of myth.

Myths as Means to Mask Tensions

One of IPA’s most prominent contributions to the concept of myth stems from the interpretive-hermeneutic strand. Dvora Yanow (1992) researches the development of organisational or policy myths. ‘From an anthropo-

logical rather than a literary approach, myths may be seen as explanations constructed in the face of puzzling parts of their organizational or policy contexts' (Yanow 2000, 80). Yanow (1992) explores how myths arise in order to conceal 'verboden goals' that are publicly unspeakable because there is no explicit public consensus to support them. Therefore, policy myths and their related organisational myths are constructed at those points where the implementing agency is most vulnerable.⁶ 'A myth is a narrative created and believed by a group of people which diverts attention away from a puzzling part of their reality' (Yanow 1996: 191). In diverting attention from incommensurables, myths create areas of silence in public discourse. Drawing on traditional theories of myth making, Yanow's definition (1996) includes the following elements: myths are stated in a particular narrative form; they are often statements of facts, yet they are not propositions of logic and therefore immune to factual attack. It is not necessary for them to have a discernible plot line. Second, as social constructions they are rooted in a particular time, place, and culture and therefore need not be universal. To say that they are constructions implies that they are public, not individual or private. Moreover, it stresses that they are not conscious creations (Yanow 1996, 191). Third, they are reality for those who subscribe to them. Fourth, myths mask tensions between incommensurable goals. Again, this is not intentional but a product of tacit knowledge (Yanow 1996, 192). According to Yanow (1996, 193), one way of holding a tension between irreconcilable contradictions is to block further inquiry.

Yanow (1992) illustrates her point in a case analysis of the Israel Corporation of Community Centers, an agency created to implement national social policies. The myths she finds are the 'myth of rational goal-setting', the 'myth of flexibility', and the 'myth of uniqueness'. The first myth reconciles the conflict between two incommensurables: the values of the stated goals that cannot be reached with the agency's limited budget, and the value of maintaining organisational existence. By directing attention to goal setting, the myth diverts attention from the impossibility of reaching these goals. The 'myth of flexibility' diverts attention from the need to show goal attainment under conditions of constantly changing criteria. The 'myth of uniqueness' is used to establish the agency organisationally when in fact it is not unique. It was needed to stop questioning the nature of this agency and asking whether it could tackle the 'verboden goal' of absorbing Sfaradim into Azhkenazim in a country otherwise ignoring questions of ethnicity (cf. Yanow, foreword to this book).

According to Yanow, myths ‘provide a way of knowing about the world. They compel emotional as well as intellectual belief, they socialize and moralize, and they thereby prompt action’ (Yanow 1996, 193). Moreover, they legitimise the social and political order that is vested in existing institutions. Because myths are so deeply embedded in a polity’s architecture of meaning, they are difficult to detect for someone who is imbued with the values and beliefs surrounding a policy issue. Therefore, it is the interpretive policy analyst’s task to move back and forth between the local knowledge of policy-relevant publics and the analytic distance of the stranger (Yanow 2000, 80).⁷

Myths Serving the Exclusion of Alternatives

Authors in the hermeneutic tradition of IPA have stressed how problem-setting stories in policymaking need to relate to discursive structures of opportunity provided by the dominant culture of the respective welfare state. ‘There are people and interests behind narratives who bring narratives into the world. But these individuals give birth to narratives only within the confinements of the available discursive possibilities’ (Fischer 2003, viii). Hence, relating to a founding myth relieves of the necessity for political explanation and justification. It can be part of a kind of master frame that represents the core values of the respective society (Lepperhoff 2006, 262–3). The dominance of certain frames can then be explained by the degree to which they resonate with the political culture (Lepperhoff 2006, 259).

Christopher Bosso (1994) provides an example of how interpretive policy analysis treats the context not as objective or as an independent variable but as something that is discursively constructed itself, yet influences problem definition. ‘If problem definition is contextual, then policy elites, interest groups, and even the mass media are not free to act in any way they want’ (Bosso 1994, 198). They have to relate to culturally embedded meta-narratives or myths for problem definitions to catch on at a particular place and time and to help a policy to come about. When it comes to agricultural subsidies, for instance, Bosso (1994, 186) highlights how in the USA ‘an agrarian mythology rooted in democratic ideals clouds any clear headed popular assessment’ of the realities of advantaged agribusiness. Farmers enjoy the same positive social constructions as the elderly or veterans and are thus seen as deserving of direct government support because they evoke mythological images of the typical family farm. Such

images ‘may connect urban Americans to an arguably more virtuous agrarian past, the symbolic loss of which would disturb more than a few citizens, even if their consumption patterns have little to do with family farming’ (Bosso 1994, 187). The lack of specificity of these myths means that competing political interests can easily appropriate them. A romanticised and mythic agrarian past regards farmers as stewards of democracy that are part of America’s constitutional foundation and thereby precludes any debate about agricultural policy (Bosso 1994, 187).

Myths as a Different Form of Rationality

A different contemporary notion of myth is one of the rationalisation of a confusing situation. ‘It is the degree to which a myth or a rationalization’s central premise fits with people’s existing expectations that the myth has power’ (McCoy 2000, 47). The argument here is that, in spite of IPA’s criticism towards mainstream policy studies for idealising policymaking as rational, these post-empiricist approaches with their emphasis on rational argumentation have themselves underestimated different forms of persuasion (Gottweis 2007, 237). Employing a myth in policy talk can also relate to a different rationality that breaks away from scientific rationality or logos. Both can be united, however, and often are. In many constitutions, for instance, a mythological image of history is raised to the ranks of constitutional imperative (Langewiesche 2014, 13).

Cornwall emphasises the qualities of myths that sprout forth from human emotions. She regards myth as an expression of emotion, and emotion turned into an image. Myths are compelling because they resonate with the affective dimensions of norms and values. This is what gives them the power to spur people into action (Cornwall et al. 2007, 6; cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2). Blumenberg maintains, however, that the distinction between mythos and logos is an imaginary one and that myth in itself is a piece of work of the logos (Wrana et al. 2014, 276; cf. Kühn, Chap. 8).

Myths as Naturalisation and Universalisation

All myths lay claim to timeless validity. Therefore, they exhibit a tendency towards universalism and essentialism. In the field of development policies, for instance, different authors have highlighted how some discourses rely on the pervasive myth that women are inherently more peaceful than

men, or that they are passive victims, rather than being actively involved in violent conflicts (Cornwall et al. 2007, 10). This drive towards universalisation in policymaking arises when different actors ignore the context-specific nature of social relations (Cornwall et al. 2007, 11).

Poststructuralists among interpretive policy analysts, in particular, have made a point for anti-essentialism. Ideology is not regarded as a distorted representation of an objectively given reality because reality, according to their understanding, is always constructed. Ideology is still defined as distortion, however, in the sense that it constructs a totalising horizon that denies the contingent and precarious character of social identity. ‘The construction of naturalizing and universalizing myths and imaginaries is a central part of the hegemonic drive towards ideological totalization’ (Torfing 2005, 15).

Ideological myths are a key feature of political community, as communities are held together by narratives with a totalising, imaginary, or even fantasmatic dimension. They ‘promise fully achieved identity in a land of idle happiness’ (Torfing 2005, 24). Poststructuralists maintain that discursive formations are more or less durable depending on how they mobilise Lacanian categories of fantasy and enjoyment. In analysing fantasmatic narratives, Jason Glynos and his colleagues (2012) scrutinise the affective dimension of discursive practices, how key logics in media and policy responses have operated to narrow down public debate on causes and solutions for public problems such as the financial crisis. These fantasmatic narratives can take different forms. They can be beatific when the fullness of enjoyment is promised to follow the overcoming of an obstacle or the removal of a villain. The narratives can also be horrific, for instance, by employing epidemiological metaphors such as ‘toxic assets’ or the ‘contamination’ of the financial system. The ‘sacrifice of enjoyment’ is routinely projected onto others and ascribed the status of ‘stolen’ in a manner that informs various types of scapegoating (Howarth and Griggs 2012, 322; Barbehön et al. 2015).

Ernesto Laclau, as one of the founding fathers of Political Discourse Theory, introduces the conceptual distinction between myths and social imaginaries. In both cases, the background against which these formations emerge is that of structural dislocation, the process by which the contingency of discursive structures is made visible (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 13). ‘Every identity (and social object) is dislocated per se because it depends on an outside that denies it and, at the same time, is its condition of possibility’ (Biglieri and Perelló 2011).

Myths attempt to repair the dislocated space in question by rearticulating the dislocated elements and forming a new objectivity. If they are effective, they can act as a surface of inscription for a variety of social demands and dislocations. However, when a myth has proved successful by incorporating a plethora of social demands, if it is hegemonised and legitimated, it becomes an imaginary. This is defined as a horizon or an absolute limit, which structures a field of intelligibility. The ‘Christian Millennium’, the ‘Enlightenment’, or positivism’s conception of ‘progress’ are examples of imaginaries (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 15).

Myths Animating Actions

Different authors stress how myths can animate action. In the field of development policies, as early as 1967 Albert Hirschman drew attention to the role that myths play in motivating and animating the actions of development actors. Taking Sorel as starting point (cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2), he maintains that myths are not mere descriptions of things but expressions of a determination to act. For him, the relationship of myths to truth or falsehood therefore misses the point. What matters, he insists, is how myth provides a sense of conviction and purpose (Cornwall et al. 2007, 4).⁸

In a similar vein, Maarten Hajer (2003), as one of the most prominent advocates of argumentative policy analysis, asserts that any discourse analysis aims to show how discourse shapes reality. He tries to explain policy changes by distinguishing three different angles: shifts in the terms of policy discourse, the formation of discourse coalitions, and the terms of the particular institutional practices in which the discursive conflicts are played out. The first dimension, the terms of policy discourse, consist of storylines, metaphors, and myths. Myth then ‘brings coherence by explaining why things cohere: a “constitutive myth” explains cohesion by narrating a foundational event, a “dystopian myth” makes people cohere to avoid a catastrophe’ (Hajer 2003, 105). With regard to international politics, ‘dystopian myths’ can be found, for instance, in attempts to convince potential allies of the need to intervene in armed conflicts or in the politics surrounding the 2008 financial crisis.

The role of myth in providing coherence and animating action is also picked up by Ernesto Laclau and authors in the poststructuralist line of IPA. In denying the essentialisms in classical Marxism that treats the social as structural positive totality and assumes an ultimate revolutionary

subject with a fixed identity, they ask where radical social change can come from. According to Shantz (2000, 98–9), this requires attentiveness to the particular forms of constitution of collective wills in social movements through social myths. It is the creation of myths which enables members to make sense out of their present, legitimise their efforts at change, and point to a new future. Myths provide a sense of unity and identity and can point beyond material interests.

In his conception of myth, Laclau draws on Sorel, but denies ‘the primacy of any monomyth, such as the General Strike, by which a centrist fixing of identity, that is, an explicitly class-centric identity, might be established’ (Shantz 2000, 103). Instead, he treats social myths as essentially incomplete, without a privileged totalising space that is closed, a concept that permits a realm of openness and extension of the democratic imagination (Shantz 2000, 103). Just like labour movements in classical Marxism, these social movements (for instance, ecology, queer politics, or feminism) are not constrained by national borders.

A Remark on Myth-as-Lie

In common parlance, to tell a myth is often equated with telling a lie (Langewiesche 2014, 13). The use of the term myth is to invoke it as a device to emphasise the falsity of taken-for-granted assumptions and as a basis for designating what ought to replace them (Cornwall et al. 2007, 4). It is striking how the notion of myth-as-lie is common in IPA, too. In spite of post-positivism’s interest in argumentation and narratives and Yanow’s (1992) explicit contribution on myths, it is quite common for authors to use the concept of myth not as analytic device but rather as a label to criticise policy analysis’s mainstream assumptions. Technocratic policy analysis’s conception of policymaking as rational is then rebutted as ‘myth’, and so is its belief in the neutrality of policy as science (cf. Fischer 2003, 125).

CONCLUSION

The interpretive turn in policy analysis regards policymaking as an ‘ongoing discursive struggle over the definition and conceptual framing of problems, the public understanding of the issues, the shared meanings that motivate policy responses, and criteria for evaluation’ (Fischer and Gottweis 2012b, 7). In showing how language and discourse shape reality,

and thereby challenging the traditional assumption that problems are part of a pre-given ‘neutral’ reality to which policymaking responds, authors have started to pay attention to those elements such as narratives and myths that structure discourse.

With the umbrella term interpretive policy analysis being home to both interpretive-hermeneutic and poststructuralist approaches, advocates of this post-positivist kind of research have been very prolific in developing conceptions of myths. While most of them treat myths as particular form of narrative, they differ in whether they restrict the notion of myth to origin stories, in what these myths do, and whether they are consciously employed by political actors. Others treat myths as discursive context or horizon to which single discourses have to relate to in order to appear plausible. They all stress how myths serve the legitimation of certain institutions or courses of action.

These differing concepts, the chapter argues, need not be restricted to domestic policymaking, but could easily be applied to the field of International Relations. A myth analysis drawing from IPA could then be structured by three guiding questions: a first reflexive one that encourages the author to clarify her epistemological premises and thereby her notion of agency in discourse and myth-telling; a second one that differentiates between different forms of myths; and a last one that focuses on what a particular myth does in a particular context.

NOTES

1. The term constructionism is used widely in the sociology of social problems. Synonymously, one could talk of social constructivism.
2. *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning* is the title of a collected volume by Fischer and Forester (1993) that introduced post-positivism in policy analysis. Argumentative policy analysis serves as an umbrella term for some authors, while others use the term interpretive policy analysis synonymously. This is also reflected in the name of their international conferences—IPA.
3. Personalised myths are not always ‘heroic’ in the positive sense, however, as the example of the warlord myth shows; cf. Goetze (Chap. 7) on warlords and states. Dany and Freistein (Chap. 12) argue that heroic deeds can also be attributed to collectives such as civil society organisations in global governance.
4. Cf. Bliesemann de Guevara (Chap. 2) on the myths of ‘1648’ (the Peace of Westphalia) and ‘1919’ (the birth of the IR discipline).

5. Cf. Kühn (Chap. 8) on Afghanistan as ‘graveyard of empires’.
6. Yanow (1992) develops the notion of ‘verboden goal’ leaning on Harold Garfinkel’s ‘publicly unmentionable goal’.
7. On the methodical challenges of studying myths, cf. Müller (Chap. 6).
8. Kössler (2014) demonstrates how development as a concept is itself a myth.

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The Precipice of Myth: Mythology/ Epistemology

Robert Cooke

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

Albert Camus famously referred to the myth of Sisyphus to dramatize the absurdity of the human condition: ‘Eluding is the invariable game. The typical act of eluding, the fatal evasion... is hope. Hope of another life one must “deserve” or trickery of those who live, not for life itself, but for an idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it meaning, and betray it’ (Camus 2005, 7). In his attempts to cheat death, Sisyphus is cursed by the gods to ceaselessly roll a rock atop a mountain, only to see it roll back down and start again. Sisyphus exists in a meaningless universe and is condemned to a labour fundamentally futile, a fate that is made to appear worse than death, yet paradoxically his passion for life is as unceasing as his fate. To live or to die are the most contrasting of acts, and yet both lie in the wake of this absurdity. Based on this premise, Camus (2005, 9) raises the question of whether one should kill oneself: ‘Does the Absurd dictate death?’ At its precipice, to which Sisyphus eternally labours to carry his burden, exist the limits of his universe.

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The decision to commit suicide to resolve the absurd, Camus argues, is ‘prepared within the silence of the heart’, and as such, so must the decision to keep living (Camus 2005, 3). The promise of plenitudinous meaning atop the mountain is a myth to mask life’s unspoken absurdity. Sisyphus’ own (decisive) silence is surely, therefore, a myth amid a myth. Human life is but an ‘inhuman show in which absurdity, hope and death carry on their dialogue’ (Camus 2005, 8). How this dialogue goes about in its silence is the fundamental question of myth and the mythographer.

Traditional literature on myths transcends ethnographical, geographical, and historiographical boundaries: here, the concept acts as a stage to a typical cast of tropes and tales, which mythologists analyse and categorise to discover their (mythical) paradigms and archetypes (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1970; Coupe 2009, 3–5). Other authors have sought to expose the ideological and negative power of myths (e.g. Barthes 1991), whereas more recent scholars have adopted myths into the social sciences with empirical intentions (e.g. Yanow 1992).¹ This chapter differs from these approaches in that it strives to comprehend both the limits and possibilities of the mythographical approach to knowledge through an exploration not of its methodology but of its metatheoretical conditions of possibility. Inspired by Jacques Derrida—reading myths, meaning, and metaphysics as systems of signs and signifiers (cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2)—this is an ontological enquiry into an epistemological aporia.

I will argue that a foundational aporia embedded at the meta-mythical level, the very myth of myths, is the incommensurability between *mythos* and *logos*—that which constitutes myth as an object. From this derives a necessary critique of the very limits of metaphysics, in which *logos* is ‘put on edge’ (Spitzer 2011, xx). The purpose of this chapter is to push myths to their most ‘absurd’ conclusion, to better comprehend myth on its own terms, and to challenge where the modern ‘reclamation of myth is itself logocentric’ (Spitzer 2011, xvii). Following *mythos*—as the disruptive trace of *logos*—enables a *deconstructive* reading of philosophy, giving a voice to that which silently haunts *logos* and logocentric discourse. In a nutshell, it shall be argued that the logocentric limits of *mythos* and myth analysis are themselves a myth, and that myths have the potential to signify every aspect of knowledge.

This chapter begins by analysing metatheoretical delimitations of previous approaches to myths, especially in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Paul Ricœur, and Dvora Yanow. While these authors have in common that

they have sought to reclaim myth in their works, I argue that they have failed to reclaim myth on its own terms. To substantiate this argument, the second section draws parallels between Yanow's 'incommensurable values' and the Derridean concept of *différance*, explicating their implications for our own understanding of *mythos* and metaphysics. Thirdly, by highlighting parallels between *mythos* and the *pharmakon*, I apply the analysis to the illustrative case of Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of myth and enlightenment. The fourth section directs the attention towards the question of mythography and discusses the value of empirics versus ethics. It argues in favour of a reflexive ethic of suspicion, in contrast to hope, to better accommodate the ambiguity of *mythos*. The chapter concludes by reviewing the virtues of postmodern myth and mythography in accepting the absurd.

THE MYTH OF MYTH

There is no simple or even single definition of myth, which would decide its inherent undecidability. Myths have come to broadly embody the 'fabulous narration' (Williams 1988, 211), the creative fiction contrasted with the facticity of historical narratives or the immanent experience of reality. However, this fact/fiction dichotomy is not the be-all and end-all of myth but rather based upon a deeper distinction between *logos* and *mythos*.

The *logos/mythos* dichotomy can be traced back to the dialogues of Plato, who distinguishes between the arguments of *logos* and the fables of *mythos*, enabling simplistic binaries to emerge by placing myths among fictions and falsehoods. Yet in Plato's dialogues, *logos/mythos* do not exist within simplistic binaries such as fact/fiction or true/false. Plato's dichotomy establishes philosophy as *logos* and in doing so establishes the birth of metaphysics to the detriment of *mythos*. Yet while for him *logos* signifies reason, truth, presence, and falsifiability, *mythos* signifies the non-argumentative and therefore is neither true nor false. Plato himself frequently utilised myths and mythic thought, appropriating myths or even inventing his own ones as an integral part of his philosophical endeavours (Spitzer 2011, xvi–xvii). *Mythos* eluded comprehension within the bounds of reason and rationality, as non-falsifiable, and thus appealed to inferior faculties. And it is in this respect, at the greatest antithesis between *logos/mythos*, that myth did not simply signify an aberration away from rationality but a potential threat—a 'disease of language', the internal Other of metaphysics (Williams 1988, 211).

While this confusion surrounding simplistic binaries deserves to be dismissed, they do succeed in emphasising the recurrent priority and privilege of *logos*, which cannot be ignored. For the sake of emphasising such privilege, our focus will revolve around the works of Lévi-Strauss, Ricœur, and Yanow. Although these authors and others critiqued later within this chapter approach and define myth in very different ways, it is their common attempt to reclaim myth as a useful concept for analysis that merits their discussion. Also, we can determine their works' varying ontological structures through their relation to *logos* and its privilege within the metatheoretical narrative of their own mythology.

Lévi-Strauss² provides an interesting beginning, since he is aware of the dichotomous *problematique* of myth and seeks to overcome it (Derrida 2005, 365). While rejecting the notion of any finality either theoretically or practically in myth analysis, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless strives to uncover the 'basic logical processes which are at the root of mythical thought'—effectively, the universal laws of myths (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 3–5, 224–5, cf. 1970, 10). Myths and their elementary structures signify a deeper reality of relational patterns, which unveil their universal and unconscious order—a meta-language, which informs a latent logic of structures. To Lévi-Strauss, *logos* is therefore the ontological foundation of mythology, sublimating *mythos* into *logos*. This is further reflected in his 'scientific' approach and the reduction of complex narratives into *mythèmes* (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 210–11), that is, units of myth, which in relation to one another follow a logical structure and hence acquire meaning.

For Lévi-Strauss, the categories of both culture and nature are underpinned by this 'logic' of myth, contrary to other structuralists such as Barthes, who sees myth as a matter of culture disguised as nature in a depoliticised narrative (Coupe 2009, 148). In the Barthesian sense, myth always signifies an ideology, a sophistry, which needs to be demythologised and exposed as a social construct, otherwise reinforcing the political status quo and hegemony of the ruling classes (Barthes 1991, 142; cf. also Müller and Sondermann, Chap. 13; Finlan, Chap. 10).

Such a claim directly contrasts Ricœur's understanding of myth as a challenge to hegemony through the hermeneutic disclosure of 'the possible' (Ricœur 1991, 482–90). Taking a broad temporal perspective on myths in terms of both their historicity and possible futures, Ricœur distinguishes between *mythos* and *historia*, in which the beginning is historical but the origin is mythical (Ricœur 2006, 139–40). Situated in history

and constituted through language, hermeneutics discloses at the heart of society and language a mytho-poetic nucleus in which *mythos* (at first) appears central. Yet while myths are not to be discarded or reasoned into submission, Ricœur still distinguishes between deviant and genuine myths.

At face value, for Ricœur the dichotomy between *logos* and *mythos* ceases to be entirely in the former's favour in arguing that the 'claim for *logos* to rule over *mythos* is itself a mythical claim'. Myth can never be subsumed into reason absolutely, granting a 'mythical dimension to reason itself', therefore making any 'rational appropriation of myth' a simultaneous 'revival of myth' (Ricœur 1991, 485–7). The two are rather deeply intertwined, even complementary, inspiring Ricœur's call for a hermeneutical dialectic between 'critical' *logos* and 'creative' *mythos* (1991, 490). It is only when myths combine their critical-creative insights and, therefore, hold the capacity for 'liberation' through the possible that they are to be considered genuine. Perversion of myths occurs at the 'level of naivety'.

In the pursuit of the possibility of liberation through myth, Ricœur (1965, 191) relies upon the 'principle of hope', understood broadly as the expectation for some future good. Myths take place within the realm of consciousness so that their creative difference may open up the possibility of forming resistance against oppression. This disruptive function of the imagination is not guaranteed and requires maintaining a critical vigilance, for which an outlook based upon hope is required. Hope, however, evades the actual by appealing to the transcendent possible. It is that 'fatal evasion' that Camus derides for distracting our attention away from the absurd. Therefore, despite rejecting possible finality, Ricœur fails to resist the alluring unity of *logos* in the form of the transcendent future good.

In this sense, therefore, both Lévi-Strauss and Ricœur look to, and are dependent upon, a form of *logos*—in spite of never expecting to find it. Whereas Lévi-Strauss looks to a sense of latent logic or order, Ricœur seeks radical possibility. This consistent hierarchical prioritisation of *logos* at the expense of *mythos* is no coincidence: Western metaphysics is fundamentally logocentric. Logocentrism signifies, within the metaphysics of presence, the desire for a transcendental signified, such as the appeals to truth or reason, as forms of plenitude (Derrida 1997, 43, 49). Whereas *logos* is vivified as this presence, *mythos* is in turn vilified as its absence.

Yanow's theory is less abstract and instead seeks to be 'analytically useful' (Yanow 1992, 399).³ Myth is defined as 'a narrative created and believed by a group of people that diverts attention away from a puzzling

part of their reality' (Yanow 1992, 401). These puzzles are products of the clash between two or more incommensurable principles and, as such, Yanow's articulation is in line with Ricœur in regarding myth as an answer to 'existential crisis' (Ricœur 1991, 484).

The key difference, however, is silence. Where Ricœur analyses myths in the form of speech and through discourse of what could be, Yanow analyses their silences and deflections of what is. Where Ricœur's myths are explicitly conscious, Yanow's concern embraces the unconscious. Meaning in myth, in Yanow's analysis, is therefore to be found in her analysis of unacknowledged 'verboden goals' and 'tacit knowledge' (Yanow 1992, 402). Hidden beneath the factual, rather than the fictional, such myths precisely cannot be recognised as such, else the incommensurables cease to be tacitly accepted and thereby incite crisis.

Therefore, demythologisation similarly ceases to be a necessarily conscious activity and is simultaneously prone to remythologisation to (re) resolve and (re)divert the returned conflict. Although never explicitly stating a position regarding *logos/mythos*, Yanow's acknowledgment of 'the verboden' as 'the real' is logocentric, implicitly diminishing myths to merely false representations—a secondary presence, relatively absent in comparison to the immediacy of present reality. The chosen factual policy myths, using her method, are exposed as palatable fictions masking the real (incommensurable) facts. For Yanow, the separation between the conscious and unconscious is determined by the implicit tension between incommensurable values. However, that which remains silent within Yanow's analysis is her own hopeful evasion, her own tacit logocentrism underpinning her concept of verboden goals.

This presence/absence hierarchy upon which metaphysical discourse has constituted itself could be seen to suggest its logocentric limits border upon myth and *mythos*, excluding them from philosophy's mastered space of *logos*. In the following, however, I will argue that *mythos*, as the Other to *logos*, plays the part of Derrida's 'trace', which is that 'part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign' (Spivak 1997, xvii). The next section will trace *mythos* through logocentric discourse to reveal its differential excess destabilising and de-centring originary presence. Giving a voice to this Other logic by exploring philosophy's aporias tests the limits of *logos*. It shall be argued that it is *mythos* that acts as the foundation to *logos* and logocentric metaphysics.

THE MYTH OF PRESENCE

In reading *logos* as presence, it would be a mistake to interpret *mythos*, or any silences, as simple absences. *Mythos* follows a different structure of logic entirely: an aporetic structure. An aporia is an apparently insoluble logical difficulty of differential excess, following yet departing from the rules of logic within philosophical discourse (Blass 2005, xviii). Myth should be recognised as supplementary to the deficiencies of *logos* by synthesising the heterogeneous, through means such as narrative or metaphor, and deflecting attention away from the aporetic and absurd.

Myth is ontologically formed of the existential play of difference between presence and absence, which exists in the absence of a transcendental signified (*logos*) and cannot be contained by the philosophical tradition. Building upon the Platonian understanding of myth as neither true nor false, *mythos* cannot be encompassed within an enclosed conceptual framework. In this respect, *mythos* in terms of presence/absence resembles Yanow's structure of the mythic as two incommensurable principles. This structure provides us with an analytically useful tool, yet contrary to Yanow's theory, presence/absence cannot be resolved or otherwise cease to be *mythos*. Such play is undecidable and limitless (Derrida 1997, 50). Instead, resolution is deflected onto more play and more myth.

This deflection, or evasion, of meaning resembles Derridean *différance*, in which plenitudinous meaning is eternally deferred in its difference to other signifiers and so on *ad infinitum*. Just as Sisyphus was eternally cursed to almost reach the pinnacle of the mountain only to see the rock roll back down, so must any definition appeal to other words from which it differs, and begin its labour of defining anew.

This means that any definition is never absolute—that definition is myth and must succumb to the logic of the supplement. Any definition must be supplemented by further signifiers in striving to attain plenitudinous presence, but the supplement 'adds only to replace' (absence): 'What is no longer deferred is also absolutely deferred' (Derrida 1997, 145, 152–4). As in *mythos*, 'the supplement is maddening because it is neither presence nor absence...presence is absence, the nondeferred is deferred', creating an eternal 'chain of supplements' (Derrida 1997, 154). The supplement vacillates between presence and absence according to the logic of play—a logic Other to *logos* (Derrida 2004, 70). In following this Other logic to its full implications, metaphysics shows significant shifts in terms of its foundation, knowledge production, and myths as metaphors.

The first and most immediate implication is to demonstrate that the foundation of *logos* is *mythos*. Counter to the Hegelian dialectic, which homogenises differences into a unified force, myths present a dialectic without synthesis. *Mythos* cannot form a univocal foundation but is rather plurivocal. It presents an inexhaustible alterity with which *logos* and philosophy can construct their identities, which grants them presence but also signifies their infinite lack or absence through the logic of supplement. The simultaneous excess and absence provides a non-foundational foundation, and establishes possibility out of its very impossibility (Spitzer 2011, 66–8).

Mythos therefore acts as the trace, which is the mark or imprint of absence that haunts presence, as the undecidable otherness that haunts *logos*. As ‘the unheard difference’ of the trace, *mythos* acts as ‘the différance which opens appearance and signification’ (Derrida 1997, 65). But this means that ‘the trace is not only the disappearance of the origin’, but that the origin ‘was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace’ (Derrida 1997, 61).

This shows how the inversion of the *logos/mythos* dichotomy at the expense of *logos*, in search of an alternative foundation, is as absurd as logocentrism. *Mythos*, as undecidable, simply cannot form such an ‘origin’ in the same sense as *logos*, and any attempt would neglect this crucial dynamic and dialogue between the two (Spitzer 2011, xx). Just as a simplistic inversion of life/death shows, in the question of suicide, the absence of life as death is yet ‘the most obvious absurdity’ (Camus 2005, 57). Death is but a mere alternative form of transcendental certainty, reconciling the irreconcilable to the point of choosing one’s own demise. Dialogue is not merely silenced but (de)ceased.

Mythos makes both *logos* possible and its absolute hegemony impossible. Yet to achieve this, the trace of *mythos* also effaces itself, becoming silent and tacit. Derrida refers to metaphysics as a ‘white mythology’, which has ‘effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being’, by which he refers to difference as the trace which remains ‘active and stirring, inscribed in white ink’ (Derrida 1974, 11).

The second implication directly concerns epistemology and knowledge production. Yanow (1992, 403) conveniently highlights how myths ‘direct attention toward what can be known’. But as we have seen in the (non-)foundation to *logos*, as well as the enabling difference which is able to produce (the myth of) definition, to know is to mythologise. The establishment of epistemic presence in the form of truths, facts, or definitions

can never be fully realised. These forms of knowledge serve to mask the underlying and incommensurable tension of ontology. There is also no ‘tacit’ knowledge, in Yanow’s sense, as an underlying truth that is not already always itself a myth because it remains underpinned by *mythos*. As such, frameworks of knowledge such as paradigms or ideologies signify an intertextuality of myths along a mythographical sign-chain. Myths, therefore, act as the silent conditions for our logocentric reality, enabling the potential expansion of myth analysis to all forms of knowledge.

This, however, produces its own more practical problems. To analyse myths to their greatest theoretical depth raises the question of how to adequately capture a mythographical understanding of myth, using the non-foundational logic of *mythos*, and avoid deciding the undecidable—or indeed, defining the undefinable. This is a basic metaphysical problem faced by all the previously discussed authors (whether knowingly or unknowingly), and the short answer is that we cannot. The longer answer is that the undecidable is the condition by which myth is both underpinned and undermined. To help outline this problematique, the concept of ‘the decision’ shall, for our purposes, be read parallel to Derrida’s concept of originary violence of language—originary in that it is both the first violence and in that it gives birth (as the non-origin) to the origin:

To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute (Derrida 1997, 112).

In rupturing the infinite play of *différance*, this first violence gives birth to finite speech as no longer endless. To decide is an ontological violence, establishing discursive coherence, which inevitably excludes the Other (*mythos*)—like the transcendental signified, placing ‘a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign’, thereby achieving a closure (*clôture*) of metaphysics and founding ‘the origin and end of its study in presence’ (Derrida 1997, 49; Spivak 1997, xli). More than a simple ‘temporal finishing-point of metaphysics’, Spivak (1997, xx) argues, ‘[i]t is also the metaphysical desire to make the end coincide with the means, create an *en*-closure, make the definition coincide with the defined’. In this respect, myth is decision, as the point of resolution and self-effacement.

The metaphysical act of ‘the decision’ remains, nevertheless, deeply necessary. Undermining the basis of knowledge also carries implications

for all things in relation to the sign, including speech. If we understand violence as exclusion, the decision/myth/speech constitutes a violence in its exclusion of play and *différance*. Yet to disown speech would (in the inverse and absence of speech) constitute silence, like death, ultimately excluding all things. The non-decision thereby constitutes the greater violence. Therefore, we are left with the seemingly paradoxical thesis in which ‘speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence’, but in which violence ‘did not exist before the possibility of speech’. In this respect, acknowledging the necessity of the decision, Derrida calls for ‘violence against violence’, drawing a distinction between ‘worst’ and ‘least’ violence (2005, 145–6, 162).

From a mythographical perspective, however, although myth is decision, it remains equally important to assert decision is myth. Spitzer reminds us that ‘closure is impossible, since undertaking it always unwittingly dis-closes’ (Spitzer 2011, 78). The rupture (re)creates an opening through its finity. As Derrida argues, ‘this field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite...there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions’ (Derrida 2005, 365). The non-central centre is the trace. As the metaphysical Other and non-foundational foundation, it exemplifies the undecidable in any decision as the fundamental elusion which constitutes our illusion that cannot be wholly arrested or excluded: ‘One could say...this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity’ (Derrida 2005, 365).

Our third implication, therefore, is to draw comparisons between this meta-mythography and other forms of the trace, such as writing and metaphor. Even a fairly traditional mythologist such as Campbell has made such a connection, analysing myth as a composition of metaphorical language (Campbell 2002). In Ricœur’s *The Rule of Metaphor*, metaphor is understood as a ‘trope of resemblance’. However, metaphor also ‘constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words; its explanation is grounded in a theory of substitution’ or, as we might refer to it, supplementation (Ricœur 2003, 1). More significantly, however, in metaphor we find a similar inferiority to *logos* at the metatheoretical level. Drawing comparison between mythography and the semiotic complements the second implication by focussing upon the mythic structure of the sign—as underpinned by a trace-structure rather than a logocentric presence-structure.

The metaphorical is antipodal to the literal, but the function of metaphor reinforces the privilege of the *logos*. Parallel to the relationship between myth and metaphysics, the metaphor is the non-foundational foundation of writing. As Derrida (1974, 60) writes that ‘it is not so much that metaphor is in the text...rather these texts are in metaphor’. In this sense, metaphor forms an Other language and is, similarly, ‘not, therefore, a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the “literal” meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself’ (Derrida 1997, 15). All forms of language are metaphor in one form or another as translation, such as translating a non-philosopheme (or *mythème*) into a philosopheme, or how the sign seeks to translate the signified. But even the signified itself is never fully present or immediate ‘as the sign is always the supplement to the thing itself’ (Derrida 1997, 145). As will be seen in the following section, neither writing nor *mythos* conform to logocentric forms but find metatheoretical overlap in the form of the *pharmakon*.

THE MYTH OF THEUTH

In the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates extols a panegyric to speech as the superior vehicle of truth in condemnation of writing, and does so by recounting the myth of Theuth, the Egyptian inventor and god of writing (Derrida 2004, 95–7; Plato 1973). Writing is offered as a gift by Theuth, as an aid to wisdom and memory, yet rejected by King Thamus as nothing more than a recollection and a recipe for forgetfulness. This discussion balances upon the Greek word of *pharmakon*, which can be alternately translated as either ‘remedy’ or ‘poison’ (Derrida 2004, 75)—another binary parallel to presence/absence, memory/forgetfulness, and speech/writing. It is at this fold in the discourse that Derrida begins reading.

Socrates argues for the ‘purity of presence and self-presence as speech’, as the immediate, ‘living’, and verifiable *logos*, and in doing so Derrida identifies a ‘kinship of writing and myth’ (Derrida 2005, 369, 2004, 80). As we have seen, both myth and writing exemplify an Other logic embedded within the *pharmakon*, erring and oscillating between falsifiability and non-falsifiability. The *pharmakon* reflects this play between presence and absence, constituting incommensurable opposites, and is therefore an exemplar of the undecidable. Being both cure and poison, and yet neither, each depends upon their essential ambivalence.

Transcendental truths, manufactured by ‘philosophy as *logos*, can only be understood through an unending oscillation with *mythos*’ (Spitzer 2011, 85, 117). But the irreducible ambiguity of the *pharmakon* and its possible meaning is beyond any control or synthesis, whether by kings, gods, or philosophers. Any attempt at imposition or domination is met with resistance and evasion. The *pharmakon* is, therefore, a helpful term for better comprehending *mythos* as a remedy and poison by making meaning both possible and impossible whilst maintaining its essential ambiguity.

To take a particularly illustrative example, it is in these dual senses that Horkheimer and Adorno are able to construct their dual thesis: ‘Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, xviii).⁴ On the one hand, mythology had contributed to progress and enlightenment through the dialectic, and was still valuable in so far as it could continue to contribute to progress. Whilst on the other hand, mythology could also be considered one of the dangers of Enlightenment thinking, which could eventually regress towards ideology and violence. The critical capacities of reason become instrumentalised, reverting to mythology with new orthodoxies and new dogmas. Sisyphus’ pinnacle, the point at which enlightenment ‘reverts’ and rolls back down the mountain and into irrationalism, is born of reason itself. These differences can be seen as suggestive of a return to the logic of the supplement. However, their desire for more remedies (progress) and fewer poisonous tendencies (regress) is equally indicative of constructing myth as a *pharmakon*.

The signifiers of remedy/poison, good/bad, presence/absence, memory/forgetfulness, and progress/regress are never stable and always changing with each variation in subject, space, or time. As such, any foundational definition is futile (in a logocentric sense). However, we might complement the *pharmakon* by taking inspiration in nomenclature from Ricœur’s distinction between living and dead metaphors, through which we might distinguish between living and dead myths.

The Rule of Metaphor is itself a translation; the original French title being *La Métaphore Vive*. Ricœur’s position is a question of hermeneutics, a matter of increasing possible interpretation. He argues that ‘metaphor is living by virtue of the fact that it introduces the spark of imagination’, through the very capacity to coin new metaphor itself, which enables the ‘possibility’ Ricœur craves. Dead metaphor, by comparison, is considered insignificant as ‘common meaning and add[ed] to the polysemy of lexical entities’. The former, or forgotten, metaphor ceases to contain the

creative tension between its split meanings as both ‘is like’ and ‘is not’ in which irreducible possibility emerges (White 1991, 313; Ricœur 2003, 358, 115; Simms 2003, 76).

The death of metaphor therefore demands a revitalisation, a reopening of the possible, a conscious and hopeful remythologisation. For the purposes of this chapter, however, in which knowledge is treated with much greater suspicion than hope, this formulation must be somewhat inverted. Metaphor does not die as it enters the general lexicon because, as has already been argued, the literal is always already metaphorical. Its power as the trace reflects its place as the ‘active’ yet effaced element underpinning language. In being understood as literal, the unrecognised metaphor runs parallel to the unrecognised myth of facticity.

Instead, those myths which are ‘dead’ are recognised as myths and lose their ontological and epistemic power. In being labelled a ‘myth’ they begin to signify the simplistic notion of absence as fictions or lies. Simply put, they are no longer believed and, therefore, are no longer used to resolve contradictory principles, whilst those which are ‘living’ continue to evade and deflect tension away from their absurd ‘reality’. A myth can be considered living by virtue of the extent to which it vivifies and breathes possibility (and in the same instance its impossibility) into the notion of knowledge through its silent play. Those like the myth of mythlessness (or indeed, the myth of logocentric ‘myth’ and the belief that myths can somehow be abolished, overcome, or made less) are in this case still strong. But there must also always be an oscillating play between the living and the dead.

In this sense, death disrupts the possibility of possibility, but it is not a simple closure of *différance*. Living/dead is not a binary between disclosure and closure, because it is closure which dis-closes, and myth constructed as either fact or fiction are both forms of metaphysical closure. To declare a myth to be ‘in fact’ a fiction is precisely to re-resolve the incommensurable tension exposed by exposing the myth in the first place. The key distinction to draw in this respect is that whereas unrecognised myth is resolved as an epistemic presence, recognition re-resolves the now absurd myth in terms of epistemic absence. The former, therefore, betrays its significance in terms of (what could be called) epistemic privilege atop the logocentric hierarchy. Such a myth of mythlessness provides a prime example of deflecting absurdity onto more play and more myth.

This is because the living element is the trace, as the infinite movement of *différance*. ‘Death’, on the other hand, ‘is the movement of *différance*

to the extent that that movement is necessarily finite'. But, as already outlined, the imposition of finity (re)produces infinity and, in this respect, death also 'inaugurates life' (Derrida 1997, 143). And as such myth is always to some extent both living and dead—*mythos* is undying.

How such a definition of this nomenclature would work in practice is ambiguous, but that is how it should be. It has less to do with methodology and more with one's approach towards myth. Such categories, and those categorised within, could never be final, and to exclude any one dimension of myth would not only impose an especially violent decision but would reduce the possibility of how mythology varies between the level of the conscious and unconscious, as well as between theory and praxis. By applying this distinction to the previous example, Horkheimer and Adorno's 'enlightenment' thesis, we also see how recognition of myth as 'myth' need not necessarily commit one's knowledge to the point of existential crisis before resolution but can act and elude through much subtler supplements.

The living myth here is 'progress'. Horkheimer and Adorno expose the undermining undecidability of the *pharmakon* underpinning the enlightenment whilst simultaneously masking it again through a dialectical disguise. In this form the myth is maintained by being allowed to elude and play between those points of fixity where its tensions would be fully exposed: the pre-modern mythology essential to modernity, of irrationality as reason; and dogmatic matter-of-fact 'progress', of reason as irrationality. In this instance, the myth of progress can be described as both a living and dead myth.

Enlightenment is precisely able to elude because it exists within an intertextuality of myth. Living myth may supplement itself within more myth to mask any perceivable points of tension: in this case by supplementing with a remedy where there is poison, such as barbarism or 'positivist decay'. This is done without denying the possibility of either remedy or poison, as enlightened/mythic creation and destruction, by harnessing the ontological power of the very *pharmakon* in which the enlightenment is made absurd. But rather than acknowledge the absurdity underpinning their thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno continue to seek a dialectic with synthesis, a transcendental point of enlightenment which exists as a virtue between two extremes of mythologisation. Enlightenment must exist both within and without myth.

However, despite writing one of the most disparaging critiques of modernity within the twentieth century, such an approach is indicative

of a less ambitious ethic of muddling about with the same, albeit more critically. They seek to do this by reapplying the Hegelian principle of ‘determinate negation’, which ‘discloses each image as script’ and ‘teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 18). Horkheimer and Adorno seek to take the dialectic out of Hegel’s hands to reclaim it from the forces of regression, from fear. They argue that the irrationality of reason stems from the fear of the unknown, which they see as determining the ‘path of demythologisation’: ‘humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 11). However, the two equally succumb to similar fears in their own attempts to remedy and reclaim the possibility of *progress*, ‘that which distinguishes enlightenment’, from the ‘decay’ to which Hegel had ‘consigned it’. Although averse to the ‘self-satisfaction of knowing in advance’, and the securities of specific knowledge, Horkheimer and Adorno instead still subscribe to the myth of knowledge as an abstract entity (2002, 18). Their compounded dialectical approach anticipates a necessary direction (even if not a necessary outcome) for the myth of progress to ‘progress’, deferring the absurd tension towards a reified and enlightened future.

A mythography able to accept the absurd and undecidable movement of *mythos* is in need of an ethic fundamentally different from that of Horkheimer and Adorno.

THE MYTH OF MYTHOGRAPHY

It is a (mythical) truth commonly acknowledged, that an academic in possession of a good theory must be in want of an empirical case study. The problem with empirics, however, stems from its position as a source of ‘knowledge’, primary partner of the positivist, and essential weapon in the armoury that is epistemic discourse. Indeed, myth must stand ‘in opposition to epistemic discourse’ (Derrida 2005, 362). Adopting the evasive form of myth we have explored, when applied reflexively a mythographical approach cannot produce its own ‘knowledge’ claims. This includes recognising the impact of the mythographer upon myths and ‘myth’ itself as mythomorphic. Lévi-Strauss (1970, 5, 12), being aware of this, acknowledged ‘it would not be wrong to consider [his] book itself as a myth’. And now this chapter too, by prescribing a synthetic unity (through its inevitable decisions) in articulating mythography, will contribute to creating its

own iteration of the ‘myth of mythology’, one that is, rather, the myth of mythography.

In this respect, the *pharmakon* of mythography is the undecidable decision. Each decision is both a poisonous violence and a remedy to the greater violence of the non-decision. The necessity of decision, therefore, necessitates mythography should not be a matter of moving beyond myths, but of continuing to read myth ‘in a certain way’ (Derrida 2005, 364). As such, studying myths is a matter of ethics rather than empirics. But in what way?

A reflexive and thereby ethical (rather than empirical) mythography cannot be content with demythologisation (in a Barthesian sense) or remythologisation (in a Ricœurian sense). Derrida (2004, 167, original italics) rejects any ‘philosophical and dialectical mastery of the *pharmaka*’. As such, one cannot rely upon hope, reflected in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s thesis, as appropriation through an expectation of future good. Although hope is a postponement of dialectical synthesis, because to hope is to acknowledge an implicit absence of something ‘not yet’ (Ricœur 1965, 12), it is for the wrong eschatological reasons—a dialectic without synthesis (...yet). Set against hope stand the philosophers of suspicion, always suspecting something at fault with metaphysics, including both Derrida and the likes of Nietzsche, famously describing language as a ‘mobile army of metaphors’ (Nietzsche 1971, 42). Their folly is, for Ricœur, in only considering dead metaphor (Simms 2003, 76). However, those which Ricœur suspects dead, we may instead suspect (as has been argued) to be very much alive as continually underpinned by the creative and tacit tension at play. It is through the affirmation of this play, embedded within suspicion, that we may best read myths and appreciate the absurdity which continually resists appropriation.

That which Derrida (2005, 396) refers to as an ethic of play—with ‘being [...] conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around’—runs counter to Lévi-Strauss’s ‘ethic, nostalgia, and even remorse’ (but also hope) of presence and origins. The ethic of play importantly continues to conceive of being, but as unceasingly suspect and undecidable. The words we use, for example, can be placed under erasure (*sous rature*), to print both the word and its deletion, so as to indicate their place as both ‘inaccurate yet necessary’ (Spivak 1997, xiv)—inaccurate because the sign is a mask to a structure of difference, but necessary because the sign remains the lesser violence.

We may, therefore, speak of myth as both an object of study whilst also acknowledging its underlying and incommensurable tension.

We can further contrast these two ethics through differences between Ricœur's future-facing horizon of hope and Derrida's notion of 'to come' (*à venir*), which remains undecidable and therefore without knowable expectation: 'it is the unforeseeable, the un-anticipatable, the non-masterable, non-identifiable' (Derrida 1992, 18; Huskey 2009, 23). Rather we must play at the limits of *logos*, teetering on the edge of an abyss as we keep watch for something beyond our horizon, unknowable but nevertheless 'to come'—to put *logos* 'on edge', to re-invoke Spitzer's phrase. Both the supplement and *pharmakon*, in this respect, represent 'double-edged' words, which help locate the suspected moment of undecidability and 'open the textuality of the text' (Spivak 1997, xlix)—the *mythos* of myths.

Through the limitlessness of play, suspicion therefore calls for the practice of the ethical mythographer to remain restless (edgy, even) as a form of critical vigilance. Any claim to a ground beyond myth, such as Ricœur's hopeful search for a second naïveté, remains a myth but ignorant to the 'possibility' of play. To find incommensurable principles, but also resist deciding upon them as much as possible, the suspicious mythographer should seek to maintain a *dialogue*—not only between presence/absence, but also 'absurdity, hope and death'. Dialogue, contra dialectic, is an open-ended practice, balancing both speech and play, which continually evades synthesis and thereby disrupts both logocentrism and its epistemic privilege.

When confronted with absurdity, the answer is not suicide; nor is it to ignore absurdity in life through the 'suicide of their thought'. 'The real effort is to stay there' and carry on that dialogue (Camus 2005, 8)—to continue to read but in that certain way, or ethic, which refuses to remain ignorant of undecidability and *mythos*.

CONCLUSIONS

Embracing the undecidability of *mythos* has allowed us to appropriate the broad outline proposed by Yanow and reconfigure mythography from a postmodern perspective, arguing that *knowledge is myth*. This deconstructive intervention is necessary in order to challenge the boundaries of mythography by putting it 'on edge', and opening up new possibilities for research

and critical thinking towards even the fundamental structures of difference and signification. In keeping with this understanding of myth as a dialectic without synthesis, mythography's only limits are equal to its opportunities, dependent on *différance*. In empirical terms, as a means of approaching knowledge production, mythographic analysis exhibits an inherent lack of limits to some who appeal to the ideal-typical practicality of *logos*, and a welcome extension for others seeking *mythos*. This chapter should be counted in the latter camp, celebrating the ethic and affirmation of play.

Absurdity is perfectly captured by this conflict between presence and absence, in the 'confrontation between the human need' and desire for reason amid 'the unreasonable silence of the world' (Camus 2005, 26). But as this analysis has shown, even if it were possible, myths are not to be transcended or escaped but embraced—albeit on their own meta-mythographical terms. Derrida's famous phrase, 'there is nothing outside the text' gains new meaning when based within an intertextuality of myths (Derrida 1997, 158). The mythography of myths is not one of mythlessness or even the myth of modernity—the myths of objectivity and neutrality which were considered so dangerous by Ricoeur and Barthes (Ricoeur 1967, 5; Coupe 2009, 12). Although these myths are well recognised, mythographers must recognise the positive power of myths as not only constitutive of the world we know but of its very possibility.

Like Derridean deconstruction, premised upon the ethic of play, an ethical mythography is not a method and 'cannot be transformed into one' (Derrida 1985, 1–5). But only by logocentric standards does this endeavour become futile. As Camus (2005, 119) concludes, 'the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart'. It is his awareness of his existence's absurdity, and as such a reflexive awareness of himself, which turns Sisyphus' tragedy into a tale of (absurd) heroism, which is the most pertinent lesson that might be applied to mythography. Then there are no limits.

NOTES

1. On different types of myth concepts, see Bliesemann de Guevara (Chap. 2) and Münch (Chap. 3).
2. On Lévi-Strauss see in detail Goetze (Chaps. 5 and 7).
3. See also Yanow (foreword) and Münch (Chap. 3).
4. On Horkheimer and Adorno, see Bliesemann de Guevara (Chap. 2).

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Bringing Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu Together for a Post-structuralist Methodology to Analyse Myths

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Myths fascinate—rightly so. This is what they are supposed to do. They represent a particular and often particularly spectacular form of narration that is supposed to capture the imagination and feelings of their audience. Yet in an age that wants to be secular, myths’ fascination has been relegated to the domain of belief and even superstition. This volume undertakes the brave attempt to argue against this wishful thinking. It aims at showing that myths matter and that they matter particularly in the international realm and in world politics—there, where they are the most denied because more than in any other realm of politics scholars (and practitioners) argue that international politics are based on coolly calculated utilitarian interests.

The analysis of myths can make a twofold contribution to the analysis of world politics: first, by deconstructing the belief in the coolly calculated interest-guided politics of the international system; and second, by providing an original angle through which power in global politics can be analysed.

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Reflections on how culture, norms, and ideas matter for international politics have become important in the discipline since several advances in theory development (Lapid 1989; Adler 1997; Guzzini 2000; Adler 2005). Empirical research has shown that cultural norms and values matter not only for how decisions are taken (Checkel 2004) but also what is deemed appropriate to be politically regulated in the world (Epstein 2008), how norms evolve and change within policymaking contexts (Wiener 2008), and how power and domination in world politics are culturally framed (Hansen 2013; Katzenstein 1996; Neumann 2012). Constructivist research has also moved away from the essentialist and still statist assumptions of identity and social action that have characterised early works of the Wendtian type and more into analysing practices and language of politics (see e.g. Adler and Pouliot 2011; Drumbl 2012; Pupavac 2012).

Myths, however, as a particular type of cultural narrative, have not been theoretically integrated into these debates and have not yet been empirically fully explored. Other social science and humanities disciplines readily accept that myths are foundational for societies; indeed, their foundational character is what turns a simple story into a myth in the first place. It is one basic definition of a myth that it is a story about very significant and archetypical personalities, institutions, and norms. The dramatis personae of a myth live through a significant and archetypical adventure that can teach us, the audience, something about our lives, our society, our thoughts, feelings, and relations, in short, our place in the universe (Segal 2004).

One simple reason why myths have been neglected is the reluctance of large numbers of international relations scholars to accept a concept of global society that necessarily underlies the thought that ideas, norms, culture, and, in particular, myth shape politics. There are certainly institutional reasons for this resistance. But there are also theoretical debates to be had about just how much a society has to be 'social', that is, linking individuals through shared culture, to be called a society (e.g. Rosenberg 2006). A common argument against the view that we are living in an age of global society is exactly that not all individuals of this world share the same culture (e.g. Lévy 2007).

Yet this argument has been well refuted by sociologists as mighty as Max Weber and Anthony Giddens, who argue that *culture* is not the most important characteristic of a society. Interaction and communication define a society: the simple fact that there are relations among individuals and that these relations result in various configurations, which 'order' individuals into relational and, often, hierarchical patterns in the form

of small groups like families or business organisations, and larger ones like nation-states or world society. Identifying culture as central marker of societies is putting the cart in front of the horses—it is, indeed, culture that differentiates such groups internally and externally by codifying the hierarchical patterns of the social relationships. The fact that there is no world culture shared among all people of the world cannot serve as argument against the existence of a world society. On the contrary, the multitude of expressions of culture point to a large variety of patterns of distinction. Analysing cultural distinctions allows, hence, analysing the social ordering and hierarchisation of world society. In short, a deep analysis of power in world politics that singles out the contours of hierarchies of authority and submission in world society necessarily has to start with an analysis of culture.

The statist paradigm of global politics has been considered for a long time sufficient to analyse hierarchy and anarchy. Yet the statist view fails to recognise and, consequently, to analyse a number of questions beyond the statist exercise of power. Prominent among these questions is the crucial one related to why the state has become the normatively and factually dominant form of political organisation in the world. The constitution of world politics as inter-statist politics is neither necessary nor natural in any way; it is the expression of a specific type of power relation between actors, some of which are states and some of which are not. These power relations bear a material form, for example, in the constitution of physical borders and their territorial defence through physical means, and a symbolic form, for example, a discourse that naturalises states as the most important and legitimate actors in world politics. Scholarly debate that ignores the symbolic construction of states risks reproducing exactly such power structures which brought about the inter-statist world system in the first place. In order to avoid such a tautological approach and to better understand how global society is politically constituted, it is therefore necessary to transcend the statist paradigm through a critique of the symbols and discourses in which it is cladded.

Myths provide a particularly good case for the symbolic analysis. I understand myths as foundational stories which define authoritatively basic values and norms of a society (for overviews of different myth concepts see Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2; Münch, Chap. 3). They are moral tales that depict not only what is good and right to do in this world but also—and commonly quite cruelly—the sanctions for misbehaviour. If world politics is to be understood as taking place in a global society where

different actors and parts interact along relatively stable relational patterns, then there are certainly myths circulating about the origins of this society, its habits, norms, values, prohibitions, and taboos.

As an object of analysis, myths, however, do represent particular difficulties. The most fundamental of these is their narrative form which, in global politics, does not appear in the same form as it does in the myths which are commonly analysed in other fields of social science and humanities. Folk tales, religious, or foreign myths are easily recognisable as myths. Myths in international relations, however, appear in secular and mundane forms such as news reporting or as urban legends (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2015). They need to be first identified as myths.

This chapter discusses how French structuralism and its successors can contribute to the analysis of myths in international relations by Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myths and a post-structuralist critique, namely that formulated by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. This 'debate', which never really was one as the two never antagonistically confronted each other in public but rather replied very respectfully to each other's work, clarifies two areas that are of interest for the analysis of myths in international relations. First, the analytical frame that Claude Lévi-Strauss proposes is most useful to identify and decipher myths in international politics; second, Bourdieu's critique of exactly this analytical frame allows tying in a discussion of power, which is still the central theme of international relations (Leander 2006; Bigo 2011; Guzzini 2013).

The chapter will first present Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myths, which draws in turn on the works of the Russian linguist Vladimir Propp and on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics. In a second section I will discuss Bourdieu's critique of Lévi-Strauss and its 'poststructuralist' aspects. It appears necessary to clarify the meaning of poststructuralism in this context, as this has often led to misunderstandings outside France about the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. While it is true that Bourdieu's critique is vigorous, it nevertheless represents an important advancement of the way societies, which are foreign to the observer, are analysed and understood (Swartz 2013). Pierre Bourdieu wanted his critique to be understood in a Kantian sense, not as negation or denigration of Lévi-Strauss' work but as a test in its application to those research questions which he, Bourdieu, was preoccupied with at the time. One major research question of Bourdieu was the structure of domination that allowed French colonisers to subjugate the Algerian peasant and worker. In this context, Bourdieu referred to Lévi-Strauss' structuralism not only because it was

the intellectual ‘doxa’ of the time. He was also inspired by the way Lévi-Strauss had succeeded in destroying the most banal and deepest racism of social sciences through his methodology that extracted myths and rituals from the realm of the absurd, comic, childish, irrational, silly, and folkloric to which they had been confined (Eribon and Collin 1988). Rather than being a deprecation of Lévi-Strauss’ monumental influence, Bourdieu’s critique is a tribute to it.

LÉVI-STRAUSS AND THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MYTHS

According to Lévi-Strauss, there is no fundamental, categorical difference between myth and history, and many narratives we encounter move between these two. Yet, myth and history are different, as the first is a closed narrative that will not change in its basic structure no matter who tells the myth and how it is told. History, however, is recounted in many different ways: ‘The open character of history is secured by the innumerable ways according to which mythical cells, or explanatory cells which were originally mythical, can be arranged or rearranged’ (Lévi-Strauss 1979, 17). On the other hand, myths are closed narratives in which the initial metaphors induce a set sequence of meanings, and although the appearances of the myth might alter, the sequencing itself does not.

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the aim of a myth is ‘to reach by the shortest possible means a general understanding of the universe—and not only a general but a *total* understanding’ (Lévi-Strauss 1979, 17). This is the reason why myths are foundational. The understanding of the world, of the personalities that populate that world, of their relations and interactions—in short, the message myths convey—is meant to be all-encompassing and total, hence, excluding and even tabooing any rival understanding.

Lévi-Strauss further argues that myths always reflect a binomial structure of understanding the world and that this is reflected in the narrative figures, the metaphors, and the narration of the myth. He exemplifies this with a myth from western Canada in which a skate convinces the South Wind not to blow every day but only every second day. The binomial structure is not only apparent in the encounter of two, the fish and the wind, but also in the shape of the skate, which is large when seen from above or below and thin when seen from the side, and in the switch from the wind blowing every day to every other day.

Lévi-Strauss' elaboration of structuralism as a theoretical interpretation of the world *and* as method of analysis makes him the revolutioniser of social sciences, notably of ethnography, his original field of study. However, his innovative approach to analysing so-called primitive societies reflected epistemological and ontological advances of the early twentieth century, like Georges Dumézil's comparative linguistic approach to the analysis of myths (Segal 1996). The central epistemological proposition of structuralism is that human activity and thought follow a systematic logic; that this systematic logic can be identified in repetitions and parallelisms; and that one can distinguish two levels of structural development, one apparent (syntagmatic) and one symbolically underlying (paradigmatic). All three propositions had been developed before Lévi-Strauss systematised them for the analysis of Amerindian myths. Lévi-Strauss' originality lay in consistently and unconditionally applying these three methodological innovations to ethnography and there particularly to all domains of human life, whether family relationships or myths.

Ferdinand de Saussure, whose 'general linguistics' will be discussed in more detail below, and his disciple Roman Jakobson particularly influenced Lévi-Strauss' mythology through their analytical proposition of two axis, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, which both create the poetic dimension of a text through their interplay in the narration. Lévi-Strauss was particularly interested in the proposition that the interplay of the two axes creates emotional, musical, and subliminal effects, which are not apparent in the flow of the narration itself or in its subject. Like other structuralists of the time, Lévi-Strauss argued that texts (written or oral) do not represent any superfluous element; anything in the text is there by some inherent necessity, even if this necessity escapes the superficial look of the observer.

Lévi-Strauss succinctly observes: 'Mythical stories are, or seem, arbitrary, meaningless, absurd...' (Lévi-Strauss 1979, 3). Myths do not always tell a story of the real world. Hence, comparing them to the real world in order to see whether the stories related in them are 'true' does not make sense. Myths tell stories about the fabric of this world. The message of myths is a moral tale about what holds the narrator's universe together. They are moral tales because they encapsulate clear indications of how to live in this world once we understand it in the way the myth wants the audience to understand it. The normative character of tales is often comprised in their religious character, which emphasises even more the myth's rectitude.

Myths have to be believed to be true. They therefore appear absurd only to those who do not believe in them; commonly, they therefore include also a subordinate tale detailing the sanctions that threaten whoever doubts the truthfulness of the tale. From the inside, myths are right and, obviously, sensible stories even though the audience might well know and understand that not all has factually happened in exactly that way. Doniger relates that Sudanese storytellers will begin with this formula (Doniger 2011, 2):

I'm going to tell a story
 (Audience) Right!
 It's a lie.
 Right!
 But not everything is false!
 Right!

The audience commonly knows and acknowledges that myths are not necessarily factually true. Whether myths are factually correct or not is therefore not a criterion by which their meaning can be understood or even their quality as myth could be debated. This means that myths cannot be 'falsified', and that is one of the major reasons why myths persist even if historical or social science research exposes their errors, flaws, and lies.

If myths are therefore not 'falsifiable' because they cannot be compared to a real world, how can myths be analysed and how can we know their impact on how societies are organised and identify themselves? The starting point of analysing myths is to ask what it is in them that is believed.

In order to identify what exactly is important in myths and how they persist and work, the analysis has to deconstruct the myth and reconstruct its context of meaning. The context of meaning is not arbitrary. It is closely linked to the narrator's wider universe. The cues for interpreting the myth are therefore to be found in the narrator's and audience's world. This means that myths cannot be analysed by reifying them and by postulating that the observer can look on them and examine them as objects outside his or her own experience and lifeworld.

This poses an epistemological problem, for the object of analysis is partly constructed by the observation itself and, vice-versa, the observer is part of the object of analysis. As Patrick Jackson in his recent study of the ontology and epistemology of international relations formulated,

the perspective to adopt is one of ‘world-mind monism’ in assuming that myths and our (in this case, my) interpretation of them are inherent to the same socially constructed mental world (Jackson 2011, 115). This approach is commonly subsumed under the notion of ‘reflexivist’ approaches and explicitly rejects the causal-mechanism modelling of so-called positivist approaches to political science and international relations. However, as Jackson points out, the simple rejection of positivism and the claim that reflexivity of the observer is an epistemological necessity is not sufficient to disarm the argument about a lack of proof and scientificity. This needs to be done by setting out clearly the methodology of such a reflexivist approach (Jackson 2011, 186). Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism is, by its systematic and rigorous design, a methodology that does exactly this.

The analysis of latent content is not arbitrary but based on structural principles. Lévi-Strauss himself condemned the arbitrary interpretation of myths, notably those referring to psychoanalytical explanations such as repressed fears, as ‘too easy’ and unhelpful as they are based on ‘clever dialectics’ rather than systematic analysis (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 429). The first principle is the claim that all elements, what Lévi-Strauss calls with a self-created neologism *mythèmes*, which make up a narration, entertain a relation to each other. This claim is based on the argument that Saussure’s linguistics has shown that no syntax element in a sentence is arbitrarily placed but that all elements produce sense by the relationship that grammar, syntax, and semantics establish among them and which the social context ascribes to them.

Saussure formulated linguistics as social science, namely that the examination of language without consideration of its ‘social side’ is inconceivable:

But what is language? It is not to be confused with human speech (language), of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty (de Saussure 2011, 9).

For Saussure, the particularity of human language is not that it is oral speech; any other organ could have replaced language, for example, hand symbols. The particularity of language is that it is an oral system of symbols, which are socially agreed upon: ‘a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas.’ (de Saussure 2011, 9). Language only

becomes more than sounds by the fact that ‘an auditory image becomes associated with a concept’ (de Saussure 2011, 9). These concepts are created and modified outside the individual as ‘[the concept] exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of the community’ (de Saussure 2011, 12).

The social nature of language determines the relationships between the concept (which he calls *signifié*) and the sound-image with which it is associated (which he calls *signifiant*). These relationships can be constructed through semantics (for example, prepositions), syntactically (for example, the difference between a car track and a track car), or grammatically (for example, infinite and definite verbs). Saussure further distinguishes syntagmatic terms from paradigmatic terms, the former being terms that link the preceding and succeeding term, the latter being terms that can be replaced, as such, by others.

He therefore conceives of two types of relational patterns that make words carry meaning and transform language into speech (*parole*): in a linear form, syntagmatic terms diachronically initiate meaning of one term after the other; in a deep form, paradigmatic terms imply meanings by referring to other terms that could be used or that should be thought synchronically with this term.

Lévi-Strauss draws on Saussure’s linguistics and develops them further by arguing that every longer language fact—narratives—can be broken down into *mythèmes*, which are also ordered following a specific structure. *Signifiant* and *signifié*, that is, expression and meaning, are not only related to each other within one sentence but also within one narrative unit. He illustrates this by taking apart the Oedipus myth and rearranging the *mythèmes* according to their similarities, and he ends up with four columns of similar *mythèmes* for which he then, in a second step, formulates binary relationships (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 428–444).

These relationships between groups of *mythèmes* follow the logic enunciated by the *mythèmes*. For instance, the logic of the relationship of the group of *mythèmes* in the Oedipus myth that deal with the killing of a kin are logically related to the group of *mythèmes* which deal with the veneration or love of a kin. Neither group of *mythèmes* appears arbitrarily in a myth but by structural necessity: it is, in Lévi-Strauss’ terms, impossible to have a myth speaking of patricide (to stay within the Oedipus myth) without also talking of mother love. In fact, the killing of a man only becomes patricide because there is also the love of a woman who is simultaneously mother of the killer and wife of the man killed (Barthes 1966, 5).

It is here, in this argument of a necessary logical relationship between elements, that Lévi-Strauss' structuralism has been most effectively criticised as he, indeed, does not venture into the epistemological question about the origins of the necessary logic. The critique has been formulated from two perspectives. On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss' structuralism has been severely criticised from a mind-world dualist perspective as interpreting something into texts which is not there or which, in the end, cannot be proven to be there. The debate between Lévi-Strauss and Propp already points in this direction, as Propp rejected the use Lévi-Strauss made of his structural analysis, at least as the debate is summarised by Alan Dundes, who writes: 'Propp is concerned with empirically observable sequential structures whereas Lévi-Strauss is interested in underlying paradigms' (Dundes 1997, 43).

The accusation is that any assumption of a paradigmatic structure underlying a narration is nothing but an interpretation. This statement only makes sense if Propp is assumed to be 'objectively' looking at tales from an outsider perspective, and the statement also only gains polemical weight if 'being interested in underlying paradigms' implies *not* being interested in the apparent story. The critique does not forcibly denounce that narratives have underlying and subliminal meanings, but it considers that the narrative cannot provide material to grasp this implicit sense. Arguing that words are sound and fury, these critics maintain that researchers lack objective principles and rules to analyse subliminal meanings, and therefore cannot produce scientific knowledge.

BOURDIEU'S 'POST-STRUCTURALIST' CRITIQUE

Pierre Bourdieu, on the other hand, has criticised that the operation of necessary logic as structural principle in Lévi-Strauss' works implies that this logic exists a priori and universally—that this logic would be 'objective', that is, outside the observer (Bourdieu 2004, 62). Bourdieu argues that the logic of speech and meaning is socially constituted and socially variable. It is most intimately linked to social and symbolic power and it is, simultaneously, subordinated to the usage that is made of language and speech, that is, the praxis of the discourse (Bourdieu 2000 [1972], 250, 1982). Bourdieu does not dispute that myths and narrations can be structurally analysed, nor does he entirely contest the binomial character of structures. Yet he does argue that the logic of meaning is socially determined by the symbolic power of dominant social groups and that, hence-

forth, the logic that is structuring a discourse (or narrative) can only be understood empirically through an analysis of social structures and practices of domination (Bourdieu 1994, 127, 2004, 62).

Bourdieu hence delves into that part of Saussure's linguistics which Lévi-Strauss has left aside, namely the question of by which social processes a sound-image becomes connected to a concept. Bourdieu would argue that the necessary connection Lévi-Strauss asserts between mother love and patricide is only conceivable on the grounds of a social process that assigns specific social roles to individuals. The concept 'mother' only gains meaning through the social hierarchy, established in processes of struggle and domination, that assigns women a specific place in society as mothers. The myth is a discursive practice that consolidates such meaning; it is, hence, part of the process of constructing the social structure in which 'mothers' and 'fathers' exist, and in which they compete for their son's and for the mother's love. We, the audience, understand the meaning through our often tacit and unconscious knowledge of society. In order to grasp the full meaning researchers, therefore, need to reveal the position-ascribing social structures and struggles.

In Jackson's terms, Bourdieu's critique is formulated from a mind-world monist and reflexivist point of view. Jackson's distinction between mind-world monist views, which assume that observers and their concepts and categories are part of the same world they are observing, and the dualist mind-world view that assumes that observers can take an 'objective' outsider position, is helpful to refute the first criticism made against Lévi-Strauss' structuralism. As Jackson argues, the dualist mind-world view assumes that any statement about the 'real' world can be verified or falsified against 'real' facts. Underlying structures are, hence, not real for they cannot be tested or falsified.

Yet, Jackson continues, the claim that it would be possible to ascertain objective principles of inquiry is shallow. Pushing the argument of the last foundational principle of analysis to its logical end, one has to admit that whatever principle is used, it is ideational, culturally, and socially determined. An objectifying view on an analytical object simply excludes, by epistemological fiat, the question of its social, cultural, and ideational origins, but it does not answer it (Jackson 2011, 14). This approach chokes once it has to explain how we, the audience of a discourse, can be sure that we understand what the words uttered mean beyond their purely functional provision of data and information.

Practically, such a claim would require the observer to analyse all myths available on earth and to human knowledge in order to induce their regularities and derive the ordering principles. Obviously, this is impossible. And yet it is less the practical impossibility of objectively accounting for every potential and possible myth that is decisive for the refutation of the objectivity claim, although the impracticalities involved are already a strong indicator of how weak the objectivity claim is. What is decisive is rather the epistemological impossibility of seeking out the definitive proof. It would always be possible to imagine that another myth exists, one that has not been accounted for, or that, indeed, an entirely new one would be created. It is epistemologically impossible to find a safe and certain last proof. Yet, as mentioned above, the refutation of the 'last proof' argument is not sufficient to debunk the argument that the mind-world monist view is unscientific as long as such anti-positivist views do not also provide an alternative methodology. Lévi-Strauss' structuralism clearly systematises the analysis of myths; Bourdieu's critique additionally embeds the analysis of authoritative discourses (such as myths) in a consistent theoretical reflection on power structures and social hierarchies.

Bourdieu's criticism of structuralism takes the danger of arbitrariness in the interpretation of structures seriously but gives a very different answer. In order to avoid this risk, the inquiry needs to undertake a foundational analysis of the social structures that enabled the paradigmatic structure of a myth, or more generally an authoritative narration. Neglecting the social construction of the principled logic applied to structuralist analysis and ignoring how narratives are acted out in practice risk not only stepping out of the mind-world monist perspective but also reproducing clichés and prejudice rather than offering tools of analysis. It is imperative to include the 'self' in the analysis that produces, reproduces, and uses interpretive logic.

Bourdieu's critique answers the question of how the analytical principles can be justified by displacing the question from the linguistic analysis to a social analysis of the knowledge structures that underfeed a discourse, or a myth in this case. He argues that the categories used in a discourse, including a myth, can be analysed by examining the actors who reproduce *authoritatively* these categories and make them widely acceptable. The authority to author these discursive categories originates in the social, political, economical, and/or cultural status of the author within the wider social field she/he is addressing (Bourdieu 1982, 140).

More specifically, when we talk about categories that inform political decisions, we need to be aware that their validity stems only from the authority with which the social distinctions expressed in these categories are validated:

Struggle is hence at the core of the construction of the (social, ethnic, sexual etc.) class: there is no group which is not simultaneously the site of struggle over the legitimate principle that should be imposed for the constructing of this kind of group, and there is no way to attribute qualities, whether sex or age, education or wealth, which will not serve as divisive grounds and for proper political struggles (Bourdieu 1982, 153, my translation).

Bourdieu retains structuralism as *method*, yet with an important change to its application. While Lévi-Strauss focussed on the comparison of narrations and the structural analysis of these, Bourdieu took the expression ‘going into the field’ more literally and took into account how people lived the rites, taboos, rules, and myths that ordered their lives. In the foreword of *Le sens pratique*, Bourdieu describes how he came to shift his scrutiny from discourses to practices (Bourdieu 1980). Seeking the perfect structural balance in his observations of the rural Kabyl society of the 1950s, Bourdieu struggled to make sense of widely differing ways individuals lived the rituals, rules, norms, and codes of their community. The practices were often in contradiction with the prescriptions that structural analysis of the community’s narratives provided. For example, the structural analysis of kinship would assign a particularly important place to the elder fatherly brother of a family; in practice, it might well be that the family had no contact whatsoever with the fatherly uncle but, on the contrary, a very close and good contact with the mother’s younger brother. Such contradictions would have to be negotiated in everyday life, and this would, in turn, lead to a large variety of practices which have to be distinguished from the discourses that justify them. Again, the practices resulting from those diversions from the ‘doxa’—‘the right way’, a much broader concept of the way people conceive of the foundations of the world but which Bourdieu preferred to ‘myth’ or ‘rite’, which are much narrower sections of the doxa—are not arbitrary but follow a social logic. Not everyone can divert from the doxa in the same way, and not all diversions create the same effects. Consequently, the analysis of social structures crucially enables distinguishing between doxa and practice, between the narratives and their meaning in everyday life. The meaning of discourses must there-

fore not only be inferred from their words and internal structures. It is also necessary to include the practices that accompany those discourses and to follow up to the social structures that underlie both:

Once one treats language as autonomous object, one accepts the radical separation Saussure operated between internal and external linguistics, between the sciences of language and the sciences of the social uses of language; once one adheres to this separation, one is doomed to seek the power of words in words themselves, there where it is not to be found (Bourdieu 1982, 103, my translation).

Power can only be found in social structures. For the analysis of social structures, however, Bourdieu retained the principle of a structural analysis based on antagonistic relationships between elements. As he explains himself, the title of his major work '*La Distinction*' plays on the double meaning of the social practice of distinction and the structuralist principle of analysing differentials (Eribon and Collin 1988). The aim of Bourdieu's analysis is, indeed, very different from Lévi-Strauss' objective. Lévi-Strauss seeks the principles of structuration for systems of symbols, which can be expressed in practices (rituals) as well as words; Bourdieu seeks the principles of structuration for social systems of material and symbolic differentiation, and most notably of systems of social power.

MYTHS, POST-STRUCTURALISM AND POWER APPLIED IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ANALYSIS

It is this focus on power that makes Bourdieu's structuralist approach interesting for the analysis of international relations, as the most recent surge in Bourdieusan analyses attests. Following Bourdieu, power has a material and a symbolic dimension. While the material dimension is expressed in objectively measurable categories, the symbolic dimension has to be inferred from behaviours, discourses, and, among others, myths. The analysis of myths initiated by Lévi-Strauss therefore enters international relations analysis through the back door of its Bourdieusan critique, that is, for those who take the idea of a social construction of concepts, knowledge, and ideas in international relations seriously. This is because a Bourdieusan analysis of myths of international relations allows not only identifying myths as a 'simple' analysis à la Lévi-Strauss but also carving out the social power relation between narrators, narrated, and audience.

The first important step is to identify myths. Bourdieu subsumes myths in the category of discourses of symbolic power. In order to be able to call a myth a myth, the observer needs to go back to the definition provided by Lévi-Strauss of a narrative that provides a moral tale of the foundations of the society in question. Consequently, when talking about myths in international relations in the understanding of Lévi-Strauss, one assumes that something like an international society exists and that this international society is not made up exclusively of highly institutionalised units like states, who act in terms of preference-guided rational choice. On the contrary, international society is well composed of individual subjects who are embedded in structured contexts, states being one of them, and who act and interact in complex webs of social relations. The lavish splashing out of the label ‘poststructuralist’ to thinkers like Bourdieu and Agamben alike has often brought the former into suspicion of negating the subject as much as the latter. However, Bourdieu’s sociology is poststructuralist only in the sense that Bourdieu rejects the sole focus on symbolic structures that Lévi-Strauss proposes in the tradition of Saussurian linguistics; it is not a post-subject sociology (Angermüller 2007).

Myths circulate in global society, which, in turn, is made up of actors, who can be institutions like states but who can also be individuals. They are narratives, which are foundational to this global society, which define its basic values and taboos, and which assign paradigmatic roles and places to its actors. The ‘Peace of Westphalia’, for instance, has been identified as such a myth. It is foundational, for it provides a creational tale of the origins of the international system; it defines basic values (sovereignty) and taboos (war for non-territorial motives), and it assigns paradigmatic roles (state) and places (the West) to its actors. Other myths are possible. To identify these, it is necessary to collect a corpus of narrations on the same topics and compare if their narrative structures follow the same sequential and paradigmatic structure (see my analysis of the ‘warlord myth’ in Chap. 7 for an example).

Once identified, the interpretation of myths requires identifying the context of the myth in order to carve out the power structures hidden in the myth. The question is not simply what kind of personalities populates the myth, but who and what these personalities represent. This is where Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism comes in as useful method of deciphering the myth. By opposing the syntagmatic structure to the paradigmatic structure of the narration, it is possible to establish tables of opposing binaries. The contextualisation of the myth in a larger cultural setting allows pin-

pointing the tacit and subliminal ‘other’ that myth is talking about when telling the story of its personalities. In the 1648 myth (that is, the Peace of Westphalia myth), for instance, the ‘heroes’ are the state and the statesmen who came together in peace talks. This narrative is repeated in other myths, which are foundational of the international state system, like the narrative of the Vienna Concert of Nations (1815), or the Versailles Peace Negotiations (1919), or the Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco conferences for the foundation of the United Nations, (1944) and (1945), respectively. The concrete others in these narratives vary in the syntagmatic structure; in 1648, it is the Church and in a wider sense religion; in 1815, it is a nebulous political entity like the Napoleonic empire; in 1919, too, it is the Empire, this time the German, Austrian, Ottoman, and Russian; and in 1945, it is the axis, the fascist ‘*Lebensraum*’ state. However, in the paradigmatic narrative, all these different political entities share the main characteristic that they are not states based on the principle of territorial sovereignty; they are all forms of political communities, which define allegiance in non-territorial and non-statist ways. A table of oppositional binaries allows carving out these syntagmatic others and the paradigmatic theme that mirrors the myth. The principle of allegiance called ‘sovereignty’ in the 1648 myth would, in this case, be contrasted with other forms such as religious, imperial, or racial belonging.

The contextualisation of the myth that allows making sense of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure is, in turn, the starting point for a more profound power analysis. The myth singles out the right and good things to do as well as the right, good, brave, virtuous personality and the villains, stupid, greedy, and unworthy. It is then only a small step to analysing who is telling this myth in the interest of whom. Myths reflect patterns of distinction and hierarchies of authority to author the story that is told about global politics and global society. Why would the teller be interested in representing this personality as virtuous and another as villain? Which type of audience recognises ‘naturally’ this division of roles and ‘intuitively’ agrees with it? Who is projected to be the hero or the anti-hero in the ‘real world’?

CONCLUSION

Myths rely on standardised narratives and use stereotypes. However, these are well concealed in the realm of global politics, most particularly as the discipline international relations itself still grapples with the Potemkin

concepts ‘state’ or ‘national interests’. The analytical categories of ‘hero’ or ‘anti-hero’ seem to make very little sense in an analytical framework that focuses on a narrow understanding of actors and interests. Yet in a much wider framework of cultural analysis, the identification and analysis of myth allows revealing structures of power and authority that structure profoundly global politics.

The structural method of Lévi-Strauss, combined with a social analysis of ‘who speaks’, as Bourdieu proposed, not only allows identifying myths in their narrative structure but also permits seeking out the power expressed by these narratives. The combination of these two approaches, furthermore, allows for a thoroughly systematic methodology within a reflexivist epistemological framework. The deciphering of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure of a narrative, for example, on conflicts or international organisations, reveals the standardised narrative sequences as well as the stereotypes used. The contextual analysis of ‘Who speaks? And with which authority?’ furthermore embeds the structural analysis in a sociological framework, which allows retracing the social hierarchies that support certain myths.

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How to Study Myths: Methodological Demands and Discoveries

Franziska Müller

Where do we discover myths in International Relations (IR)? How can we identify, reiterate, translate, explain, and interpret them? Which methodological presuppositions do studies on myth pose? To do research on IR myths, our discipline has to resolve a number of methodological questions that arise both from the fuzzy nature of myths themselves and from some long-standing methodological neglects that have pervaded IR as a discipline and been largely resistant to change even in the face of IR's different 'great debates'¹ and 'turns'. In the case of IR myths, such methodological challenges rematerialise in aggravated form.

When using 'myth' in the following, I do not refer to 'false beliefs' or wrong consciousness, as Roland Barthes has sometimes argued following a structuralist-Marxist worldview, as my intention is not driven by an enlightened ambition to 'unveil' myths. Rather, my perspective on myths is guided by an interest in International Political Sociology that follows the wish to reflect on IR's history of ideas as well as a post-positivist/post-structuralist interest in uncovering discursive power and its nodal points within a particular discourse, in this case IR's art of theorising and framing empirical cases. Myths are therefore not regarded as an epistemological

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weakness, which would have to be overcome for the sake of ‘better’ IR theory but rather as an inevitable yet invisible component of any kind of research (cf. Weber 2010, 2–7). Foregrounding myths and outlining their discursive and sometimes narrative power, their reception, and their different functions helps to clarify the researcher’s own role in myth production. Developing methodological guidelines for myths’ study can thus be understood as an expression of a more reflexive IR.

Departing from this understanding of myth, this chapter aims to address epistemological challenges that studies on myths should take into account. More specifically, it refers to post-positivist and poststructuralist debates that have influenced IR since the heydays of the ‘third debate’ (Lapid 1989). Post-positivist criticism of IR’s theoretical mainstream and its assumptions have certainly resulted in a more reflexive attitude towards ‘the researcher’, ‘objects of research’, ‘epistemological objectives’, and classical IR concepts and controversies such as ‘the state’, ‘power’, ‘sovereignty’, or ‘structure vs. agency’ (cf. Cox 1981; Linklater 1998; Campbell 1998). Postcolonial studies, in their intention to decolonise social sciences, have emphasised this criticism in a more passionate way by questioning both the ‘right to research’ (Appadurai 2006) and the production of Western epistemologies, and calling for different forms of knowledge production (Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos 2014). Unfortunately though, these debates do not seem to have resulted in significant methodological repercussions within the discipline of IR as a whole.

I will argue here that when studying myths in IR the postulates of the post-positivist/poststructuralist tradition need to be reconsidered with regard to:

- *Myth as a concept that pervades our own discipline*, thereby creating certain narratives and monolithic dogmas (Which myths are told through acts of IR storytelling?); and
- *Myth as an analytical and empirical focus within IR* (What could be the role of the researcher both as a ‘mythographer’ and—inevitably—also as a myth producer? How do we aim to discover, translate, interpret, or unveil myths?).

Driven by these epistemological and (meta-)theoretical questions,² in the next section I showcase what I mean by saying that myths are an inevitable yet invisible component of any kind of IR research and that

IR scholars are thus (wittingly or unwittingly) myth producers and reproducers. In the second step, I then discuss the role of the researcher as mythographer and the usefulness of auto-ethnography and reflexivity to remain critically conscious of IR's own myth production. Finally, I discuss a number of qualitative methods that seem adequate and promising for empirical studies on myths with regard to their methodological potentials. These qualitative methods all allow shedding light on myths, yet do so from considerably different angles. I argue, however, that they all fit the broader aim of developing methodological perspectives for an IR research agenda on myths.

IR AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING

IR as a discipline has to some extent engaged in self-reflection. A number of scholars have explicitly focused on the history of IR and its overlapping epistemologies with regard to International Political Sociology and Historical International Relations. Such works on the history and genealogy of IR give an account of how IR's key analytical concepts have unfolded their discursive and material power alongside the discipline's debates, thereby shaping and carrying certain narratives about the world. Buzan and Lawson (2015), for instance, give a specific account of how 'ideologies of progress' have developed in the course of IR history, while Hobson (2012) has focused on the extent to which Eurocentric notions have informed IR theory development.³ This strand of literature provides an overall rich reflection of the 'roots' of IR and the often unquestioned dogmas that relate to them, and it proves to be highly valuable in terms of identifying certain meta-narratives, (founding) myths or biases that have accompanied IR debates for more than a century now. In order to exemplify this, I want to very briefly draw attention to three critical discussions that have concerned the discipline in different historical phases, highlighting some of the myths that have been produced and reproduced by it.

Unsurprisingly, the concept of 'security' has served as an attractor for various myths and narratives. Early examples are Morgenthau's 'anthropocentric worldview', the neorealist assumption of 'mutual threats', and the calls for 'hegemonic stability' or 'relative and absolute strategic gains' (Freyberg-Inan 2004; Freyberg-Inan et al. 2009). Ann Tickner's feminist critique of Hans Morgenthau's classical realism has been seminal in carving out to what extent a male bias has pervaded Realist approaches,

thereby resulting in the creation of certain dichotomies centred around categories such as hard vs. soft politics, strength vs. weakness, and threat vs. cooperation (Tickner 1988).

Another more recent wave of myth production has taken place in parallel to the rise of mainstream constructivism. The well-intended focus on ‘norms’ and the development of various concepts for the study of norms that privilege forms of liberal, voluntary ‘diffusion’, ‘learning’, and ‘transfer’ has tended to outshine constructivist IR theory’s epistemological biases. Norms have been presented as something entirely good, universal, and neutral, as, for example, Grovogui’s (2006) postcolonial rereading of human rights demonstrates. Indeed, almost two decades of constructivism have taken norms as a ‘taming force for good’, as the perseverance of early models such as the ‘norm life cycle’, the ‘spiral model’, approaches of ‘policy learning’, or the assumption of an eventual ‘spill-over effect’ illustrates. Current debates on critical norms research now seek to challenge some of the inherent normative biases of earlier constructivism and develop a more pluralist/localised understanding of norm travel/diffusion with regard to the contestation of norms (Wiener 2009), their adaptation and localisation for various contexts (Acharya 2004), and the problematique of norms as an educative, subjectivating force (for a critical norms research agenda: Engelkamp et al. 2014a, b).

We have also witnessed how the more recent postcolonially inspired debate on travelling IR concepts and alternative approaches to the international system beyond the West is developing (Acharya 2011; Acharya and Buzan 2007; Tickner and Blaney 2013). Its repercussions might challenge the foundations of IR in an equal manner as some of the earlier debates did. A central feature certainly lies in reconstructing IR’s affection with Eurocentric notions, which is driven by the interest to unveil how Eurocentrism as a powerful myth actually works—for instance, in creating a functional order based on dichotomies between ‘the West and the rest’ (Seth 2011), by mechanisms of universalisation and homogenisation, by a distinct understanding of central IR categories such as ‘actor’, ‘power’, ‘state’, ‘sovereignty’, or ‘democracy’ (Hobson 2012), or by deeply inscribed racialised or colonial orders (Vitalis 2015; Muppidi 2012). This also concerns the ways in which Western IR concepts travel, how they become diffused or localised, and how processes of hybridisation or contestation tend to happen. Speaking of ‘worlding beyond the West’ points to the idea that IR concepts have multiple roots—for instance, when looking at IR from the angle of Chinese foreign policy, African

political philosophy, or the non-alignment movement (Shilliam 2011). Furthermore, this also means to challenge IR as a westernised, homogenous canon of theories and to call for a broader understanding of how theorising as a social process actually happens and strategies that foster a ‘decentring’ or decolonisation of IR (Nayak and Selbin 2010; Sabaratnam 2011). At the same time, however, we also need to ask on which myths the postcolonial critique of IR is built: expressions of anti-imperialist heroism, a sometimes monolithic understanding of power blocs, and a glorification of ‘the local’ accompanied by fundamentalist rejections of ‘development’ and ‘the West’ as such are just some of the points to look at in this respect (see Ziai 2004, for a discussion of fundamentalist and emancipative post-development approaches).

While these trajectories of myth production have been influential during IR history up until now, my aim is not to take them as an intellectual foundation for conceptualising a ‘better’ IR theory that would unveil and eventually overcome such forms of myth production, as this would be a truly over-rationalist and hypocritical claim. Accept it or not—myth production is here to stay and will be an everlasting constant of theory development and paradigm shifting. Following the pluralisation of IR approaches, we can witness a multiplication of myths, and in fact new IR myths might just be lurking around the corner: be it myths deriving from the ‘practice turn’ in terms of how researchers approach and (re-) produce ‘the field’ as such, or be it IR’s obsession with borrowing methods from social anthropology (Vrasti 2008). Rather, from a post-positivist point of view, the aim would be to develop a kind of critical consciousness in order not to be misguided by IR myths, but rather to identify, retell, rewrite, and reshape them in a highly pluralist manner (cf. also Cooke, Chap. 4, on suspicion).

In doing so, IR can be conceptualised as a kind of ‘storytelling’, structured by certain narratives, tropes, protagonists, scripts, and tensions. This points to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of methods and methodology that asks for the ‘meta-plots’ within IR stories and IR myth production. Without doubt, as IR theorists we have become familiarised with stories about ‘good regimes’, a ‘balanced world order’, or the ‘civilizing power of norms’ as part of our training in ontologies and epistemologies. We might indeed have been active in multiplying those scripts, while the meta-plot, made up of a positivist world view and the demand to be overly ‘scientific’, remains largely unquestioned (cf. Jackson 2010).

Thus practising auto-ethnography as a form of critical standpoint epistemology might in fact reveal some of the stories we have ‘grown up with’ and have been retelling and rewriting during stages of our research careers (for a broad range of autobiographical accounts by IR researchers, see Inayatullah 2011). In so doing, this kind of self-reflexive experiment could also serve as a starting point for methodological debates and discoveries that pave the way to an understanding of methods not as facilitating and value-neutral bridges between subjectivity and objectivity but as a performative and political practice, for which we as engaged researchers (or ‘public intellectuals’) carry responsibility (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 598).

HERE BE DRAGONS! OF MYTHS AND MYTHOGRAPHERS

Apparently, we are out on some kind of Indiana Jones mission. Discovering myths, putting them in jars, and displaying them in a sort of IR history museum might sound like a highly scientific task, yet it is one that separates us as researchers from the subject of our research. In order to identify the course of myth production in IR, and to develop a mythographical research agenda, we need to follow a different trajectory: one that starts by focusing on the researcher and her motivations with respect to IR knowledge production.

The ‘reflexive turn’ (Neufeld 1991), as one of the many turns in IR theorising, has proven helpful in this regard as it brings some considerations to the front which are commonplace in social anthropology or sociology but have only in the past two decades started their career within IR. Yosef Lapid’s criticism of IR as one of the least self-reflexivist disciplines of the social sciences (1989, 249–50) has resulted in remarkable repercussions on IR debates, first in a mostly meta-theoretical or theoretical reasoning—that is, with respect to Critical Theory, constructivism, or feminist IR approaches—, but increasingly also with regard to the empirical field and methodological considerations (Hamati-Ataya 2013).

Part of this turn is a different understanding of knowledge production in the field of IR which seeks to rediscover the subjectivity of the researcher and let him/her be present in his/her writing. Building on ‘standpoint analysis’ (for example, in terms of positioning the self with respect to race/class/gender and other privileging or marginalising categories) and ‘situated knowledge’, this also calls for other forms of writing. Narrative approaches play a central role in this regard, as they allow giv-

ing voice to the passions, desires, and stories that drive most researchers' ambitions (Doty 2004; Dauphinee 2013). This might, as a first approximation, result in a different kind of writing culture which is more personal, more diverse, and maybe also more political with respect to the motivations that drive IR research on the individual level (e.g. Jackson 2013). Furthermore, this could also be part of a critical and post-positivist reflection of IR epistemology and methodology, insofar as hegemonic forms of knowledge production are challenged for their strategies of silencing the subaltern or empowering those already in power. As Himadeep Muppidi puts it:

In the wasteland that is conventional IR, stories of any sort might appear, at first glance, to offer a welcome respite. But there is also, as some of our fellow disciplines can attest to, a politics of story telling; whose stories do we get to hear all the time; whose stories are generally inaudible; how do stories make us over; whose mansions do stories furnish with humanity in every remote room and whose huts do they deprive of life and dignity (Muppidi 2013).

For a mythographical research agenda, too, narrative approaches can offer valuable strategies for discovering and displaying IR myths, as they shed light on the plurality of stories that accompany IR (cf. also Goetze, Chap. 5).

This can help to carve out how we as researchers follow certain normativities of our academic discipline, how we contribute to myth production through research and writing, and which perceptions, fears, or desires drive such processes. Yet narrative approaches require an enormous rigor and self-discipline in order to live up to their proclaimed ideals and to be more than a mere expression of self-indulgence. Doing so, auto-ethnography can serve as a particularly worthwhile approximation to the relationship between a researcher's subjectivity, the empirical field, and the myths that grow in between. Indeed, auto-ethnography has increasingly become popular as a research method that 'seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis et al. 2011, original italics). Auto-ethnography can uncover those parts of the research process which are in fact far from 'neutral' or 'irrelevant' for research itself—for instance, the decision who, what, when, where, and how to research, institutional restrictions or personal motivations. This leads to enhanced transparency

and intersubjective understanding of research processes and allows a better grasp of the complex relationship between the researcher and ‘the field’—that is, the mutually constitutive relations that pervade empirical work, their forms of production and reproduction, and not least, the irritations or projections that accompany them. It thus helps to understand how one’s own subjectivity as a researcher gets (re-) constructed through personal experience and to what extent this can result in a better understanding of research motivations, research processes, and forms of knowledge production.⁴

In general, auto-ethnography involves a reflection of past experiences with the researcher/field relationship, a focus on significant moments along research processes (Ellis et al. speak of ‘epiphanies’, that is, cathartic moments which represent extremely intense situations occurring along a research process), and a focus on the values and beliefs held by the scientific community. Preferably, such experiences should also be reconnected with others in the field so as to allow forms of intersubjective reflection that go beyond a highly individualised ‘first-person’ account of doing research. Ellis et al. (2011) distinguish between a number of specific accounts, such as *indigenous/native ethnography* focusing on (post-) colonial power relations within research, *reflexive ethnographies* that consider the transformations of the researcher/field relationship, or *layered accounts* that provide transparency along the different stages of research processes.

For the field of IR, Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker have outlined ‘how the self can become a more legitimate source of knowledge about International Relations’ (Brigg and Bleiker 2010, 780). Going beyond a critique of positivism and the value-neutral strategies for ‘writing the self out of social science’ (Brigg and Bleiker 2010, 782), they offer methodological guidance for a more systematic evaluation of auto-ethnographical contributions to IR research by proposing two strategies. First, following the idea of ‘puzzle-driven research’ as it has been suggested by Ian Shapiro (2004), they suggest developing research agendas based on actual political problems that are reformulated as research questions. If research designs are developed from ‘puzzles’, auto-ethnographic accounts can provide a richer and more thorough reflection of research designs, since they value personal experience and emotion as an often-untold aspect of academic knowledge production. Second, Brigg and Bleiker question the idea of the researcher as an ‘autonomous self’ in Western epistemologies and suggest drawing back on auto-ethnography in order to develop a more relational understanding of knowledge and knowledge production. This implies:

(1) making visible the dynamic network of relations any researcher cultivates; (2) allowing space for reflecting on psychological repercussions of empirical fieldwork, such as mind/bodily sensations; and (3) providing processual transparency with respect to data analysis and the production of meaning from the data corpus that has been gathered, so as to understand the process of knowledge production (Brigg and Bleiker 2010, 792–6).

Considering our envisioned research agenda, this calls for some more specific reflections on myths, researchers as myth-seekers and/or (re-)producers, and it calls not least for methodological guidelines. A starting point lies in the four-field typology of IR myths, regarding the sources of myths (strategy vs. social construction) as well as their performative effects (ideological delusion vs. necessary fiction), suggested by Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (cf. Table 2.1 in Chap. 2). Relating this typology to auto-ethnographic forms of self-inquiry, the following questions and aspects may guide a mythographer's journey:

1. *Personal dimension*: What might be guiding metaphors and personal experiences that bear a significant impact on my role and identity as an IR researcher? Are there any distinct stories, narratives, metaphors that have been influential for me? Where do I stumble upon myths as parts of research puzzles?
2. *Performative dimension*: Where and how do these aspects reappear in my writing on IR topics, or in the everyday choices I make as a researcher? How do they pervade forms of academic knowledge production? At which points in a scientific process—for example, in terms of outlining a research design, developing a research methodology, within my (or my community's) particular writing culture, or in the dissemination of research results—do I draw on or (re-)produce certain IR myths?
3. *Epistemological and academic dimension*: To what extent might my motivations, my standpoints, and my role as a researcher contribute to IR myth production in a wider sense? How are the myths, which are part of my research agenda, productive or constitutive? Am I aware of certain IR myths and their performative power? Do I approach them, for instance, as a guidance that reduces complexity, as a short-hand access to theories and the empirical field itself, as an enabling force, or as a veil that prevents more controversial, counterfactual, or even paradoxical understandings and therefore needs to be unveiled?

4. *Reflexive dimension*: How could I proceed from this point—that is, how could I achieve a higher level of transparency with respect to the research processes and the forms of myth production of which I am most likely a part? Which methodological choices follow from this? Which forms of academic writing might be suitable for me?

This kind of close encounter with one's autobiography as a social scientist and IR researcher can shed light on the roles and activities of researchers as mythographers. As a first autobiographical 'exercise' this could then result in a more conscious and self-reflexive understanding of methodological choices.

REMIXING METHODS: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR A CRITICAL STUDY OF IR MYTHS

Myths can be studied from a variety of methodological perspectives. However, the previous paragraphs have suggested that certain forms of methodological inquiry seem particularly apt for exploring the role myths play in and for IR knowledge production and theory development. This points to the ways in which we as IR researchers tend to approach methodological questions. As a matter of fact, conventional IR has been driven by an instrumentalist perspective on methods and methodology that degrades methods to merely a 'toolbox' that is used in order to come to empirical knowledge (cf. King et al. 1994 as *the* classical example for IR case design). This view—which has gained new support under the auspices of neo-positivism (cf. Jackson 2010)—has widely been criticised from post-positivist perspectives on methodology for neglecting the relationship between 'the researcher' and 'the field'. Furthermore, an instrumental perspective on methods does not problematise the strategies and scientific interests that fuel knowledge production. It also eventually disregards the value of plural and paradox empirical perspectives that might pop up while doing field work but might at the same time juxtapose a previously fixed research design (see Lie 2013, 205–10 for a reflection of the epistemological challenges of ethnography as a method for IR; cf. also Vrsti 2008). Also, using methods as 'tools' does not allow much space for reflecting on their empirical application, or on the way the subjects of empirical research correspond to a particular method—for example, how they deal with a survey, how they (re-)act during an interview situation,

or how they, as part of a transdisciplinary dissemination, might comment on the envisaged research results. Moreover, postcolonial perspectives on methodology tend to be particularly doubtful with regard to the powers of social science methodology in contributing to a Eurocentric reconstruction of the South, and in a broader sense to the abyss of classifying, categorising, ‘othering’, or silencing the subjects of research (Appadurai 2006; Smith 2012).

Therefore, an important precondition for the study of myths in IR might lie in two points Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans have raised. First, they present their understanding of methods as performative and not simply representational:

[Methods] are not simply techniques of extracting information from reality and aligning it with—or against—bodies of knowledge. Methods are instead within worlds and partake in their shaping. As performative, methods are practices through which “truthful” worlds are enacted, both in the sense of being acted upon and coming into being (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 598).

Second, they suggest understanding methods, and the very decisions for a particular method, as a political and not a value-free decision. This underlines the need for careful and critical reflections on how certain methods correspond to a research design and how they might silence some voices or boost others. Their conclusion is to regard methods as performative practices, namely as productive ‘devices’ that create certain empirical artefacts, for example, by producing interview data, mapping, and visualising certain relations through network analysis, or altering and rendering visual representations through picture analysis (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 604–606).

For our study of myths, this conceptualisation of methods implies that the mythographer should make his/her methodological choices carefully, for instance, with respect to the way any given method engages in certain reconstructions of the respective empirical focus, and thereby ‘enact[s] worlds and make[s] particular orderings more visible than others’ (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 612). In closer detail, this means considering beforehand which kind of ‘worlding’ might happen when choosing a particular methodological approach, which aspects might be brought to the front, and which further aspects might be veiled or even silenced. This also calls for a productive combination of methods so as to allow for multiperspectivity. In so doing, we also need to think of triangulation as a means

of allowing both methodological pluralism and validation of empirical results. Especially when we as mythographers are on a mission of exploring ‘how myths mean’, ‘how myths unfold, multiply, change or fade’, or ‘how the genealogy of IR myths is shaped, reproduced and rewritten’, we need to take into account what a particular method could reveal.

This calls for engaging with various qualitative approaches which can serve as methodological trajectories to shed light on particular modes of mythography. Methods-wise, that is, in their practical sense, the approaches in question all focus on forms of interaction with data that overcome entirely positivist research designs. I will discuss the following approaches, whose potential proves especially valuable for a fuzzy subject such as IR myths: (1) qualitative interviews in a broader sense; (2) discourse analysis; (3) ethnography, and especially organisational/institutional ethnography; and (4) visual communicative analysis. All of these approaches bear certain qualities and potentials with regard to myths—and, referring to Aradau and Huysmans’s propositions, they all have distinct ways of performance and enactment in common. Engaging their postulates, we would have to clarify how each of them can work as a performative and political practice, and how this could be helpful with regard to the mythographical research agenda. While this chapter cannot introduce each of these approaches and their practical requirements and preconditions in detail, it can at least outline what the particular merits in each case may be.

1. *Interviews* have proven to be one of the most popular qualitative methods applied in IR, and while semi-structured interviews, expert interviews, or surveys are still very common—and often unquestioned—many other types of social science interview techniques have also been mobilised for the field of IR.⁵ For studying myths, especially narrative, loosely standardised interview types would, due to their openness, seem apt to reveal stories on a certain subject, and to shed light on the metaphors, images, and associations that accompany them. Types such as narrative interviews, in-depth interviews, or conversational interviews all require a far more reflexive preparation with regard to one’s own role as an interviewer, the introductory questions (and the associative trajectories they open or close), the nature and content of verbal interventions during the course of the interview, and the documentation and transcription practices.

Similarly, group discussions seem viable for letting an expert audience explore which myths guide their assumptions on a certain subject, as this very method has specific strengths in encouraging an audience to speak relatively freely (and even forget about the otherwise often dominating role of the interviewer), follow loose lines of talk, and express deeper beliefs and emotions. This allows exploring the ways through which myths become embedded into the inner logics and momentum of epistemic communities or international organisations. Here, ethnography (see point 3 below) proves to be a valuable complement. Exploring the field of IR myths, we could think of cases such as a round of security experts or a group of grassroots activists against climate change in addition to dialogic interviews, which would allow IR theorists to reflect about their habits.

2. *Critical discourse analysis* has unfolded over the past two decades (Fairclough 1995; Milliken 1999; Wiener 2009, to name just a few seminal works; cf. Neumann 2008 for an IR focus). For research on myths, the characteristic questions of power relations, discursive hegemony, discursive (in-)stability, or discursive contestation put focus on the discursive practices through which myths acquire power within a certain debate, how meaning is actually produced within a discursive field, or how this power might come under contestation. This sheds light on the ways myths are talked into being, or how they pervade discourses and (re-)structure discursive fields. In IR, this could, for example, help to explain how political myths—for instance in the aftermath of 9/11—can dominate discourses, or how rapid discursive changes can be explained with respect to the creation of powerful political myths.
3. *Works under the heading of IR's 'ethnographic turn'* have recently started borrowing heavily from the disciplines of social anthropology and ethnology, as their field-based methods of participant observation and ethnography open up fresh and unseen ways for exploring IR topics in a much more holistic manner.⁶ However, this does not always happen to the sheer joy of these very disciplines. Wanda Vrasti (2008), for example, has criticised IR's practices of borrowing and exploiting a method in a way that neglects its critical potential and turns it into an easy-to-apply technique (see also the rejoinders by Rancatore 2010 and Vrasti 2010). In any case, these methods allow a much deeper intersubjective interaction with the

research field, an interaction that may even lead to a rephrasing of the research design as a whole. These back-and-forth movements between the researcher, the field, and the research design are characteristic for this kind of knowledge production and may lead to a deeper understanding of their inner relations. They also influence the techniques of ethnographic writing, which differ considerably from other forms of social science text production. In a similar fashion, methodologies deriving from interpretive policy analysis refer to hermeneutic practices for framing research questions or interpreting research results (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012)

In being a performative device, ethnography thereby points to a pluralist knowledge production that collects several different articulations, which are connected to each field. Thus, ethnography is especially apt to give voice to the political subjects or let them interact with the research design. Ethnography can therefore be a highly political method, a fact which is illustrated by close proximity to (participatory) action research. Regarding research on myths—for instance, when analysing the myth of ‘development’—this could point to subjectivation practices (that is, understanding the way a myth becomes inscribed into discourses and practices of the people who are to be ‘developed’) or communicative practices that accompany myth production, but it could also point to the rituals that are centred on it. Research on myths in IR could also focus on how IR myths develop their own momentum when incorporated into the agendas of international organisations or when they are retold or reinterpreted within political dialogue among epistemic expert communities. Therefore, approaches such as institutional/organisational ethnography seem highly valuable in visualising how such processes function and how they are governed by discourse and narration (Smith 2005; Smith 2006; Ybema et al. 2009).

4. *Visual communications analysis* (VCA), deriving from media and communication studies, is an approach still positioned at the very fringe of IR. The focus on visual representations—displayed, for example, by news channels, documentaries, movies, photography, or even political cartoons and video games—opens up another empirical field which has been neglected in IR for the most part. Methodologically, visual communications analysis deals with any type of mass media representations. In close proximity to discourse analysis or semiotics, VCA is firstly interested in providing a close

description of how certain images are produced, rendered, and altered, and also to which tropes, metaphors, or narratives the content is connected. Based on this, the analysis explores how an image becomes part of a discourse and which interaction with an audience is mutually created (cf. Schneider 2013; Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). Some of David Campbell's later works demonstrate the merits of such an approach; for instance, his works on the representation of famine or war scenes (Campbell 2007).⁷ Recent emphasis has been put on strengthening connections between visual communication analysis and IR, especially with respect to critical security studies (Moore and Farrands 2013; Bleiker 2015). In the study of myths, VCA allows exploring the politics of imagery as a field that has not yet been covered methodologically and is shaped by even more complex and contextualised circulation processes—think, for example, of the specific power that visual representations are acquiring in social media. Thus, the way myths mean or are communicated through forms of imagery very well complements other discursive approaches and adds the dimension of aesthetics to the study (cf. also Finlan, Chap. 10).

For a comprehensive study of myths in IR, this brief overview of certain qualitative methods demonstrates the potentials each of these approaches bear, allowing the mythographer to carve out individual research strategies. Moreover, for a richer and more multifaceted perspective, a mixed-method design can add value, for instance, when combining discourse analysis and VCA, or when complementing interviews with ethnography. For a fuzzy subject such as political myths, forms of triangulation can enhance the significance of empirical data. Overall, the mythographical research agenda and its variety of methods have the potential to enrich IR's methodological debates.

NOTES

1. See de Carvalho et al. (2011) for a critical rereading of IR's 'great debates' and the production of truth.
2. Cf. also Bliesemann de Guevara (Chap. 2), Münch (Chap. 3), Cooke (Chap. 4) and Goetze (Chap. 5).
3. For a broad-ranging introduction into the sociology of IR, see Hobden and Hobson (2002).

4. See a series of blog entries at ‘The Disorder of Things’ on critical methods and narrative approaches in IR for some ideas on how auto-ethnographic accounts might enrich and empower a researcher’s identity: <http://thedisorderofthings.com/tag/methodology-and-narrative-forum/>
5. Up to now, there exists no handbook specifically designed for the needs of IR interview research. Therefore, either broader social science introductions into interview research (cf. Gubrium et al. 2012; Kvale and Brinkmann 2014, as two examples that discuss epistemological and ethical issues in great length and depth) or guidelines for the whole field of qualitative IR (Lamont 2015; Klotz and Prakash 2008) are worth noting.
6. Hitherto only few IR textbooks have covered the method of ethnography (cf. Gusterson 2008 as a rare exception). For proper methodological training, IR researchers need to engage intensively with the methodological debates of social anthropology. For some examples of how ethnography can be exerted for political science/IR topics, the works of anthropologists Ferguson and Gupta (2002), Mosse (2005) and Li (2007) give highly valuable impressions with regards to global aid governance.
7. See also <http://www.imaging-famine.org/> and <https://www.david-campbell.org/topics/images-atrocity-conflict-war/>.

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PART II

Empirical Explorations

Warlords and States: A Contemporary Myth of the International System

Catherine Goetze

Not all violence entrepreneurs and not all violent militaries qualify as warlords, and not all situations of collective violence are labelled warlordism. In fact, the analysis of warlordism is relatively recent. What is so particular about warlords and warlordism that they constitute a narrative of their own? Drawing on the analysis of myth as proposed by Lévi-Strauss (see Chap. 5), I will argue that the warlord narrative can be considered a modern myth of the international system. It has a syntagmatic, apparent structure—the narrative of warlords rising and, sometimes, falling—, as well as a paradigmatic structure, that is, a structure of mirror images, namely those of states and statism being the ‘good’ mirror of warlordism. The warlord myth’s morality is the tale that only states can provide good governance and order without arbitrary and gratuitous violence. It is therefore a myth that takes up the eternal themes of the international system—statism, sovereignty, order, the mastering of violence. The warlord myth, hence, reproduces the international system’s basic narrative of the Western-type state as universal model for ‘good’, ‘rightful’ international relations.

The warlord myth also tells a tale of ungovernable territories and peoples. It, consequently, offers a justification of international intervention

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and, at the same time, an excuse for the failure of external peacemaking in these ‘ungovernable’ regions by putting the blame entirely on the recipients of the peacemaking efforts. The warlord myth deflects critical questions that could be asked about interference and intervention, about the state of the state in the world, and about structural weaknesses and failures of the Western state model due to global policies and specific foreign politics before and during the external peacemaking efforts.

The warlord/state myth represents warlordism as a dire reality of the contemporary world by contrasting wicked individuals to orderly states in such a stereotyped manner that other possible explanations of political violence are a priori excluded. It should be pointed out that my analysis does not dispute the empirical facts but the way these empirical insights are arranged into a narrative pattern; without doubt there are many instances of extremely nasty violence in places like Afghanistan, and without doubt many men who are labelled warlords are extremely unpleasant fellows. Yet their stories are arranged in a strikingly similar way. It is this pattern of mythologisation and the question of why the (wrong-)doings of these men (warlords are always and by definition male) are mythologised that are at the centre of this chapter.

In his discussion of myths, Lévi-Strauss uses the example of an Amerindian myth about a skate, who convinces the south wind to blow only every other day and not every day. Lévi-Strauss dismisses that this is an absurd and unreasonable story, and claims that, contrary to ridiculing such myths, the analyst needs to reflect on the implicit and culturally framed meanings of the dramatis personae and their actions in the myth (Lévi-Strauss 1996 [1958]). The analyst has to ask ‘Why the skate and why the south wind?’. Both represent something that is well inscribed into the cultural landscape of the audience and makes sense to them; the analysis of the myth has to unveil this sense. In the same vein, this chapter’s analysis has to ask ‘Why the warlords and why the state?’ In looking for answers, the analysis has to turn towards the question of why ‘we’, that is, the West that produces these narratives, tell this tale of warlords and states. Which is the cultural horizon on which the images of warlords and states are painted?

It is not sufficient to declare the rhetoric of warlords a strategic discourse of policymakers, academics, or militaries, which would be hiding other, *real* motives. Although the strategic use of this narrative is certainly an important factor to explain its persistence, it can neither explain its emergence nor its particular structure. Both its emergence and particular structure are determined by a priori defined meanings and contexts.

The deconstruction of the myth can capture these a priori defined, hence subliminal, meanings; the object of the analysis here is the preoccupations that the narrator expresses with this myth and which the audience seems to share, if not acknowledge, as otherwise the myth would not be so popular (see for a similar argument Stanski 2009).

According to Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of myths, myths have to be read in three ways. First, the apparent content has to be analysed in order to capture the significance of the *dramatis personae* (which he calls 'function', following Propp, see Chap. 5) and the action of the myth (sequences) (Propp 1968). Second, every function and sequence has an 'other'—positive or negative connotations which are often implicitly, but sometimes also explicitly, presented in the apparent myth. Third, the underlying, implicit and tacitly understood narrative, which results from the interplay between the syntagmatic (explicit) and paradigmatic (implicit) narrative, has to be identified and recontextualised within the text and within the understanding of the myth's audience (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 1979, 1987, 1996 [1958]). This structural analysis takes the sequential analysis of the folk tale analyst Propp further: 'Lévi-Strauss' position is essentially that linear sequential structure is apparent or manifest content, whereas the paradigmatic or schematic structure is the more important latent content' (Dundes 1968: 2). At the same time, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes himself from purely interpretative approaches (for instance, psychoanalytical approaches) as he argues that the myth's latent meaning cannot be interpreted through hermeneutics but has to be deduced strictly and systematically from its apparent content and cannot be freely interpreted (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 429).

In this chapter, the warlord myth will be analysed using these basic principles. In a first step, I will identify the functions and sequences of the warlord myth. In a second step, these functions and sequences will be examined for their paradigmatic 'other', the state myth.

A SHORT WORD ON METHODOLOGY

In analysing the mythology of warlords, the research for this chapter has gone forth and back between different corpuses of literature. For an explorative investigation of the warlord myth pattern, two distinct samples of newspaper articles published between 2007 and 2012 in US newspapers have been analysed. For a deeper analysis of the warlord and the state myth, a series of scholarly articles and books have been explored using

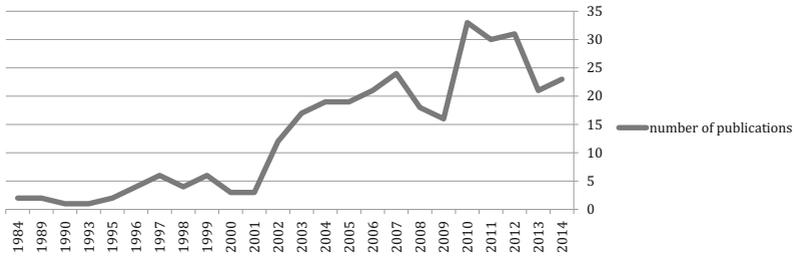


Fig. 7.1 Publications with ‘warlord’ in the title, keywords or abstract per year (Scopus count). *Source:* Author

computer-assisted discourse analysis (NVivo). The focus on English texts derives from the observation that most writing on warlords, whether in newspapers or in scholarly literature, has appeared in the United States and in the United Kingdom, and mostly after the US invasion of Afghanistan (see Figs. 7.1 and 7.2).

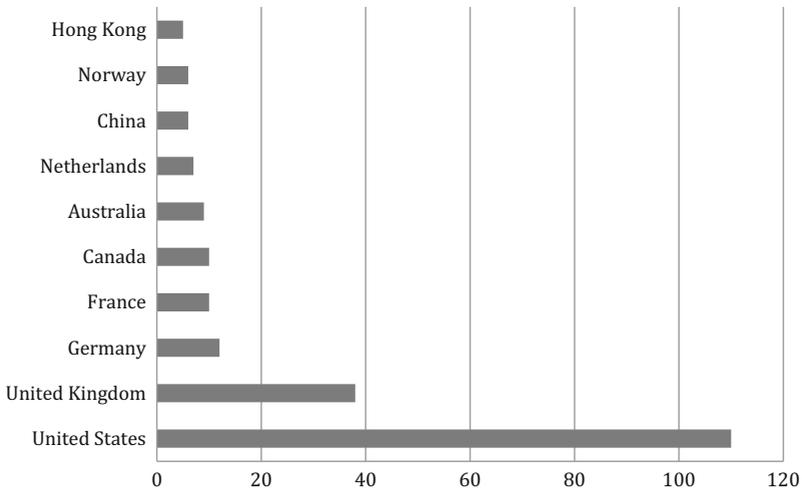


Fig. 7.2 Publications with ‘warlord’ in the title, keywords or abstract per country (Scopus count)¹. *Source:* Author

In terms of scholarly literature, a smaller sample of eleven journal articles and research working papers were selected on the basis of an initial content analysis. From these a further selection was made for an in-depth analysis, which is presented in this chapter. The selection of texts was not based on a stochastic model but resulted from an intensive reading of these texts and a selection on how much they qualitatively represented the functions and sequences of the warlord and state myths. All investigated texts followed the patterns described below. Those presented in more detail here, however, do so in a particularly clear manner, which makes them ideal-typical objects for a discussion of the mythologisation processes of warlordism and statism.

THE WARLORD MYTH: A TALE OF WICKED MEN

In a first step, the warlord myth was analysed according to the ‘functions’ it contains. Propp defined functions as linguistic figures through which action is initiated: ‘Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action’ (Propp 1968: 7). A function is an action that initiates a specific series of particular sequences. A tale is characterised by the stable recurrence of these sequences.

Functions are acts acted out by the tale’s *dramatis personae*. Consequently, as Propp says, the tale can be studied ‘according to the functions of its *dramatis personae*’ (Propp 1968: 8). The focus on functions is abstracting from the number and factual presentation of *dramatis personae* who populate the myth: ‘one may say that the number of functions is extremely small, whereas the number of the personages is extremely large. This explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition’ (Propp 1968: 8).

Propp consequently formulated three essential characteristics of fairy tales:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale. Independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
 2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited. [...]
 3. The sequence of functions is always identical.
- (Propp 1968: 9)

All three make up the classification of a narrative as a fairy tale. Subsequent research has shown the same pattern stability for other kinds of tales, too (Dundes 1964; Holbek 1987; Foley 1990).

Propp's analysis starts with the identification of an initial situation: the beginning point of all development in the tale. He then enumerates the various functions present in a sample of 100 fairy tales. The size of his sample is not determined by any external factor but simply by the identification of functions; as soon as these are repeated in a sufficiently large number of sources, he considers that he can end the comparison. The functions are marked up with a number and a noun describing the action that is expressed in this function. They are presented in their linear chronology, as one function leads to another.

The uniformity of the functions and sequences in which they appear makes up a corpus of tales. As Lévi-Strauss summarises Propp's analysis:

The fairy tale can be defined as a development of which the starting point is a treason, the ending point a wedding, a treat, a deliverance or a relief, and the transition between the two happens through a series of intermediary functions. (Lévi-Strauss 1996 [1958]: 149, my translation from French)

Similarly, one can define the warlord myth corpus as a development of which the starting point is a fragmented society and political instability, commonly summarised as 'failed state', and the end point some kind of exploitative tyranny by a few. The transition is described through the rise of a man as military leader without any political or ideological programme, financed through shadowy economic activities (smuggling, corruption etc.). The rise of the leader might have been straightforward or encumbered by competing warlords, and it might or might not have been supported by external patrons (commonly with the distinction of 'good' and 'murky' patrons); the sequences can take on various colourings, but they will appear in the same order and describe the same overall development.

The former Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations and current CEO of the International Crisis Group, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, tells a very short version of this tale:

Most conflicts in the world today [...] are civil wars and they are usually fought in the *poorest* countries, often where *states have withered or collapsed*. And although warlords may try to *mobilize ethnic and religious hatreds*, they are often more about *local riches and resources* than they are about big ideas. (Guéhenno 2005, italics added)

The same sequencing has emerged inductively from an analysis of a small sample of 30 articles, which contained the word 'warlord' in their

headlines and were published in major US news publications (*New York Times*, *Washington Post* etc.) between 2007 and 2012. The functions and sequences generated from this analysis allow describing the development of the warlord myth as illustrated in Fig. 7.3.

To check the general presence of these sequences in the media, a different sample of 131 newspaper articles and nine US governmental documents from the same time period was then scrutinised with the aim of finding major digressions from the above narrative pattern. The analysis shows repetitively that there are no digressions of the warlord narrative pattern in the sample. Even though not every sequence regularly appears in the articles (and this might well be for space reasons), the sequencing as such is always the same. It is noteworthy that function VI—‘redemption through international intervention’—and its sequence only appear in articles and texts after 2008, when the election of President Barack Obama made a US withdrawal from Afghanistan more likely. Sometimes, sequences are differentiated in variations such as the militia function, where description might vary on the type of militia (ethnic, religious, thugs and criminals, abducted children etc.). Such variations are purely concerned with the phenomenological appearance of the function but do not alter substantially the function itself; for instance, in all tales militias are irregular and extraordinarily brutal gunmen, regardless of whether they are tribal militias or constituted by unemployed urban youth.

As already indicated above, the warlord myth is not restricted to media reporting but is equally narrated in scholarly literature. A fine example of this is the working paper ‘“Tribes” and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980–2005’, written by Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah for the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Giustozzi and Ullah 2006). In this paper the authors discuss the rise (and fall) of four warlords—Esmatullah Muslim, Mullah Mohammad Nasim Akhundzada, Khano, and Allah Noor—in Southern Afghanistan. In each case, the two authors follow neatly the mythological structure lined out in Fig. 7.3. Table 7.1 gives a short overview of how often and with which language the authors narrate the warlord myth.

Giustozzi and Ullah’s text shows, furthermore, how much the mythology of warlords is based on the stereotyping of particular forms of actions and persons. Just as in a folk tale, the sequences are largely contingent on the stereotyping of certain dramatis personae. While in a folk tale this is, for example, the stepmother (evil), the dwarf (vicious), the elderly woman (witch), the blond young girl (innocent), the white horse (carrying the

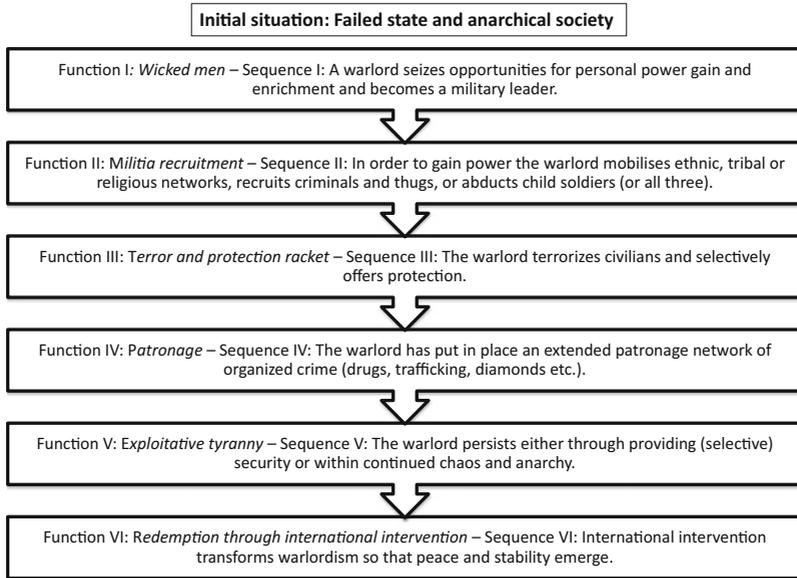


Fig. 7.3 Functions and sequences of the warlord myth. *Source:* Author

hero) etc., the mythology of warlords relies heavily on stereotypes of foreign countries and ‘races’ (or ‘tribes’ or ‘ethnic groups’ or however these are then designated in the text)—concepts which the authors use without the least critique of their colonial and deterministic ontology.

This is unsurprising given that these stereotypes are derived from and justified by references to colonial anthropologists and social scientists, particularly in cases like Afghanistan. Keith Stanski shows in his discussion of the Afghan warlord metaphor that its contemporary use has a long pedigree going back to the first encounter of British colonisers with Afghanistan in the early nineteenth century (Stanski 2009). In a detailed discussion of the use of the metaphor by the Bush administration and in the media during operation *Enduring Freedom*, he is able to confirm the orientalist and manipulative character of the notion in the US political context. He also points out how Afghan actors themselves rejected the label of warlord, yet with little avail (Stanski 2009: 81).

These stereotypes have a specific place and use in the warlord mythology. They serve not only to define what and who a warlord is but also to

Table 7.1 Giustozzi and Ullah on warlords in Afghanistan

<i>Functions (dramatis personae)</i>	<i>Function I: Unorderly agency</i>	<i>Function II: Militia men</i>	<i>Function III: Racketeers</i>	<i>Function IV: Patrons</i>	<i>Function V: Tyrants</i>
Sequences (action taking place)	Sequence 1: Wicked man seizes opportunities offered by state failure for personal enrichment and becomes military leader	Sequence 2: Warlord forms militias by recruiting ethnic, religious, clanic followers or by recruiting thugs, disavowed youth, or by child abduction	Sequence 3: Warlord terrorises population and then offers protection against loyalty	Sequence 4: Warlords establish patronage networks usually on the grounds of criminal activities	Sequence 5: Over time the system gets established and warlords become tyrants, sometimes found dynasties
Frequency	5	5	5	5	5
Text examples	“Whilst he was definitely a military leader, he also had other characteristics typical of warlords, such as his lack of interest in political ideology and his resistance to any control from the political authorities.” (p. 7)	“He mainly recruited among the unemployed youth of the province, who were mostly not very ideologically committed. At the same time, they were not recruited through tribal networks either, contrary to the Akhundzada’s militia. The main factor driving recruitment was the rather generous pay and Khano’s personal charisma as a commander.” (p. 15)	“He was widely rumoured to have personally killed hundreds of innocent people without reason. His victims included many tribal chiefs and road travellers and even popular celebrities, such as the singer Ubaidullah Jan (...). He himself and his followers were involved in forced marriages, rape and torture and he boasted of having ten young wives.” (p. 8)	“According to this interpretation of how Nasim’s system operated, he also forced all farmers in the area to cultivate poppies. Those who refused were punished with torture and execution.” (p. 10)	“It is remarkable that Mullah Nasim’s system survived his assassination and so quite smoothly his brothers Mullah Mohammad Rasool and Mullah Abdul Ghafar simply took his place.” (p. 12)

Source: Author

Note that this working paper was published in 2006 before function VI (‘redemption’) became an integral part of the warlord myth

classify his actions and to give specific, predetermined meaning to them. They hence stabilise the narrative and pattern the sequences. At the same time, they are evocative of the mirror myth, the underlying and subliminal myth about the stereotype's 'other'. The stereotypes of the syntagmatic narrative (in this case of the warlord myth) produce the paradigmatic narrative through contrasting images.

THE PARADIGMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE WARLORD MYTH: THE MYTH OF THE STATE

The analysis of the paradigmatic structure of a myth is Claude Lévi-Strauss's further development of Propp's sequential analysis. In his otherwise eulogistic discussion of Propp's work, Lévi-Strauss makes one sharp judgment, which distinguishes his own approach from the former's:

What has [Propp] lost on his way? Exactly, the content. Propp has discovered—and that's his glory—that the content of tales is transformable; he has often drawn the conclusion that it thus is arbitrary, and that's the reason for the difficulties he had [in his analysis] for even the substitutions follow rules. (Lévi-Strauss 1996 [1958]: 148)

Lévi-Strauss asserts that any syntagmatic structure is mirrored in positive or negative, yet always stereotyped, connotations of syntagmatic terms, and that this paired structure reveals the paradigmatic structure. Such oppositions tend to be stable throughout a large variety of narrative forms and dramatis personae and to rely on stereotypes, which intuitively make sense to the audience. Lévi-Strauss gives the example of the night owl symbolising the night and being contrasted with a pigeon that as a day-active animal symbolises the day and light. Examples from folk tales are the dark-haired and old witch, symbolising darkness, wickedness, and age, with the blonde-haired young girl, symbolising youth, innocence, and kindness.

In the case of the warlord myth the other of the pair, the mirror, is the myth of the Western state. Already the metaphor of warlord contains implicit meanings about the West and legitimate statehood. The paradigmatic myth of the state contrasts 'good' lords, i.e. rulers, with 'wicked' warlords, i.e. anarchic individuals. As the republican period of violent turmoil in China's pre-communist era is the obligatory reference for the

definition of the term ‘warlord’, it is almost by definition orientalist (and erroneous,² as the China historian Arthur Waldron has pointed out). The experience of disorderly state-formation in China is then commonly contrasted with state-formation processes in Europe. Just like the warlord myth relies on stereotypical images of tribes and warlords, so does the state myth rely on a peculiar reading of Max Weber’s definition of a state as monopoly of the legitimate use of violence.

For example, Kimberley Marten explicitly defines warlords in opposition to the state in her book *Warlords: Strong-arm brokers in weak states*:

“Warlords” are individuals who control small pieces of territory using a combination of force and patronage. [...] Warlords rule in defiance of genuine state sovereignty but through the complicity of state leaders. Warlords today flout and undermine state capacity and state institutions, and they do so by colluding with cost-conscious, corrupt, or frightened officials and bureaucrats. In other words, warlords are parasitic creatures of the state. (Marten 2012: 3)

Marten refers to Max Weber’s socio-historical elaboration of the concept of the state as a specific category of social organisation. However she reads Weber in a functionalist and deterministic way, so that what are heuristic concepts in Weber’s investigation of the emergence of the law-territory-authority triad in Germany’s middle ages become ontological facts of statehood. The ontology of states that Marten evokes is a very different one from Weber’s account. In Marten’s account, states are mythologised as ahistorical and acontextual, functionalist, and rationally necessary entities—hence, reflecting the mainstream ontology of the international system of (mostly American) international relations scholarship and neglecting most of the major critiques addressed at these ontologies and epistemologies from critical, postcolonial, gender, or historical-sociological studies (including the critique Max Weber himself would formulate of such a misinterpretation of his work).

Marten’s book and articles on warlordism in Afghanistan are particularly well constructed examples of the paired warlord–state mythology (Marten 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012). Both myths are narrated in parallel and constant reference to each other. Figure 7.4 shows how the state myth reflects the warlord myth in Marten’s account of warlordism in her 2012 book. Every function and every sequence (indicated by Roman and

Functions		Sequences	
Warlord myth	State myth	Warlord myth	State myth
Initial situation: State failure and anarchy	Initial situation: Competing authorities (e.g. European middle ages)	Initial situation: State failure and anarchy.	Initial situation: Competitive authorities (e.g. European middle ages)
Function I: Wicked men	Function A: Kings (institutions)	Sequence 1: Warlord seizes violently opportunities for personal enrichment.	Sequence α: Depersonalized institutions and law emerge.
Function II: Militias	Function B: Armies	Sequence 2: Warlord creates unruly militias.	Sequence β: State monopolizes legitimate use of violence.
Function III: Racketeers	Function C: Merchants	Sequence 3: Warlord terrorizes and racketeers civilian population.	Sequence γ: Trade, commerce, innovation, modernity and prosperity develop under rule of law.
Function IV: Patrons	Function D: Bureaucrats	Sequence 4: Warlord establishes far-reaching criminal patronage network.	Sequence δ: Bureaucracy, tax collection and rule of law span entire territory.
Function V: Tyrants	Function E: Statesmen	Sequence 5: Warlords become tyrants.	Sequence ζ: State supported by population and accountable (democracy).
Function VI: Saviours	Function F: Representatives		

Fig. 7.4 Functions and sequences of the state myth as opposed to the warlord myth. Source: Author

Arab numbers for the warlord myth and Latin and Greek letters for the state myth) has its exact mirror image in the mythologisation of European state-formation.

From here on, it is possible to oppose the warlord functions to the state functions and to elaborate what Lévi-Strauss called *mythèmes* (a neologism combining the words ‘myth’ and ‘theme’), the inside topics, so to say, of the myth. These *mythèmes* have to be contextualised in the cultural usages of the images and metaphors they evoke in order to understand the discourse (the meaning and morality of the tale) underlying the narrative (the dramatic development). As Lévi-Strauss argues with the examples of the skate and the south wind, it is neither the dramatis personae per se nor the sequences that give meaning. It is the discourse constituted by the *mythèmes*. In his example, the skate and the south wind stand for *something* and contextual analysis allows capturing *what* they stand for.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: THE ‘NON-DITS’ OF THE *MYTHÈMES*

The wider contexts of the warlord and state myths are the wars in these countries. It is noteworthy that, indeed, the notion of warlords is mainly used to describe warfare in countries which are or were also subject to external intervention and invasion. Based on a count of just under 1000 articles published between 2007 and 2012 in US newspapers using the online database Nexis, the term ‘warlord’ was associated only with 12 countries, of which only two, the Philippines and Pakistan, had not been recently the object of formal foreign intervention (see Fig. 7.5).³

Newspaper articles also provide a rich source of contexts with which the warlord theme is explicitly associated. Not all newspaper articles under scrutiny have displayed all functions of the warlord myth. Many articles actually deal with other central themes and use the warlord myth only as fleeting reference. Hence, the themes discussed are good indicators of the themes that are widely associated with the warlord myth. They are, in no particular order: rape as weapon of war and the dire conditions of women in these countries; child soldiering; conflict diamonds; the illicit exploitation of mineral resources or other illicit activities like drug smuggling or

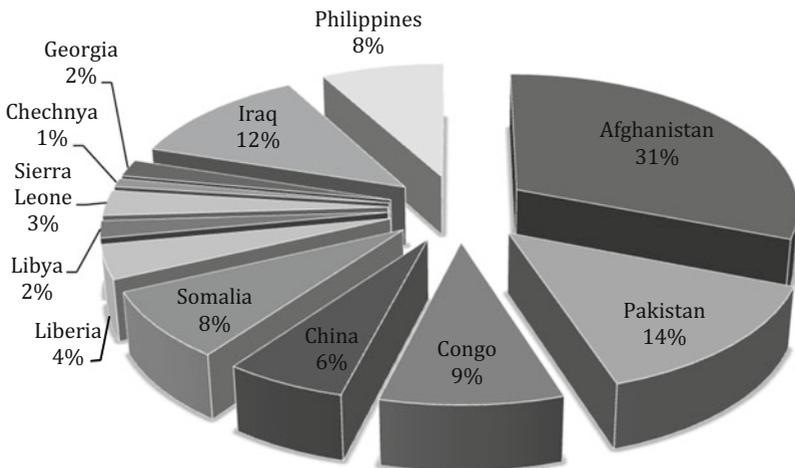


Fig. 7.5 Counts of ‘warlord’ in the headlines in USA newspaper publications, 2007–2012 ($N=998$). *Source:* Author

human trafficking; humanitarian assistance and aid; or the inference of other unruly states like Pakistan in these areas. In short, the warlord myth is the crucial reference to make sense of all the misery and brutality of contemporary wars in countries which are already or might be the object of an international intervention. Importantly, the warlord myth locates the causes of wars, violence, and wretchedness in the actions of warlords, and distinguishes them in an essentialised narration from states and state action. Consequently, foreign interventions (by states) cannot be causing misery; on the contrary, the evocation of the state myth introduces the discourse that states are the origin of order, rule of law, bureaucratic efficiency, justice, and peacefulness.

The myths create an imagination and understanding among the audience not only by what they narrate, but also by what they do not tell. In the case of the warlord–state myth, violence, and particularly brutal, gratuitous violence is only associated with warlords and never with the state. If violence is associated with state action, it is so only in the careful framing of the state’s monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. It is violence that is controlled, framed, regulated, but never violence for sadistic pleasure or to terrorise civilian populations. Stories of drone attacks, of brutalities committed by foreign militaries, or of any other misery caused by the foreign intervention are never told in the same newspaper or academic research as the warlord–state myth.

As every folk tale opposes a story of the ‘good’ to a story of the ‘evil’, the opposition of the warlord–state myth opposes stories of ‘good’ politics to stories of ‘bad’ politics. The stereotyping and essentialisation of the two sides in these narratives decontextualises them. Hence, questions which are commonly linked to political rule—such as those about popular legitimacy, about political efficacy, about the whys and why not—are excluded from the narratives.

Particularly with respect to the question of popular legitimacy, the myths predetermine which actors are legitimate and which are not through the *mythèmes*. Every paradigmatic opposition of every *mythème* leads to the final question of how legitimate warlords can possibly be, commonly answering this question in the negative: they simply cannot be legitimate. This mirrors the conclusion to draw from the state myth, namely that states are legitimate in their actions, no matter what.

The unspoken themes may loom large, but they are not discussed, as the myth has already narrated the foundational legitimacy of states. The effect of the warlord–state myth is not only to deflect any criticism of

intervention, as Stanski argues with respect to the orientalist framework (Stanski 2009). It is, beyond this conjectural purpose, to cement the unquestionable character of the state as foundational unit of the international system and as the ultimately only and only legitimate form of political organisation. Given that the state myth has been developed in the West and is stereotyping Western state emergence, the state's unquestionable quality as the only and singularly legitimate political unit has become an ontological certainty and an epistemological *a priori*.

CONCLUSION

The chapter has shown that the construction of the category 'warlord' induces the narrative of binomial oppositions such as chaos–order, warlord–state, arbitrariness/criminality–law etc. This is true also for accounts, which intend *not* to tell the story in this way, but which by the fiat of the warlord tale end up doing so. This is because the narrative of warlords only makes sense with its mirror of the state tale, just as the metaphor of the warlord is in itself and essentially orientalist. Consequently, the functions (in Propp's sense) of the warlord tale *necessarily* entail a narrative logic that follows the mythical pattern, otherwise neither the use of the warlord metaphor nor the tale would make any sense.

This chapter also shows through the reflexive scrutiny of the context out of which the warlord myth is narrated that the notion and narration of 'warlord' is more effective in justifying the West's current interventionism. Research relying on the warlord myth fails to provide a differentiated and reflexive view of statehood and intervention. Giustozzi's conclusion from his study on warlords is telling:

In the case of Afghanistan, moreover, the problem is still state-formation more than state-building. Gradually I came to think that the formation of a "modern" and "diplomatically recognisable" state in the context of Afghanistan has little chances of succeeding unless it relies on the establishment of an international protectorate, with all the difficulties that come with that. (Giustozzi 2009: 13)

This is the white man's burden all over again, and, unsurprisingly, Marten argues exactly in the same vein that Western military intervention is the only way of ending violence in the world (Marten 2007). But these authors are not only providing justifications for the military conquest of

large parts of the world: their arguments are epitomising the attitude that the state is the only imaginable form of political organisation in world politics that, once consolidated and ‘working’, can create durable peace. This is certainly a political belief, but it is also an epistemological and ontological deflection that blends out the violence exercised by real existing states domestically and, in this context more importantly, internationally, particularly in those countries mentioned here, where, according to Physicians for Social Responsibility, an estimated 1.3 million people have died in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan alone (IPPNW et al. 2015).

The focus on warlords establishes and maintains a firmly Eurocentric epistemological and ontological boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and it will therefore only be able to explain partially where the violence in these world regions stems from. Abandoning warlordism can open our eyes that there are cases which represent—historically, politically, intellectually, and academically—alternatives to the ‘modern’ and ‘diplomatically recognisable’ state and which challenge the idea that the state is the best guarantor of welfare and peace. The warlord myth is by itself a great impediment to the study of alternatives to statehood in world politics.

This is not to say that Giustozzi’s or Marten’s works, or the newspaper articles analysed, do not provide a lot of information about the persons they call warlords. They are also more or less detailed accounts of the histories of these warlords, well researched and presented. Yet, they remain firmly rooted in an essentialised vision of the international system with Western states as, by definition, legitimate and the only efficient actors.

What then is to be researched about the collective violence in these regions? If the notion of warlordism is to be given up, patient research on the ground will certainly be able to factually debunk many of the *mythèmes* of the warlord myth. Examples of such diligent on-the-ground research exist, such as Krijn Peters’ book on the soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone that shows that the RUF did have an ideological grounding and even an utopian project (Peters 2011), or Georgi Derlugian’s serene archaeological approach in analysing the origins of the Chechen wars (Derlugian 2005). What these two books share is a fundamental change of perspective on the subject, most notably by pursuing an epistemology that is not based on ‘definitions’ but treats the investigated actors from the point of view of their subject position.

Yet debunking the warlord myth factually will not lead to its abandonment, just like the detailed historical research about the Treaty of Westphalia has done little to oust the myth of Westphalia (Teschke 2002;

de Carvalho et al. 2011). What is needed is a sort of reflexive ‘secularisation’ of our scientific thought about ‘others’ in world politics (who, certainly not by coincidence, happen to be former colonial subjects), where the analytical gaze is turned to the immanent world of ‘us and them’ and not only to the world beyond ‘us’ at ‘them’.

NOTES

1. This search has been repeated with the German and French words for warlord without producing any other results.
2. According to Waldron (1991), Chinese historiographers and time witnesses used either the word *junfa* (军阀) or *dujun* (督军) to designate the military figures who western observers quite disdainfully called warlords in 1920s China. The term *junfa* literally translates as ‘military group’ or ‘military clique’; hence, it does not designate an individual. The character *jun* (军) additionally is the character used for high-ranking military leaders, not common soldiers, bandits, security agents, or other bearers of violence. It is the same character that makes up the second part of *dujun*. *Dujun*, on the other hand, designates a high-ranking military governor, that is, a person that is nominated by the central government to represent the state’s power militarily in a certain region and a post commonly occupied by a civilian, not a military. Hence, neither term has the meaning of warlord which, according to Waldron, was derived from the German *Kriegsherren* which, again, was a polemical term used in Great Britain to denounce war-mongering generals in Germany of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and in particular the German emperor, and is very little if at all related to any understanding of medieval feudal lordship (Waldron 1991).
3. Note that this analysis was undertaken in 2012 and therefore lacks references to Syria or ISIS.

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Afghanistan and the ‘Graveyard of Empires’: Blumenberg, Under-complex Analogy and Basic Myths in International Politics

Florian P. Kühn

In Afghanistan after 2001, along with the statebuilding endeavour, many attempts were made to uncover the truth about why Afghanistan is what it is represented to be. In this chapter, I argue that myths about Afghanistan were at work which served to shape and construct political realities and supply interpretations of politics. By what I call under-complex analogy, the sustainability of mythical explanations was made productive for understanding Afghanistan. Hans Blumenberg’s (2006) ideas regarding the connection of mythos and logos are taken as a conceptual starting point presented at the beginning of the chapter. It is his foundational understanding of myth as supporting element of our understanding of reality which is then employed in the following analysis of Afghanistan post-2001 intervention. Myth is understood here as taking on quasi-religious functions for the group of actors involved in the restructuring of Afghan

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politics, society, state, and interpersonal relations, as a secular belief-structure guiding action. Political actors view their actions as re-action to acts shaping their world which emanate from outside forces beyond their control. As such, myth works to structure reason in the face of (quasi-)natural forces beyond oneself. Myth rests on a ‘particular interpretation of a historical experience or policy [...] that is invoked in the present to justify certain policies’ (Buffet and Heuser 1998, ix).

Understanding Afghanistan, especially from a western scholar’s but also from a policy perspective, implies working with and around these myths. The chapter sections following the conceptual part present selected myths ranging from talk of Afghanistan as a ‘graveyard of empires’, portraying Afghans as ‘fierce fighters’, terrorists using Afghanistan as ‘safe haven’, and Afghans’ ‘democratic fondness’, which represent epistemic approaches to the image of Afghanistan as constructed in the international discourse. Beyond narratives, these myths’ practical impact implied their selection for the purpose of illustrating the concept of myth: they guide western thinking towards Afghanistan, and in demonstrating how they structure Western policy, their power can be revealed. This, in turn, allows drawing conclusions about their functions for the construction of subject, interaction, and the epistemology of politics about Afghanistan.

THE BLUMENBERG LEGACY: WHY SOME STORIES SURVIVE AND OTHERS ARE FORGOTTEN

Research into myths conducted by philosophers and anthropologists since the late eighteenth century shows the eminently political character of myths. Traditionally, myths were believed to be a ‘fiction’ about the past, centring around the sacred, supernatural, or gods. Evoked and retold by priests, they provided a narrative for societies about themselves linking the divine to the profane. As such, they had a central role in society, in politics, and in explanations of phenomena observed in nature. Since enlightenment until this day, aspects of ‘hollowness’ and ‘self-deception’ are entailed in broadly positivist uses of the term (see in more detail Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2). Such derogatory understanding aside, myths merit scrutinising as they provide of substantial legitimacy and explanatory power to politics, as will be shown in the following.

In modern political philosophy, mention needs to be made especially of the works of Ernst Cassirer (1985, 2010), and of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (2003) of the Frankfurt School. Cassirer's work can be read as a forerunner to deconstructivist approaches, pointing to the most sublime mechanisms through which states manage to obscure their origins and historicity, that is, their genealogy, and the ways they shape knowledge and citizens' lives. Horkheimer and Adorno (2003, 24) stress that the social functions that myths fulfil are merely obscured in scientific modernity as a process in which positivist followers of enlightenment dismiss universal meanings contained in myth first, as beyond empirical knowledge, and consequently, as untrue. Facing fascism, they warn that reason in its totalitarian tendency to usurp all finite arguments provides the instrumental means for barbarism, contained in systems of dominance, that is, the state (Horkheimer and Adorno 2003, 38, 43).

Preserving the caution of these earlier ideas, Blumenberg takes on myth in its culturally productive form. He starts his analysis with the durability of myths, which ensures that they appear in heterogeneous contexts and at different times. This *extra* longue durée (Braudel) of myths led to the conclusion that they contained truth, which was not invented—consequently, the viability of fictitious stories proves myths as part of nature and thus exempts them from further investigation (Blumenberg 2006, 167). However, Blumenberg argues that what he calls 'temporal illusion' about myths is that they appear to emanate from a point early in human history, while being a product of a long-lasting development. Only what would have been transmitted over generations verbally and proved its efficiency as core meaning of a story would be found worthy of writing down at a later stage. While oral narration reduces the myth to its core, new versions eliminate distracting or otherwise unnecessary elements, testing such narratives' reception and impact; written culture, to the contrary, freezes the fictitious and invents it as a point of reference (Blumenberg 2006, 168). In effect, oral transmission fosters conciseness of content at the expense of historical or seemingly historical facts (Blumenberg 2006, 170).

That mythical subjects remain durable over long periods supports the faulty conclusion that they contain in fact timeless, even eternal truths. While this need not be the case, of course, one reason for enlightenment thought to dismiss myth is its refusal to explain itself. As such, myth attracted fierce resistance from enlightenment figures (and earned a bad

reputation as delusional in common parlance), which Blumenberg attributes to the fear of the unreasonable. Myth allows for the reign of unreason, and possibly even enforces it (Blumenberg 2006, 180).

What can fruitfully be adapted from these understandings of myth in order to come to analytical results? What is the value for approaching international politics through the lens of a mythical conceptualisation? Myth is understood here as spelling out assumptions about reality which need not be questioned henceforth. Myths are extremely productive in shaping basic assumptions, or starting points of inquiries, of the driving forces of political development. Blumenberg (2006, 181) argues that in order to conduct research by ‘trial-and error’, concrete long-term assumptions to start from are necessary. Practically, myths align with other epistemological certainties, such that existing knowledge can be actualised and referred to. It is here that the division between reasonable knowledge and presupposed acceptance of something as ‘true’ is blurred to the extent of indistinguishability. In the process of historiography, myths come to coalesce with existing knowledge and prove to be compatible so that no open contradiction between mythic content and assured knowledge arises. To be sure, sufficient ambiguity of both myth and facts is required to create an ‘epistemic space’ wherein contradictions may cohabitate.

Under-complex analogies are in this sense undergirding the combination of myth and fact. De-historicised analogies—critical scholarship tends to highlight *decontextualized* arguments referring to a synchronous relational decoupling of information—allow presenting an argument voluntarily or unintentionally disregarding parameters. Examples abound, and arguments may as easily be questioned as they are brought forward under such curtate points: portraying Afghanistan as the USA’s (or the West’s) new Vietnam (Finlan 2014, 60, 162, 194), or—vice versa—arguing that Afghanistan could not be turned into a new Switzerland (Ruttig 2010) were tropes employed frequently. Such analogies help cognitively locating a problem but work alongside the *longue durée* of myths to construct a foundationalist understanding of a policy challenge. That Afghanistan was a highly militarised endeavour, and that the situation on the ground fostered a certain understanding of the situation (Duffield 2010; Smirl 2015; Bliesemann de Guevara 2014, 71–74), allowed for a quiet merging of myth and analogies, which I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs.

Before looking into the case in more detail, it makes sense to clarify what myths do as opposed to other concepts. We can distinguish myth with a long-ranging perspective grounded in history from policy myths

such as statebuilding or the 'international community', which produce contradictory policy consequences (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2010, 2011; Kaczmarek, Chap. 11). Myths, in either sense, relate closely to what is taken as established truth, and they contribute to the discursive formation of an outside world which can hardly be influenced by individuals: the outside world hands itself to man, relieving her from responsibility. Myths become productive in that they guide repertoires of action—as a reaction to this outside world; they help preselect options available to political (but by extension also military or other) decision-makers (Finlan 2014, 43).

Unlike legends, which also have an explanatory function but concern a narrower field of social life and also concern assumed events, myths explain what is *behind* such action. In Greek mythology, legends of actual gods involved in concrete plots merely exemplify and thus make visible the characteristics of those involved. Such ascription of personal qualities is by no means incidental but codifies myth as an encrypted version of truth. We have to distinguish between the actual plot and the solidified truth claim behind it; what Blumenberg (2006, 15–17) calls 'absolutism of actuality' overwhelms the individual and demonstrates the helplessness she becomes aware of. It is thus functional for her to relate what happens into a higher context to give her life-world meaning.¹

On the surface of the deeper structure of myth, legends as one form of relating events portray what might have happened but what might also not have happened: they are mainly representations of patterns to make sense of the surrounding reality and fulfil a significant role in interpreting reality in interventions such as in Afghanistan (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2015). Legends in this sense are akin to fiction in that they not only entertain but also explain and lend meaning to life. Similarly, anecdotes, more individually, usually involve events in the social vicinity of those listening. What is important is that the latter, and oftentimes legends as well, are transmitted orally; they are told and retold and thus lack the historicised credibility that linked-to-knowledge myths have (bear in mind, however, Blumenberg's 'temporal illusion' inherent here).

While interpretations of such narrative forms can be contradictory, with different versions competing for credibility, myths are beyond that stage. Blumenberg (2006, 196 et seqq.) describes more precisely as 'basic myth' what becomes paradigmatic for understanding truth; it is the maximum reduction of the myth's main content and can hence be transformed into particularistic interpretations without losing contact and, more importantly,

leaving intact the core pattern of the myth. As basic myths have no episodic character,² they need not be spelt out in detail but are reconstructed in the minds of discourse participants. It is this quality that distinguishes myths from narratives. Narratives, one might argue, are crafted explanatory tools, broadcast by someone or a group for a particular end. They tie together concrete events with elements of myths and assured knowledge in order to make a specific point usually suitable for the political interest of the sender. In the Afghan context, narratives have frequently been shaped by elites for different purposes, as will later be shown for Durrani/Pashtun primacy to rule in Afghanistan. Narratives thus are coupled with particularistic interpretations of politics; they are more closely related to power and acute competition between political actors to establish knowledge about a situation—which, subsequently, may or may not converge with mythical claims to truth.

As all individuals act within the structures reproduced by the ‘epistemological software’ which myths provide and which intersubjectively guides actions in societies, myths shape subjectivity. In fact, as Scarborough argues, it is the dualism of primary and secondary qualities which changes the function of modern myths. This dualism, following Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes, of primary hard-fact and measurable qualities, and secondary qualities such as ‘taste, touch, sound, smell, and nonmeasurable visual qualities’ (Scarborough 1994, 11) provides for the subsequent discrediting treatment of myths.³ In the age of science, this concerns unreliable knowledge about subjective understandings, superstitions, and whims—in other words, myths cannot be regarded as knowledge. The need to explain the big picture, to narrate the whole of the story of the world, however, has not disappeared with this proposition. Myths, defamed and placed far outside serious scientific inquiry, have proven remarkably resilient. Also, following Blumenberg, they have the quality of creatively incorporating contradictions, as they need not give answers that can be readily apprehended by ‘problem solving’. In this, myths are not dogmas, which require being stable, codified, written, and unchanged (Blumenberg 2006, 240).⁴

As myths concern the overarching explanation of the world without being explicit about it, they are susceptible to international relations: after all, the ‘whole’ quality of global politics and structures highly depends on abstractions and basic theoretical claims; these can be opened up for methodical scrutiny, turning the discipline itself into a subject of inquiry. While this is not the norm, it also transfers the general onto a level of particularity which then can be criticized and questioned on its own terms;

the underlying basic myth remains untouched. No International Relations (IR) scholar will credibly be able to make the claim to 'know' empirically, by virtue of her own experience, how international relations work. If this can be assumed to be correct or at least plausible, then it is even more amazing that IR has not yet developed a branch concerning itself with myths and their function in shaping the epistemologies and practical execution of politics. If we take into account the profound practice of myth in international politics, derogatorily using 'myth' as false belief reveals a very modern understanding of myth and, by extension, politics.

Post-positivist analyses of myth point us to the constitutive and performative functions of myth as representing basic truths. Some, such as Roland Barthes or Cynthia Weber, are motivated by ideology critique and the unveiling of hidden functionalities wherein myths play their role; philosophical approaches such as that of Hans Blumenberg lay open how myth cannot be disentangled from truth, how myths are required not as logical other to science but as logical underpinning for it. Blumenberg (2006, 18) puts it succinctly:

The boundary line between *mythos* and *logos* is imaginary and by no means dispenses with the question of the logos of myth in working free of the absolutism of actuality. Myth itself is a piece of high-carat work of logos.⁵

CREATING A STATE FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPERIAL RIVALRY: THE GREAT GAME AND AFGHANISTAN AS 'GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES'

Situating Afghanistan in the Great Game of the nineteenth century and highlighting its continuing importance for global affairs provides the pretext for myths about Afghanistan. Western powers remained continuously involved in Afghanistan, while the country's relevance is not matched by a convincing explanation of how it came to be ascribed such importance. It is in this sense that myth is productive in delivering such explanations and providing a basic layer for understanding actual developments. One influential myth, developed after defeats for the British (several), Soviets, and more recently the United States, portrays Afghanistan as unconquerable 'graveyard of empires'. While Afghanistan was never actually colonised, the Afghan state is a product of colonial politics. To begin with, British Empire elites involved in the formulation of colonial policy and

with economic stakes were obsessed with ideas of Russia pushing south to the Indian Ocean. As Hopkins points out, the role assigned to Afghans in countering this ‘threat’ was defined from the perspective of colonial India; interest in Afghanistan in the first half of the nineteenth century was limited to ‘the spectre of the Russian threat on the overactive imagination of British policy circles’ (Hopkins 2004, 5; see also Wyatt 2011).

Policymakers lacked actual evidence for a Russian strategic expansion into Afghanistan (Hopkins 2004). However, the claim mirrored strategic thinking, so British lust for expansion was projected onto the Russian Empire. Afghanistan as bulwark against this expansion became a mythical last post for the ‘free’, that is, the liberal-capitalist world. From the myth automatically followed strategic policy and consequently how Afghanistan was dealt with. The first Anglo-Afghan War was fought on the premise of assumed Russian support of the Persian military by strategic advisors, portrayed as an imminent Russo-Persian alliance that posed a threat to British interests which had to be countered immediately. While likely focussed on settling border issues with the relatively rich city of Herat, the local context became assigned global relevance. The British, however, sent a strong army and decisively fought forces more or less loyal to the incumbent king in order to reinstall a more easily controlled ruler (Johnson 2011, 50–55). Exaggerating the Russian factor, the British had unknowingly become part of internal rivalry and dynastic competition in Afghanistan.

The second half of the nineteenth century, however, saw a change as the Russians were getting established in Central Asia, building railroads and dependent states—which proved costly to sustain. Yet instead of militarily engaging directly in Afghanistan, the British had changed their attitude towards Afghanistan. Their southern pressure moulded Afghanistan into a nation state, which, if anything, was intended to buffer the Russian and British Empires. After the first war, the British had concluded that ‘the Durrani elite were incapable of controlling their own people. Hence any future occupation of Afghanistan as a colony, even with the cooperation of its ruling class, would likely prove a questionable venture’, which would demand ‘military commitment far out of proportion to the value of the country’ (Barfield 2010, 132). The internal composition of the Afghan ‘state’, hence, demanded treating it differently in the eyes of the attempting colonisers.

Said elites, however, saw their own limited role in rejecting British influence, as they concluded that a stronger state apparatus was required

to prevent their own demise by their own people (Kühn 2011, 64–67). Hence, their approach to politics towards the British, via Calcutta, focussed on securing funds not available in Afghanistan itself, in order to establish modern military forces. They also tried to establish a narrative of legitimate Durrani rule (excluding competing Pashtun tribes as well as Tajik, Uzbek, Kohistani, or other minorities) over the whole of Afghanistan, 'portraying themselves to the Afghan people as the necessary preservers of the nation's independence and Islamic religious identity against potential aggression by both the British raj and czarist Russia' (Barfield 2010, 133). Afghan rulers, henceforth, dependent as they are to the present day on foreign funding, have played an intermediary role between the population and foreign powers. Mobilising against 'foreign invaders', religiously connoted as 'jihad', became a decisive and deliberate element of generating legitimacy for ruling Afghanistan.

In any case, despite historiography, the 'graveyard of empires' myth never deterred foreign powers from trying to use Afghan rivalries to their own advantage. British, Russian, and American involvement manipulated and transformed Afghan politics to different degrees—all left their mark on Afghan society. Vice versa, attempts to subdue Afghanistan by cooperating with forthcoming elites mostly failed as Afghan internal rivalry destabilised political arrangements rather speedily. To be sure, in colonial history this claim might be made quite legitimately for most states. Indeed, the development of a state system is of European making, and capitalist globalisation championed first by the British and later by the United States affects and penetrates most societies. Conversely, defeat in battle and unfulfilled political hopes did not destroy the British Empire (Kühn 2010, 153 et seqq., 268–72), and there is reason to believe that the Soviet Union would have collapsed without the military campaign to secure the Afghan communists' survival in power. To ascribe Afghanistan causal responsibility for any of these developments seems to be going very far.

The gloomy narrative about Afghanistan provides ample illustration for reasoning by analogy. Comparisons of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF)'s post-2001 engagement with that of the Russians in the 1980s, or with the United States' erratic war in Vietnam abound; the 'graveyard of empires' myth sells books, and authors and pundits alike set claims to expertise on such analogous reasoning (Jones 2010; Schneckener 2005). Yet the analogies are problematic, as they pick aspects of a much more complex set of factors, conveniently excluding contradictory evidence.

For example, Soviet intervention was by no means an attempt at creating another Soviet republic in the Union but was born out of strategic indecisiveness, itself owed to the gerontocratic leadership of the Communist Party (Feifer 2009). Knowledge production in international discourse rests on such mythical content, which plays with the spectre of history repeating itself. Analogies, among other ways of establishing historical basic understandings, help in creating myths in international relations by situating truth claims in the not-so-well-known realm of history.

This underscores Blumenberg's assertion that myths tell stories rather than explaining the origin of the world. Not being etiological, that is, not being about genetic characteristics, we have to stick with Blumenberg's idea that we will not know the origin of myth; it is, however, all the more important to turn to their function (Segal 1999, 145). For stories comprising a myth to be credible, they need to be isomorphic with other stories, which mutually establish a credible claim by being compatible. The 'graveyard' myth rests on several supporting myths, and in turn supports others, which combine in providing sufficient 'knowledge' about Afghanistan to constitute the foundational room for such claims. For this process, whether political action tailored to the 'realities' described in the myth is actually deliberately (and manipulatively) misleading, or whether belief in such 'realities' and 'ancient truths' is genuine, makes no difference. Rather, what is of interest is how such myths are productive and, in the concrete case, decisive in defining the interaction of members of the 'empire' and their mythical gravediggers.

THE 'AFGHAN FIERCE FIGHTERS' MYTH

While the 'graveyard of empires' myth uses historical analogy and is situated on a more general level, the 'fierce fighter' myth is productive in giving an explanation of why fights, if taking place, are interpreted to end with defeat for the superior power rather than the opposite. It uses a functional analogy to produce credibility. It can itself be analysed from a historical perspective but focuses on the modes of fighting and points to the jihad component of fighters' motivations. This myth's explanatory function sits comfortably with the 'graveyard of empires' myth; the two logically support each other. In the eyes of observers, near constant feuding, the hardships of the rugged landscape, harsh winters, Western romanticism fed by 'noble savage' ideas, but also overwhelming hospitality despite enduring poverty have underscored the image of Afghans (particularly Pashtuns) as brave and

noble fighters. The historical accounts, especially of the first Anglo-Afghan war, popularised in the nineteenth century not only in Great Britain itself,⁶ served the purpose of restoring the belief in Western, especially British, superiority by explaining away military failure. The first supporting column of the 'graveyard of empires' myth, therefore, is the related 'Afghan fierce fighters' myth which will be outlined in the following.

Dominant *historiography* is not a good guide for evaluating Afghans' qualities as fighters. Robert Johnson explains in his book *The Afghan way of war* (2011) how the fighter myth developed. By all accounts, even from contemporary trainers for the Afghan National Army (ANA), there is no natural talent for Afghans to be fierce fighters. According to Johnson, one of the reasons why Afghans came to be seen as particularly tough fighters is that most accounts were written by those who lost against them. The Anglo-Afghan wars produced a huge overhang of British accounts and very little to no reports of the mostly orally conveyed Afghan recounts of the story.

The British expedition corps suffered a shock facing under-equipped opponents relentlessly attacking the well-armed British; as a seemingly vastly superior force, they had to explain why they were beaten by those who were seen to be bearded, 'shameless cruel savages' (Elphinstone quoted in Johnson 2011, 23). Regardless of exaggerations, Afghans killed and looted many—at times a whole expedition—such as in 1842. The brutal and total defeat of Lord Elphinstone's army was, of course, an exception. The failure was explained by individual mistakes by officers, but overwhelmingly by pointing to the bloodthirsty rage of Afghan fighters. Johnson, instead, puts against this interpretation that clans, who lived nearby but were not party to the agreement, on a retreat of the British started attacking them—attempting to secure plunder from the British, which were held to be famously rich, while initially not intending to destroy them wholesale (Johnson 2011, 70–74). The seeds for a second Anglo-Afghan war, which was to take place in late 1878 to 1881 and in which the British Empire sought to restore its prestige and reputation, were planted (Barfield 2010, 140; cf. Lebow 2008, 326–327).

Quite regularly, attacks occurred but were contingent upon opportunity opening up. There were skirmishes, hardly coordinated, but tests, anyway, of the resolve of the British soldiers, which informed the Afghans of the British reaction. But only after British morale was broken (to which Afghans often tried to contribute by withholding supplies), and when loot was expected to be made easily, did otherwise fragmented groups join to

form a full-fledged attack and overwhelm the British—to loot, not necessarily to annihilate.

The mainly British myth of fierce fighters, adapted to the Soviet and post-Taliban situations, is paralleled and presumably strengthened by traditional poetry and songs stressing male bravery. Tales of resistance against the Soviets resolve around the theme that ‘Afghan resistance fighters prided themselves in their toughness. They travelled light, with just a weapon, a blanket or scarf, ammunition, and a minimal amount of food’ (Johnson 2011, 218). In the West, published opinion heroised Afghans for their resistance against the ‘Evil Empire’ (Ronald Reagan), and popular films from ‘Rambo III’ (1988) to the more fantastic ‘The Objective’ (2008) provided the iconography of dusty roads and half-clothed fighters in destitute mountains.

Especially in Pashtun culture, being a poet *and* a fighter brings fame to a male. To prove oneself in battle is essential for young males, which helps explain why insurgents found it easy recruiting young villagers to plant IEDs (Giustozzi 2008, 37–43, 70; cf. Jones 2010, 292–4). The war against the Western military proved to be one big adventure park for these youths, risks were limited (mainly as direct attacks were tactically avoided), while adventure and fame were guaranteed. Few of those youngsters were actually affiliates of the Taliban, let alone al-Qaida, but their acts exaggerated the sense of attack for Western forces (for details see Carter 2011).

The public myth of Afghan bravery certainly shaped expectations of young men to engage in some sort of resistance to the overwhelming US force. Referring to jihad, which is an undisputed reality in Afghan narratives, helped lend a lot of legitimacy to such actions: hitting a Westerner wherever one meets him (as Bin Laden famously propagated) is one thing, but driving the sole superpower out of one’s front yard is quite another, and a lot more noble, thing. Driven by the ‘graveyard of empires’ myth, it is safe to say, Afghans were happy to support the Taliban (and other, more locally acting militants) in their quest to liberate Afghanistan (Thruelsen 2010, 267)—trusting that in the long run they would succeed, as they had always, according to the myth. This requires explanation, since they are weaker on all measurable indicators.

The weaker part in an armed confrontation may feel inclined to adapt the *way of fighting* to include outwaiting the stronger party (Daase 1999, 96–7; Callwell 1996 [1896]). Afghans have a now famous proverb, according to which ‘The West has all the watches, but we have all the

time' (Barfield 2010, 328). It is often understood to refer to the pace at which things happen in Afghanistan and about which aid workers will shrug. However, it may also be understood in military terms, such that Afghan fighters always waited for the time to be right, took some time to test the invaders, and see when the situation was best to hit them hard. It is surprising that it has been little noted that Afghans never tried to prevent an invading force from entering Afghanistan; homeland defence with its decidedly territorial notion was alien to them. '[H]istorically, occupation forces have not been driven out, but make a strategic judgement to depart on their own terms' (Johnson 2011, 303). However, the time factor appears relative when we look at futile attacks on Western forces in the south and east of Afghanistan (Thruelsen 2010, 266). While making Afghanistan an unpleasant place to be in as a foreigner is the insurgents' strategic goal, tactics are highly adaptable. In Johnson's words, over the last 200 years, Afghan wars present themselves as 'a catalogue of consistent problems and constant change' (Johnson 2011, 305).

An illustration of this is that the Taliban, who cannot and should not be viewed as a unified force, waited a few years before they slowly and crouchingly started testing the resolve of the Afghan state and Western forces. With few forces in the country, they more openly sought direct confrontation, which, however, resulted in little gains Western military would count as success. After having given ISAF or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) forces a hard time, they dissolved—and mostly claimed ground when westerners had withdrawn. After 2009, direct attacks decreased as a result of the mainly US troop surge, and practices shifted to IEDs and hit-and-run attacks (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012, 247–52, 291–2). Later, until early 2013, Afghan forces increasingly engaged in what was called green-on-blue attacks, at the time often shooting unarmed westerners in the camps. These attacks were conducted by disenfranchised Afghan Army personnel or, seldom, by smuggled-in insurgents (Armstrong 2013; Long 2013). This caused a lot of stress for the Western forces, resulting in a few months of heavy losses and was a big blow to the morale.

The question 'Who can you trust?' was exploited masterly in these incidents (resembling reports from the Anglo-Afghan wars, when the same people who would have supplied food to a garrison would later engage in slaughtering the expedition force, including women on their way out in a convoy). The significance of this narrative for the myth lies in the evocation of historical 'knowledge' to underscore the primordial

traitor behaviour, which deems all efforts to help Afghans fruitless and prone to being undermined by Afghans themselves. Reasoning by analogy fails to take into account context, historically decontextualising anecdotes, and neglects strategic and personal considerations behind such behaviour.

During the surge, also, targeting changed to attacks on influential Afghan figures and state representatives. Not only high-ranking politicians—Ahmad Wali Karzai, President Karzai’s brother and governor of Kandahar; Burhanuddin Rabbani, who headed the peace council; and the governors of Logar, Abdullah Wardak, and Kunduz, Mohammad Omar—were assassinated. The police chief of Farah and many other police chiefs were also directly targeted and killed, along with many local and regional police commanders and politicians. A former intelligence analyst describing patterns of violence in Afghanistan reported that in the northern areas of Afghanistan, with the exception of Kunduz proper, in the course of three years there was no single district which had not lost a district police chief or vice-police chief.⁷ Some districts saw the third or fourth police chief during this period. In other words, one of the main strategic goals, to make life miserable for one’s opponents, now also applies to those aligned with the foreigners (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012, 309–10). Fighting non-believers (*‘kufir’*) has become an intrinsic part of jihad, and those who cooperate with foreigners are easily proclaimed to be unbelievers (*‘takfirism’*) themselves (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012, 29, 84; Barfield 2010, 227). Jihad works well as an overarching, that is, globalised narrative. It allows locating a particularistic grievance within an overarching narrative of a Western conspiracy to undermine Islam. Conveniently, what it means to wage jihad, who can be targeted, and what social and political aims jihad is waged for, is ambiguously vague—even the repulsion of invaders is itself but one interpretation relying heavily on adapted ideas of nationalism and territoriality. Although jihad cannot be viewed as a myth, it works strongly to motivate and in the right context to unify a violent effort against another group. Tightly coupled with the ‘fierce fighter’ myth in Afghanistan, jihad serves an explanatory function and moves resistance close to the divine. That this strengthens the myth is revealed by Afghan reference to martyrs, even reiterating the liberating function of the mujaheddin in the Bonn Agreement of 2001—despite ample information that the mujaheddin had a significant share in devastating the country in the 1990s.

THE MYTH OF AFGHANISTAN AS 'SAFE HAVEN' FOR TERRORISTS

Myths are supported by compatible myths, which epistemologically support the structure and content of mythical truth. These are not hierarchical but rather increase credibility through similarity and familiarity in tropes. Mutually interlinked myths form a network of powerful narratives which need not be questioned but acquire the status of assured truths. In order to disentangle the aspects, which co-function to establish and stabilise myths, as well as the results and consequences of such 'collaborative' myths, I now turn to the main justifications for the Western campaign against the Taliban after 2001.

While in the process of the intervention, a parallel discourse about human and especially women's rights combined with a pervasive development argument emerged, the whole campaign hinges on the security argument. Despite disappointing results in statebuilding (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2010), which might have suggested speedy abandonment of the Afghan mission, the imminent return to terrorist camps and Taliban expansion of its Islamist 'sharia' state continues dominating the international imaginary. The security argument haunts Western experts as a Ghani government unsupported by Western military and trainers is imagined. If there is no Western presence, the argument goes, terrorists and al-Qaida will immediately return and start another campaign against the 'West' (Kühn 2013). This argument misses several points: first and foremost is the schism between Shia and Sunni groups, which feeds much of the violence and has led to religiously motivated violence in many countries, and to an extreme extent in Pakistan (Ispahani 2013). Secondly, before 2001, Taliban and al-Qaeda did not cooperate to take over the world with a Muslim caliphate. Although the Taliban, when in power, used the language of old power structures ('Emirate'), Taliban thinking was exclusively focussed on Afghanistan and the continuing social crisis provoked by mujaheddin fighting. Al-Qaida's ideology thus provoked tensions between Bin Laden and Taliban leaders.

First, the ideational backgrounds of proponents of global jihad (generally known as Salafi school), on the one side, and the vast majority of Afghans, on the other (Hanafi, more precisely Deobandi school), provide different outlooks on political affairs. Major differences in their perspectives on secular rule exist(ed), regional differences notwithstanding (see Giustozzi 2009, 294). For the Afghans, a worldly ruler such as the Afghan King was perfectly fine, as long as he ruled in accordance with

their interpretation of Islam. Islam in the Pashtun interpretation, however, enshrined the sovereignty of local communities; that is, state legitimacy was guaranteed as long as no competition between local and state norms arose (Steul 1981, 236; Kühn 2012, 27).

If rulers acted against this principle, the *ulema*, or Muslim clergy, would cry out in their sermons and mobilize against following the ruler. Most notably, King Amanullah lost the throne in 1929 because Afghan notables were unwilling to accept the modernising influence the ‘young turks’ had on him. His visit to Berlin two years earlier, where his wife was photographed without a veil, led to crumbling support, revolts, and his eventual unseating from the throne. Such local power relations were of minor to no interest to al-Qaida in their rather abstract, globalist orientation. They disregarded practical questions of rule, putting all hopes on the eventual emergence of the *umma*, which as a divine order would be acknowledged by all true believers without questioning or power struggles.

Second, illustrating the Taliban/al-Qaida differences: Afghan nationalism played a huge role in the jihad against the Soviets. ‘Afghan Arabs’, fighters from Arab countries, were never fully accepted in the mujaheddin ranks (Barfield 2010, 275; Rashid 2010). That Mullah Omar sheltered Bin Laden in Afghanistan after 2001 was read as a solid alliance, but is a result of Pashtun obligations to hospitality as well as old comradeship—not necessarily political allegiance or ideological coherence. That Bin Laden had helped the mujaheddin, part of whom would later become Taliban, made it impossible to one-sidedly break with him. According to *nanawati*, the hospitality rules enshrined in the Pashtunwali codex, a weak person asking for shelter may under no circumstances be turned away (Steul 1981, 143–7). Doubtlessly, in 2001 Bin Laden was weak and in search of protection in the face of US demands at extradition. However, what Bin Laden was accused of was nothing the Taliban wanted to have anything to do with or had in mind supporting.

After 1991, about a quarter million soldiers were deployed to Saudi-Arabia after Saddam Hussein’s annexation of Kuwait. Protesting this, Osama Bin Laden had to leave Saudi-Arabia. During the unfolding odyssey from Afghanistan to Saudi-Arabia and Yemen, to Pakistan and back, then to Sudan and finally, after 1996 back to Afghanistan, Bin Laden’s aims turned increasingly global. The Taliban cautioned against such a shift and reportedly (Rashid 2010, 216–20) tried to convince him not to attract too much attention to Afghanistan; increased pressure against harbouring al-Qaida as a result of Bin Laden’s aggressive statements was detrimental

to Taliban efforts to establish better relations with the West. They sought to counter Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud's ties with the West, which helped legitimise the still officially ruling 'Rabbani' government, and portray themselves as a legitimate executive government. The global aims of al-Qaida and the local or national perspective of the Taliban, primarily concerned with restoring order according to their interpretation of Islam and against the marauding mujaheddin, did not converge.

The 'safe haven' myth, assessed critically and scrutinised for different periods, worked well, constructing Taliban and al-Qaida as one of a kind, even a political entity. For the period of Taliban rule and Bin Laden finding shelter in Afghanistan, relations were strained for political reasons, especially clashing ideologies of a global perspective for al-Qaida, and a rigorously Afghan, if not Pashtun one for the Taliban. That they tried to restore Pashtun rule in Afghanistan followed a widely shared sentiment that Pashtuns were the ethnic group 'naturally' inclined to provide a national Afghan leader. This converges with distrust against the central state, which ought not to interfere with individual (male) independence. Hence, from a Pashtun perspective, the state often served to rule over other ethnic groups, while at a maximum being allowed to bargain for temporarily limited coalitions with Pashtun tribes. The convergence between Pashtun tribes and Taliban ideology, however, always remained ambiguous, as Deobandi ideas, propagated by the Taliban, oppose tribalism. Consequently, Taliban fighters have frequently killed tribal elders in order to impose their version of social order.

The 'safe haven' myth rests on a portrait of Afghanistan as an inherently dangerous place, where violent factions collaborate to create a powerful alliance uniformly opposed to the West. The dangerousness of Afghanistan can be found in the 'fierce fighters' myth aligned with myths of the non-state and collaborating nature of the Taliban and al-Qaida as globalised jihadists. Connecting imaginations and assumptions about Afghan cultural and social characteristics, these myths provide the background knowledge for the intervention (see Rashid 2008). That these myths were recounted at different times in the campaign illustrates the purposes they serve. As Blumenberg has noted, myths explain how, not why things happened—and this is what they explain for Afghanistan. From the dangers assumed to be emanating from Afghanistan—not least for the intervention, which is entering the 'graveyard of empires'—derives an obligation to stabilise an Afghan polity in order to establish a proxy ordering leviathan to protect 'the international community' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2011).

MYTH ABOUT A ‘DEMOCRATIC AFGHANISTAN STATE’

In the West, the image of Afghanistan is largely one of ‘traditionally’ weak structures that have been destroyed by 30 years of war, along with most of society’s structures. The Taliban with their anti-statist stance underscored this picture. They scrapped everything states usually do, closed schools, destroyed museums, and refused to decide on laws. Theirs was an ideology claiming that all law required already existed in the form of *sharia*. Western social engineering started, based on an understanding of a Western, idealised Weberian state of rational bureaucracy to replace these structures (Kühn 2012, 27; 2013, 70–1). Many of the structures in place, such as authority of elders, maliks, or khans,⁸ or the complex tribal structures (mainly in the south and east) have been severely transformed by the war. Mujaheddin commanders and mullahs,⁹ seizing opportunities provided by militarisation and Islamisation, had tried to appropriate such authoritative positions, often by force. *Traditional* structures lost influence, but hardly disappeared.

More importantly, while democracy is a cherished concept for Afghans, the idea of a competitive democracy ran counter to the politics of honour and face-saving. The presidential elections of 2014 are a case in point, where widespread fraud notwithstanding a double-leadership was introduced to allow the election loser Abdullah to become member of the government. The post of Chief Executive Officer, unknown to the Afghan constitution, was created to resolve the standoff between the two remaining candidates after the rigged 2014 elections. Similar leverage was hardly available in local and provincial elections, leaving opposition candidates often unable to arrange for power-sharing or post-splitting arrangements. So openly appearing as a loser caused many tensions, bitter accusations, and kinship-based loyalties hardening between followers, while cooperative arrangements were preferred and informally practiced (Brick Murtazashvili 2014).

In the Afghan understanding, losing face undermines one’s standing as it questions the ability to defend one’s interest. Being seen as weak becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as others will act towards a losing person accordingly. Not losing hence becomes an undeniable imperative. Otherwise, weakness is projected onto a family, which analogously appears as weak. Appearing weak, in turn, provides for existential dangers to individual leadership from inside the family, as someone, sometimes a brother or cousin, may feel forced to reinstate a powerful family’s fame

by replacing the weak leader. Outsiders may also take advantage of such opportunity; sometimes seizing women, property, and influence from a weak leader was practiced. In its simplification of social relations, there is significant similarity between realist thinking in International Relations and this culturally formed model of inter-familial politics in the absence of a hierarchically ordering state.

Electoral systems where the loser gets no share of the power, to return and try again four or five years later, let alone a winner-takes-all presidential system seem unsuitable for a society working along these rules. Juan Linz (1990) has warned that presidential systems in polarised and fragmented societies—which Afghan society undisputedly is—may not work to bridge the gaps but deepen them. Such a system institutionalises the loss of face and automatically provokes dissent and dissatisfaction, and resistance. Moreover, it seeks to unhinge the ontological position that society allows for smaller groups—families, tribes, *ethmoi*—to take: freely arranged social relations devoid of hierarchical, and thus imposed, order by a higher authority. Disputed statehood in Afghanistan, hence, is about much more than the question of whether a party or leader proposes the right political programme. Questioning political authority, similarly, reaches a lot further than merely asking which questions the state ought to address; it asks instead if the state ought to be implied in social relations at all. Preserving personal autonomy means keeping the state at bay, not accepting its claim to universal superiority, organising social relations, and expanding influence over society (Jung 2001).

The myth of the Afghan state involves double meanings about the hierarchical nature of the state. Designing a new state after 2001, international actors pleaded for a highly centralised state that should become a focal point for power; over time, it was intended to develop the credibility and stamina to counter the multiple challenges coming from the fringes (certainly not limited to the Taliban). This was a departure from Afghan statehood, where state and rulers were hardly accepted in a way in which European kings of the Absolutist era were, who managed—at least in principle—to keep rivals at bay and to monopolise violence until the state's particular way became accepted as universally 'true' (Bourdieu 1998, 84). The multiple different modes of settling disputes, punishing delinquents, and so on in the Afghan case give ample evidence that this unitary understanding of state rule hardly ever existed in Afghanistan. Highly particularistic relations between head and parts of the state existed in the stead of hierarchical relations to nominally equal citizens. Generally, the state in Afghanistan is not simply rejected but its reach is neatly determined and

periodically renegotiated. This can be explained by the historic genealogy of Afghanistan as a buffer state between the British and Czarist empires.

State formation was top down, by kings who even borrowed their title of king (transforming the meaning of *emir* or *khan*) from the European idols. With Western penetration of global social relations, the state form became a necessity of the system. So ‘Afghans’ accepted a king as a necessary hinge function between their plural social formations and the outside world, but hardly as someone ruling *over* them. Over time, the reach of central rule was ever disputed and sometimes fiercely fought over. However, due to the political economy of Afghanistan as a rentier state dependent on foreign funding, the relation was one of give-and-take, of particular relations, negotiated between equals, and highly personalised. When a king died, the successor did not only have to keep 15 cousins at bay but also had to renegotiate agreements with strongmen influential in the provinces. The local men would know how to evaluate the weakness or strength of the successor, and terms of agreements would be renegotiated accordingly, usually in favour of the locals, in exchange for support.

In other words, the state was and is a necessity dictated by the international system and is negotiated between different, and shifting, power centres. No one, however, actually questioned the state in Afghan history—apart from a more recent pan-Pashtun movement which would rather merge Pakistan’s parts of Pashtunistan with Afghanistan than secede from Afghanistan. Generally, no demand for restructuring of the state’s borders or secession was seriously voiced—which ought not be confused with acceptance of a state as a mode of organising society.

CONCLUSION

Understanding these different, but for the Afghanistan campaign of the West, guiding myths allows explaining at least partly the course of the intervention since 2001 and why resistance in Afghanistan against the Western-model state has been so pronounced and sustained. Expanding on Blumenberg’s ideas on myths, this chapter has directed attention towards basic truths, coined as myth, shaping policymakers’, military’s, and supporting publics’ assertions, which in turn influence the way aspects of politics are selected and evaluated. Blumenberg makes the case of detaching myth from explanations of creation but understands them to reproduce basic ideas in a certain form appealing to an audience. Their sustainability is guaranteed by oral (that is, narrative) tradition.

The analysis of myths, understood not as false beliefs but as epistemological software structuring action, analysis, and consequently subjectivities, promises a better understanding of the logics of action of players in contexts like Afghanistan. Logic, in this way, is not to be understood as a rational evaluation of costs and benefit but a weighing of selected arguments—the selection, of course, sometimes deeply influenced by the underlying myths. What is selected in each concrete case, in the narrated form or representing Afghanistan in a given context (military briefings/debriefings, staff meetings, strategy planning, and so on), is already an expression of myths at work. The relative durability of myths about Afghan's fighting mode, Afghanistan's role as safe haven, or Afghan state-society relations supports naturalising these qualities as beyond time and context. The work of myth can be observed in the arguments of proponents and critics of the intervention alike, for example, when the latter make the case for knowing the history of Afghanistan better as a precondition for successful statebuilding. Indeed, confusing myth and history is the default mode of under-complex analogy.

Enlightenment's critique of myth as irrational is replicated in describing Afghans as following mythical (hence necessarily untrue) beliefs. It is part of the work of myth itself to seamlessly incorporate both rationalist arguments denouncing irrational political behaviour and their function of stabilising the productivity of the guiding myth itself. In addition to the 'work of logic' which myth is, myth contributes to trusting the order of things—even if the order of things is undesirable. As myth is not a logical other to science and knowledge but its supportive twin, several myths revolving around a particular subject of narration support each other. It is in this sense that we can draw lines from Afghan history to terrorism and contemporary statehood, which are all part and parcel of the particular myths of Afghanistan, of which only a small part could be presented here.

In forcing us to analyse myth as productive and guiding for knowledge production in International Relations, a Blumenberg-infused study of myth is reflexive and tells us as much about ourselves as about the object of study. Myths, vivisected in their mutually enforcing, underpinning, and productive impact, can help explain perspectives on a subject. Such an analysis also helps analysing the narrative construction and intellectual grounding of politics. In Afghanistan, as anywhere, narratives and counter-narratives compete constantly to define the spaces of the say-able and the do-able, thereby carving out the essence of the myths. Just as Blumenberg describes it for classical myths, these were later enshrined in scripted

form and thus frozen. Similarly, questioning the myths of Afghanistan as described here would mean challenging foundational knowledge. Putting taboos on topics and possible action is the exclusionary flip side function of myth. In withholding some topics from public scrutiny, myths are powerful to pre-shape evaluations of political possibilities and potential ways of addressing a situation. In this way, the study of myths allows the shedding of light on other aspects than classic International Relations would have envisioned—well beyond Afghanistan.

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NOTES

1. The 'absolutism of actuality' is remarkably present in development policy papers. They often acknowledge the failures of the past while being unable to put forward convincing concepts departing from the 'old ways'; thus, the hidden dynamics that turn the most benevolent of actions into their contrary remain at work (Pospisil and Kühn 2016). The absolutism of the actual case, or project, leaves no space for conceptual divergence.
2. For the foundational contradiction of Christian philosophy, which is fundamentally opposed to the episodic character of metamorphoses prominently employed in (Greek) mythology, see Blumenberg (2006, 196–203).
3. See, however, Bliesemann de Guevara's (2012, 2016) work on politicians visiting intervention theatres to 'see for themselves' and the subsequent claims to credibility in political discourse; Bliesemann de Guevara's notion of such visits being staged resounds military parlance for a mission environment as 'theatre'.
4. This is a result of Christian dogma being claimed as divine truths; the Christian God, revealing truth for the purpose of guidance, takes a different position than the mythical gods, which are particularistic, deficient, and

- unreliable. Dogma in its genealogical sense is a canon for the exclusion of heresy (Blumenberg 2006, 249).
5. Transl. and emphasis F.K. ("Die Grenzlinie zwischen Mythos und Logos ist imaginär und macht es nicht zur erledigten Sache, nach dem Logos des Mythos im Abarbeiten des Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit zu fragen. Der Mythos selbst ist ein Stück hochkarätiger Arbeit des Logos.")
 6. Theodor Fontane's (2002 [1858]) ballad 'Das Trauerspiel von Afghanistan' [The Tragedy of Afghanistan] certainly did that for German-speaking Europe. It is disputable if his political impetus was to undermine the British Empire's claim to power by showing that it can actually be defeated. It seems more plausible that, as correspondent in London for some years and writing 15 years after the fact, Fontane intended to demonstrate the national trauma the defeat still meant to the British public and, especially, its military elite.
 7. Personal conversation, former ISAF Intelligence Officer, Kabul, March 2014.
 8. Both are titles derived from leader or 'king', but do not have specific meaning beyond denominating someone with a particularly influential role in (local) society.
 9. Mullahs are members of the rural clergy, often illiterate but able to recite parts of the scriptures; their traditional roles of mediation and social pastoralism did not ascribe them particularly influential positions in society. Deliberate targeting in Soviet times, but also by the grown influence of military strongmen in the course of the wars, even diminished their social position. Conversely, where men were away to fight, or when radicalized Islamism took root, their teachings became more influential.

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Mutually Implicated Myths: The Democratic Control of the Armed Forces and Militarism

Katharine M. Millar

Clausewitz's aphorism—'War is a continuation of politics by other means'—may be read as a policy prescription identifying the appropriate relationship between state authorities and institutions of violence. The construction of war as a form of policy, subject, as any other, to the will of the political authorities, presents an instrumental understanding of the use of force that represents and informs a long intellectual tradition extolling the benefits of the political/civilian control of the military. The transition from generally civilian to specifically democratic control of the armed forces has been halting, however, as 'historically, the two have been neither inseparable nor interdependent' (Szemerényi 1996, 3). Militaries retained a great deal of institutional power and political influence across Europe well into the twentieth century, while elsewhere newly independent revolutionary and/or authoritarian regimes in the Global South frequently fused political and military authority as, to an extent, did the communist states of the Cold War.

Currently, major organisations actively promote the democratic control of the armed forces, often referred to as 'DCAF' or, as is increasingly

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common, ‘security sector reform’, as an explicit policy aim in the context of new and transitional states. As DCAF typically employs the exhortative language of transparency, accountability, morality, and, often, peace, rather than formal argumentation, this chapter suggests that DCAF may be understood as a particularly powerful, even ‘meta’, international policy myth. Placing the policy of DCAF in the context of Dvora Yanow’s understanding of the characteristics and functions of policy myths, and utilising the Foucauldian concepts of discipline and normalisation to elaborate this understanding further, the chapter argues that not only is the popular understanding of the purportedly pacific nature of DCAF a potent *policy myth*; it itself is subtly dependent upon a *secondary, academic* myth, namely militarism. The chapter maps and unpacks the implication of policymakers and, primarily, academics in the construction and reification of these mutually reinforcing myths.

Overall, it is argued that the discourse of militarism identifies the valorisation of, and participation in, violence by democratic societies as ‘deviant’ exceptions to the generally constraining, rational tendencies of DCAF, thus normalising the quotidian reliance of democracies upon the (potential for) political violence.

DCAF AS INTERNATIONAL POLICY

The contemporary status of DCAF as a major policy goal of a range of international organisations stems from the twin post–Cold War desires of Western powers to (a) ensure European security following the break-up of the Soviet Union; and (b) maintaining the trans-Atlantic NATO alliance despite the demise of the Warsaw Pact (de Santis 1994, 61–81). To this end, NATO created the 1994 ‘Partnership for Peace’ program, intended to support the democratisation of aspiring NATO members through a variety of measures (NATO 2012), including the promotion of DCAF (Rose 1994, 13–19). Given its perceived utility in the promotion of democracy and regional stability—and in the absence of an ideologically acceptable alternative—DCAF became a preferred policy of the ‘international community’ (see Kaczmarek, Chap. 11) promoted by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the African Union, among others (OSCE 2005, DCAF 2013a, b; UNGA 2008; OECD 2006). Perhaps the best expression of the growing international consensus as to the importance of the promotion of DCAF

policies is the creation of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces in 2000 (DCAF 2013a, b), which works with virtually every major international organisation in the furtherance of DCAF. It is supported by 61 member states, reflecting the extent to which DCAF has become a common policy (goal) of the ‘international community’.

While a great deal of DCAF literature was developed in the 1960s and 1970s in relation to the ‘new’ post-colonial states in Africa and Latin America, this chapter highlights the extent to which, following the decline of the Soviet Union, it has become possible to promote the Western, liberal policy of DCAF as that of the ‘international community’ as a whole. In other words, while DCAF is not a recent development, its promulgation as the commonsense consensus of a range of international institutions is. Correspondingly, the iteration of DCAF of interest here is not its context-specific meso-/micro-practice within a particular organisation but rather its broader construction and dissemination as an overarching policy goal throughout the ‘international community’.

At this general level, DCAF is articulated as a policy regarding the formal structure of institutional arrangements, consisting of: (a) a clear constitutional/legal division of authority between military and civilian authorities; (b) the dependence of defence budgets and military deployment upon parliamentary approval; (c) the cultivation of military professionalism; and (d) building the capacity and expertise of civilian ministries of defence [Simon quoted in Szemerényi (1996, 67)]. In many instances, such structural arrangements are supplemented by a parallel emphasis on the role of civil society in maintaining DCAF, through a removal of military-related media censorship, consultation with non-governmental ‘watchdog’ organisations, and the formation of military labour unions (Encuțescu 2002, 87–94).

The overall policy goal of DCAF is to address both the ‘functional imperative stemming from the threats to the society’s security and [the] societal imperative arising from the social forces, ideologies and institutions dominant within society’ (Volten 2002, 315–16; Huntington 1972, 2). DCAF thus may be understood as reflecting the division of the modern (liberal) world into separate ‘spheres’ of social activity—generally understood as public and private, but, in this case, comprising the state, the military, and society, or the ‘Clausewitzian trinity’ (von Clausewitz 1989, 89). The goal of isolating the military from the ‘public’ life of politics represents a normative commitment to ‘detaching and freeing the other sectors from the use of force, and so eventually reducing and marginalizing the

military sector itself' (Buzan 1997, 23). Despite its technical emphasis on structural and institutional reform, DCAF is very much aimed at 'containing' the military/violence in order to promote peace and 'protect' democracy—a project embedded in the broader Western cultural and ideological heritage of liberalism.

DCAF AS POLICY MYTH

DCAF may be understood as a particularly potent policy myth, or 'narrative created and believed by a group of people that diverts attention away from a puzzling part of their reality' (Yanow 1992, 401). Drawing on Dvora Yanow's understanding of the four elements of myth as narration, social construction and context, belief, and incommensurability (Yanow 1992, 401), this section examines the cultural foundation and social function of DCAF beyond its superficial, technical manifestation as international policy. The most salient characteristic of DCAF as a policy myth is its social construction within the context of a particular time and place—the West in the immediate aftermath of the post-Cold War era. The perceived 'victory' of liberal democracy following the fall of the Soviet Union ushered in an era of 'liberal triumphalism', wherein politicians, policymakers, and, to an extent, academics, attributed to 'liberal democracies' an inherent peacefulness in their mutual interactions, a greater 'moral reliability' in their international relations, and an unmatched record in the protection of citizens' rights (Reus-Smit 2005, 75). DCAF is both firmly embedded within (and a purposive extension of) broader Western cultural and ideological liberalism. Its explicit commitment to universal civil and political rights, the rule of law, democracy, rationality, and, ostensibly, non-violent conflict resolution (Howard 1989, 11, 137) thus provides DCAF with a universalised normative foundation while obscuring the value conflict inherent to its assumptions.

Liberalism 'regards war as an unnecessary aberration from normal international intercourse and believes that in a rational, orderly world wars would not exist: that they can be abolished' (Howard 1989, 137). It is this belief, and the impulse to act upon it—the 'liberal conscience' (Howard 1989, 11)—that informs the narrative aspect of DCAF as meta-policy. The liberal understanding of history as progressive, moving towards the constant improvement of the human condition through the universalisation of liberal values, situates DCAF firmly within a long, imagined, and teleological historical trajectory moving away from the rule of kings towards

the ultimate quelling of violence through the will of the people. More concretely, DCAF may be understood as a specific manifestation of liberal democratic peace theory, which holds that due to popular sovereignty and human rationality, liberal democracies are the most pacific collectivity (Doyle 1983). The promotion of DCAF, therefore, furthers the ongoing liberal project of world peace through the transformation of otherwise threatening societies into conformity with the liberal norm. While democratic peace theory does engage in logical argumentation, which is not in and of itself ‘myth-like’, both it and DCAF (re)produce the liberal meta-narrative of progress. As this secular faith ‘transcends a specific historical time’ (Skonieczny 2001, 439) and, in its broadest form, is largely ‘immune to factual attack’ [Cutherbertson quoted in Yanow (1992, 401)], DCAF is imbued with the implicit narrative qualities of a potent policy myth.

That the utility of DCAF as a means of protecting rights and reducing violence meets Yanow’s third criterion of myth—belief—hardly bears stating. While Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ may not have come to pass, it is difficult to imagine a policymaker intelligibly arguing for any other approach to the management of the armed forces. This explicit promotion of DCAF by the ‘international community’, however, points to a contradiction between the *domestic* understanding of DCAF—as containing the violent capacities of the military in order to safeguard external defence and internal liberty (Akkoyunlo 2007, 7)—and its apparent utility for the ‘international community’ as a means of preventing conflict.

The contrast between DCAF as a policy of individual states and as a policy goal of the ‘international community’ highlights the final aspect of Yanow’s myth—‘incommensurable values—two or more equally valued but incompatible principles embodied within a single policy issue’ (Yanow 1992, 402). These incommensurable values are democracy and security. Despite the denial of violence in the daily life of liberal democracy, the possibility of such a society, which depoliticises violence, relied upon force for its inception, and continues to depend upon at least the potential for future violence for its maintenance (Jabri 2006, 55). As Adam Smith observed, the ‘invention of firearms, an invention which at first sight appears to be so pernicious, is certainly favourable, both to the permanency and to the extension of civilization’ [quoted in Bowden (2009, 45)]. DCAF’s attribution of violent activities of the state to the excesses of the military is something of a sleight of hand, obscuring the fact that while the military might be tamed by politics, ‘politics’ might yet find functional value in the use of force.

The active promotion of DCAF by the ‘international community’, however, belies the limits of its pacific nature, as it contains an implicit acknowledgement that non-liberal democratic states are potential enemies. After all, the (liberal) state monopolisation of violence necessarily entails its exercise against those whose liberal credentials are lacking or suspect [van Kreieken quoted in Bowden (2009, 147)]. The proselytising impulse inherent to the liberal historical narrative driving the West to help Others become ‘like us’ is driven as much by a self-interested desire for survival, and perception of difference as threat, as it is by an altruistic attempt to raise all peoples to a universal standard of civilisation. Accession to DCAF thus becomes the logical means of insulating a particular state from the force of the liberal West. While liberalism may be couched in the language of universalism and progress, it has a profoundly exclusivist logic, differentiating amongst the enlightened and political, and the retrograde, violent Others, so as to rationalise (and facilitate) the use of force against them.

Despite what might be understood as the ‘defence’ exception, therefore, the myth of DCAF-as-taming military/violence, on its own, is not capable of completely reconciling this tension between the pacific liberal self-understanding with the war-making activities of democracies. There are many examples of democratic states—in full control of their armed forces—undertaking aggressive foreign policy, from the promotion of democracy-by-force by the USA in Iraq to the eagerness with which the French and British greeted World War I (Doyle 1983). While DCAF’s normative narrative allows it to justify the coexistence of a defensive military with a democratic society, the myth struggles to account for instances in which democracies demonstrate the aggressive use of military force paired with an apparent societal approval of (or eagerness for) war. For this, DCAF relies upon a second myth, premised upon the same normative convictions and structural understanding of military-state-society relations: militarism.

MYTH AND NORMALISATION

Drawing on the Foucauldian concepts of productive power and normalisation, this chapter argues that in order to account for the powerful regulative effects of myth, rather than relying upon the vague notion of ‘belief’, it may be more useful to understand myths as involved in the construction of ‘truth’. Foucauldian theory understands ‘truth’ to be the product of a particular notion of power, which is diffuse, decentralised, and ‘productive of meanings,

subject identities, their interrelationships, and a range of imaginable conduct' (Doty 1996, 229). It is 'implicated in all knowledge systems', to the extent that 'we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth' (Foucault 1980, 93). DCAF benefits from a host of epistemological commitments bound up with liberal modernity, particularly the purportedly objective character of social science, attendant fact–value distinction, and instrumental nature of policy. This constitution of truth makes it possible to present DCAF as a neutral policy that, while normatively-informed, is not a normative value itself but the means to an end.

Yanow's (1992, 415) statement that myth is 'presented as a matter of fact' may be read as the expression of a complex process wherein DCAF, rather than being understood as a powerful, political manifestation of the broader discourse of liberal modernity, is, instead, considered objectively true in its instrumental utility and effectiveness. The construction of DCAF as a social fact thus obscures its historic contingency, facilitating its universalistic claims to constituting not only the best but the sole successful policy of 'controlling' the military. Myths, therefore, are not simply 'believed' but believed in a particular way that elides their own implication in relations of power and instead constitutes them not only as 'true', but as *natural*. Crucially, however, most myths cannot, in their discrete form, completely support this process. While myths are generally effective in mediating the 'incommensurate values' inherent to policy, discrepancies, such as the aforementioned eagerness of much of British society for war in 1914, do occur. Such incidents have the potential to imperil the authority of policy myths. Maintenance of a myth's 'truth', therefore, relies on the ability to convincingly account for—or normalise—the many situations in which it is not successful as an effective mediator between 'incommensurate values'.

DCAF's 'success' is subtly dependent upon what may be understood as a secondary, myth—militarism. The argument follows, analogically, from Foucault's understanding of depoliticisation and normalisation in the penal system (Edkins 1999, 51; Foucault 1995). According to Foucault, prisons produce a subject (the criminal), a system of knowledge (criminology), and an institutional means of addressing the 'problem' (prisons) (Edkins 1999, 12). Through the process of criminalisation, and the correspondent normalisation of 'crime' as an expected aspect of sociality, the 'political force of certain acts' related to such practices is neutralised. As such, 'the failure of prisons in their (apparent) aim of rehabilitation is in

actuality a success', in so far as they reaffirm the inevitability and 'naturalness' of crime (Edkins 1999, 12). In this reading, the concept of militarism supports DCAF (as practically effective and normatively valid) by constructing the occasional outbursts of aggression as normal, rather than a sign of systemic flaw.

MILITARISM AS MYTH

Conventional historical accounts of militarism attribute its origins to Prussia, which is often considered militaristic virtually from its inception, characterised by highly nationalistic public education, universal conscription, and the isolation of the military elites from broader society (Posen 1993, 80–124). Following the success of the Prussian military in the Franco-Prussian War, so the narrative goes, other European states strove to emulate the Prussian system, bringing the social elevation of the military (McNeill 1984, 253–5), mass experience of military service, and bureaucratisation of military organisation to bear across the continent. Though, due to differing empirical manifestations of the same general process across Europe, there is a tendency to portray militarism as synonymous with 'Prussianism', rather than a broader social phenomenon (Summers 1976, 105), considerable consensus exists as to its role in promoting aggressive foreign policy (Bond 1998; Howard 2002; Miller 1997; Vagts 1959).

There are two significant elements to this account of the origins of militarism. In terms of narrative, it functions less as a 'policy' myth than a myth in the classical sense, containing 'heroes or villains, and discernible plot lines' (Yanow 1992, 401). Militarism, or the pan-societal saturation of military values or glorification of war, is attributed to early Prussia which, given the presentist knowledge of the outbreak of WWI, is cast as a villain. The 'spread' of 'Prussianism' across Europe approximates a typical 'fall from grace' myth, as societies are presented as implicitly 'corrupted' by the institutional and normative pathologies that accompany militarism. As with policy myths, this construction of militarism, though it has an understanding of causality, does not engage as much in the language of logic or argumentation as it does in the assertive language of description, a structure not unlike narrative.

This highlights the second 'mythic' function of the academic militarism literature—its implication in the construction of militarism as a 'real' phenomenon. The majority of work on the origins of militarism is, unsur-

prisingly, performed by historians (e.g. Berghahn 1984; Howard 1989, 2002, 2009; Vagts 1959). According to academic convention—an important regime of power/knowledge production—historians are considered to work inductively from empirical evidence to reach factually accurate classifications, thus benefitting from cultural epistemological assumptions as to what ‘counts’ as knowledge and how it should be acquired; the conclusions drawn by historians (and social scientists) are commonly regarded as ‘truth’ (Milliken 1999, 236–7). In purporting to ‘describe’ or ‘study’ militarism, therefore, the academic community also participates in *creating* it.

In doing so, the academic literature not only constructs militarism as a historic ‘truth’, but also as a form of social pathology. For instance, much of the literature is devoted to identifying the *specific* origins and nature of militarism. One group of scholars, such as McNeill (1984) and Posen (1993) considers militarism to derive from an array of institutional arrangements which enabled military ‘cliques’ to make policy decisions independent of political authorities and the ‘nation in arms’ policies of military organisation and mass recruitment (Bond 1998, 58, 65). Another school, in contrast, considers militarism to be a social and political phenomenon, characterised by a ‘vast array of customs, interests, prestige, actors, and thought associated with armies and wars and yet transcending true military purposes’ (Vagts 1959, 13). This school highlights ‘ideational’ factors—such as the ability of democracy to create personal identification between ‘the people’ and the state (Howard 2009, 110–12)—as significant to militarism’s development.

The impression left by both schools is one of diagnosis. Due to the association of militarism with the outbreak of WWI, scholarly interest in its historical origins and various manifestations stems from a desire to understand ‘what went wrong’—thus reifying an absence of conflict as normal. As such, despite its mythic narrative, the specifics of militarism are understood in a highly evaluative way, through the lens of ostensibly objective social scientific language of characteristics, causes, and effects. Correspondingly, perhaps the greatest legacy of the historic militarism literature is the indelibly negative normative character of, if not the concept itself, certainly any situation to which it is applied.¹

Similar to the way in which the prison system—and its attendant academic discipline of criminology—are understood to (re)produce the social category of ‘delinquency’ as a social pathology through a process of scientific labelling, study, and evaluation (Foucault 1995, 276–7; Edkins

1999, 50), the academic treatment of militarism presents it as a problem to be solved. In doing so, the academic construction of militarism suggests that it is ‘possible to supervise it’ and to channel the social pathology into ‘forms of illegality [or violence] that are less dangerous: maintained by pressures of control on the fringes of society’ (Foucault 1995, 278). Identifying militarism as a transgressive social practice thus renders it amenable to intervention and provides the impetus for isolation, mitigation, and/or control. The academic ‘creation’ of militarism thus renders a complex social phenomenon ‘knowable’ and, like crime, theoretically amenable to eradication.

DCAF AND MILITARISM

The policy intervention(s) intended to forestall militarism both reflect and inform the prescriptive logics and normative assumptions of DCAF. The mainstream academic militarism literature may be divided into two broad schools of thought roughly reflecting the institutional vs. sociological/cultural diagnoses of pathology evident in the previous historical analysis, which, despite their differing emphases, demonstrate striking similarity in their ‘treatment’ of militarism.

As a means of framing the discussion, it should be clarified that it is not the intention of this chapter to suggest that militarism scholarship either purposively works in concert with DCAF or has been directly drafted into service as a means of explicit justification/validation of liberalism’s occasional violent lapses. Militarism, while important, is not the sole source of DCAF’s policy authority, nor was it created as an active excuse for its failures. The point made here is rather more subtle, and rests on demonstrating the degree to which militarism scholarship—much of which was consciously written against the violent tendencies and cultural valorisation of the military in liberal democracies—is, in essence, drawing from the same ideological well and foundational assumptions as DCAF, thus limiting the bounds of effective critique. What is at stake is not the way in which particular academics or specific definitions of militarism construct the relationship between violence and politics in liberal democracies, as all presented here are necessarily archetypes, but rather the way in which the *creation* of militarism as real (and pathological) inadvertently serves to normalise the violence of liberal democracies, preserving the normative validity and technical efficacy of DCAF.

Institutions and Civil-Military Relations

The first such approach to the phenomenon of militarism, the civil-military relations (CMR) school, is typified by a strict focus on the military *institution*. It emphasises ‘institutional and formal’ factors in examining the structural relationship between distinct civil, political, and military spheres (Barak and Sheffer 2010, 15). It is primarily framed by a central concern: the separation of the military from other spheres of social life through the delineation of an appropriate relationship between the military and the civilian government. Virtually every scholar supports the ‘common-sense’ assertion, explicit to the DCAF policy literature, that the military ought to be subject to the civilian government, and apolitical in nature. Political neutrality is understood as the abstention from formal partisan politics or seeking civilian governmental authority. When this arrangement fails, and the military becomes involved in national politics, it is as a result of the ‘political institutional structure of society’, rather than a characteristic of the military itself (Huntington 2006, 192–4). Other scholars argue that a professional military ought to be educated so as to actively generate a deep commitment not to neutrality per se, but ‘the rules of the [democratic] political process’ (Janowitz 1977, 22, 78). CMR scholars agree, however, that a professional military is crucial to avoiding institutionally generated militarism, or a military regime (Janowitz 1977, 78).

With respect to DCAF, this portrayal of militarism illustrates two important findings. The first is that, in its unambiguous diagnosis of militarism as the result of a structural/institutional pathology that enables the military to participate in politics, this literature, akin to the prescriptive, outcome-oriented nature of DCAF, and its persistent promotion by the West as a means of coping with developing and transitional states, is clearly ‘problem-solving’ in nature. Not only does this reify militarism as a social pathology but, due to the historical entanglement of such scholarship with the development of policy towards the Cold War ‘Third World’, it mirrors the normative tenets and policy assumptions of DCAF; the bodies of work were co-produced. The presentation of the military by CMR scholars as ‘less a source of influence on society at large than a sphere which has been profoundly circumscribed by the wider society’ (Shaw 1991, 74–5) (re) produces DCAF’s cultural embeddedness in the modern liberal understanding of human sociality as divided into discrete realms of activity. By presenting DCAF as the only logical solution to a dangerous social pathology, the literature elevates the strict separation between civilian authori-

ties, the military, and society to a normative imperative. As such, the social scientific designation of DCAF as a bulwark against militarism furthers the policy's authority and bolsters its status as 'common-sense', naturalised truth.

Perhaps more significant, however, is the second, subtler way in which structural approaches to militarism legitimate DCAF. CMR scholars take great pains to differentiate between what are considered to be normal, acceptable activities of the military, such as defensively preparing for war, and the development of militarism. In endorsing the foundational assumptions of the normative validity and functional efficacy of an idealised model of DCAF, the militarism literature implicitly naturalises the 'regular' use of force by the military. As argued by Foucault with respect to crime, the penal system is concerned, despite its rhetoric, less with the eradication of crime than with 'handling illegalities...differentiat[ing] them...and provid[ing] them with a general "economy"' (Foucault 1995, 272). The labelling and policy 'treatment' of deviant social behaviour is not about abolishing objectively 'bad' acts but about creating an implicit ordering in which some acts are considered pathological while others are not. The militarism literature constructs an ordering of violence wherein militarism is carved out from the broader ambit of military-related force as a 'deviant' case, thus rendering the state-authorized use of force normatively unremarkable. Through this process of naturalisation, this particular conception of militarism helps resolve a tension within DCAF between the obvious use of force by liberal democracies, on the one hand, and DCAF's apparent 'success' in promoting peace, on the other hand. The habitual use of force by democracies, when conducted in accordance with legal oversight processes (and, therefore, is not militaristic), literally does not count.

Critical Militarism Scholarship

The critical school of militarism scholarship, while still concerned with the military as a socially embedded institution, emphasises primarily socio-logical but also cultural, material, and ideological/ideational factors in its analysis of the military as 'a major arena for social exchanges' (Barak and Sheffer 2010, 19, fn3). Associated scholars focus on broad patterns of social interaction, examining the military as a banal, pervasive, and everyday influence upon liberal society. Correspondingly, critical militarism scholars aim to problematise the taken-for-granted state of liberal affairs.²

For the purposes of this discussion, this diverse work is parsed by the degree to which the criticism challenges the normativity of liberalism. At one end of the spectrum is a literature which employs ‘militarism’ explicitly diagnostically, to suggest something is ‘off’ in the typical/desirable ordering of liberal society. In contrast to the institutional anxiety exhibited by CMR scholars, the normative concern of these narrowly critical scholars lies in their perception of an excessive military influence upon society. The many studies, polemics, and popular commentaries in this category indicate an underlying anxiety that military values, symbols, or attitudes are ‘leaking’ from their institutional container into a broader society which, without militarism, would be fully democratic and liberal (Bacevich 2005; Dixon 2012).

Though, like the CMR scholars, this work demonstrates a DCAF-inflected desire to detach the military from politics, it is distinguished by its understanding of politics as either (a) all activities taking place within the public sphere; or (b) pervasive to broader social life, rather than simply formal democratic processes. The military is not just to be institutionally constrained but also isolated from society. This is in keeping with the recent iterations of DCAF, which hold that ‘demilitarization must transcend the idea of the formal withdrawal of the military from the political arena’ and emphasize a form of ‘deeper’ democracy, wherein civil society and the media also oversee and moderate the military (Houngnikpo 2010, 26; Encuțescu 2002, 87–94). Due to their common implication in liberal modernity, therefore, both schools (re)produce, almost as a normative imperative, the distinction between the ‘spheres’ of society inherent to DCAF. Given this understanding of the appropriate structure of society, DCAF is once again reified as the only logical ‘treatment’ for combating incipient militarism.

The majority of critical militarism scholarship, however, works to problematize this ‘spherical’ conceptualization, suggesting that militarism is not antithetical to the workings of liberalism (Stavrianakis and Selby 2012, 6). Examples of this perspective include analyses which, generally, consider militarism to be diffuse throughout various cultural productions, such as film and video games, which promote military values, masculinities, and rationales as both normatively exemplar and geopolitically exigent (Stahl 2010, 48; see also Ó Tuathail 2005; Dalby 2008). From a more sociological perspective, the many studies investigating specific institutional-cultural-ideational configurations of militarism—militarism with adjectives—ranging from British ‘nostalgia militarism’ (Shaw 1991, 118), to ‘militarized

socialism', (Mann 1987, 46) to even civilian-targeting 'terror-militarism' (Shaw 2005, 132) fall within this rubric. This school also encompasses the many feminist investigations of the relationship between militarism and patriarchy—a process of militarization deeply implicated in subject formation (Enloe 2004, 2007; Stavrianakis and Selby 2012, 14).

Despite this school's explicitly critical engagement with liberalism, however—as well as its exposition of the arbitrariness of state violence—from the meta-perspective of myth-making and truth production, it subtly reproduces the distinction between liberalism and militarism, and violence and politics. Stavrianakis and Selby (2012, 5), for instance, construct militarism as 'either a concept or object of analysis', further affirming militarism as 'real'. Similarly, although scholars make the important move of recognizing that militarism and liberalism may coexist, or that liberalism is prone to militarism (Edgerton 1991; Wood 2007), this is not the same as suggesting that the violent phenomena associated with militarism are, in fact, *necessary* to liberalism. This is illustrated by the literature's frequent call for the 'demilitarization' of certain aspects of social life, exemplified by Enloe's (2007, 78–80) intriguing suggestion that it ought, hypothetically, to be possible to conceive of a 'less militarized' military. The notion that militarism may 'wax and wane', or be ameliorated through 'demilitarization', suggests that as its severity/intensity is subject to change, it ought, at least theoretically, be possible to excise militarism from liberalism. Though the point is somewhat semantic, it is non-trivial: liberalism might support, manifest, or even actively encourage militarism, but it is not *necessarily* militaristic, not necessarily violent.³

Overall, in contrast to CMR scholars who maintain the social prestige of the military, the critical/sociological school, in its general concern regarding the undue influence of the military over society, implicitly constructs association with the military as a normative ill. As a result, though not exhibited in each piece by each associated scholar, in the aggregate, the school tends to conceptually collapse violence more generally with the military, implying that the 'containment' of violence to the military will succeed in protecting democracy and pacific civil life. This has the effect of suggesting that in the absence of contamination by 'military values', liberal society would be, for the narrowly critical scholars, generally pacific, or, for the others, at least significantly improved. Militaristic outbursts may be understood as inherently pathological and 'blamed' on either the military directly, or the entanglement and mutual reinforcement of aggressive and patriarchal military values and ideals with liberalism itself. While militarism may co-occur, it is not constructed as a normal, constitutive aspect

of liberal democracy. This thus, at a deeper level than the simple reification of the 'spherical' understanding of society, bolsters DCAF's normative claims. It does so through negative definition. In other words, liberalism's empirical failures to live up to its own values are conceptually excluded from being instances of liberalism in the first place. Through this move to discount illiberality, the ideological coherence of DCAF's underlying liberalism is preserved.

CONCLUSION

In the aggregate, the myth of militarism supports the policy authority of DCAF as 'true' in a variety of ways. The first is to naturalise the 'regular' military violence of liberal states through the creation of an illiberal economy which, through the distinction of 'militaristic' violence as an inherent social pathology, renders other forms, in simple contrast, normal and unremarkable. In this way, the habitual use of force by liberal democracies undertaken in accordance with democratic checks and balances fails to constitute militarism, and thus often fails to garner active politico-normative concern. Correspondingly, the use of force by DCAF states is presented as continuous with, rather than opposed to, the policy's general principles. The potential tension between the pursuit of security and liberal values is thus resolved through the naturalisation of the use of military force as a normal aspect of democratic governance.

The second function of militarism in supporting DCAF relates to the role of historians and social scientists in its construction as a 'true' academic myth. The majority of the highlighted scholarship conceptualises militarism as a social phenomenon that 'breaks out' when something is 'off' in institutional arrangements, political ideologies, or cultural representations of the military within society. Militarism, like crime, is presented as an intermittent, cyclical, social force. Its construction as 'deviant' therefore does not normalise militarism itself but rather its *occurrence* as an inevitability to be managed. The academic study of militarism, akin to Foucault's understanding of criminology, and the creation of a policy and institutional structure to control it (analogous to the prison) simultaneously create, combat, and, in doing so, reproduce the social ill they are forged to eradicate. In a similar fashion, then, to the way the 'reality' of delinquency legitimates the power to punish, militarism naturalises DCAF as *the* means of governing the use of force while simultaneously obscuring 'any element of excess or abuse it may entail' (Foucault 1995, 302).

Correspondingly, the myth of militarism ‘effac[es] what may be violent in one and arbitrary in the other’, understood here as liberality and democracy, and, in doing so, ‘attenuat[es] the effects of revolt they may arouse’ (Foucault 1995, 303). Through the construction of militarism in such a way as to inadvertently, yet significantly, implicitly elevate DCAF as the logical ‘solution’ to terrible social pathology, the policy comes to constitute a normative imperative in and of itself. As a result, the ‘other’ violence of democratic societies is, to varying degrees, naturalised and depoliticised. Militarism, therefore, as crime to the carceral system, rather than constituting what at first might be understood as a definitive policy failure actually *supports* the myth of DCAF’s normativity and efficacy. The construction of militarism as pathological yet inevitable simultaneously ‘explains away’ DCAF’s failures to eradicate aggressive foreign policy, naturalises the system’s ‘other’ coercive ‘excesses’, and justifies the policy’s continued existence. The academic myth of militarism as an ‘actual’ collective social transgression, due to a common intellectual and historical heritage, is a perfect foil to the tenets and assumptions inherent to the DCAF policy myth.

This mutually reinforcing construction of DCAF and militarism thus raises the question as to whether they actually constitute two separate myths or whether policymakers and academics are reproducing the same *savoir*, or regulative body of knowledge, albeit in the distinctive idioms of their respective practice. The intertwining of the two logics raised here should not be taken as a condemnation of militarism scholarship—or, indeed, even DCAF itself, which, though problematic, contributes to the everyday security of many individuals, peoples, and societies—but rather a reflection of the limitations of critique (and failure of language) within a context of ideological, cultural, and normative hegemony. What this argument suggests, therefore, is that we should perhaps strive, as do many of the critical scholars referenced here, for a greater recognition of and attentiveness to the role of academics as myth-makers, even (or particularly) when the connection between scholarship and policy seems remote.

NOTES

1. For a notable exception to this point, see Shaw (1991, 12).
2. It must be noted that this criticality operates at differing degrees and, crucially, that not all critical studies of the military are necessarily studies of *militarism*. Many works that fall under the ambit of broader critical war/

military studies, which conceptualise politics and violence as continuous, constitutive aspects of sociality, largely avoid the issues raised here. For this approach, see Barkawi (2011).

3. Such a move also tends to naturalise the militarised yet (superficially and formally) *non-military* quotidian coercive practices of liberal democracies—such as the use of riot police, the detention of illegal migrants, or torture—through the construction of militarism as a powerful, emotionally resonant social pathology explicitly defined in terms of its association with the institutional military. Critical scholarship may inadvertently naturalise non-military violence either through elision, or, somewhat paradoxically, through its characterisation *as military*, and thus subsumed within the original pathology.

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Tales and Images of the Battlefield in Contemporary Warfare

Alastair Finlan

Warfare is manifest horror. At the heart of war on the umpire-free landscape of the battlefield resides a dark truth that few care to dwell on: it is about killing and injuring people in any way imaginable. In cold terms, all military technologies are designed to inflict catastrophic injury to closed organic systems dependent on the uninterrupted circulation of eight pints of blood with an extraordinarily sensitive nervous system hotwired to a central control mechanism known as the brain.

Generic military capabilities around the world exude similar characteristics because the levels of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 66) among soldiers are very high and typically the twenty-first century warrior carries an assault rifle with an assortment of sighting aids, wears body armour, a distinctive beret or helmet, and also possesses grenades, rockets, and a bayonet. A cursory glance at the modern accoutrements of a soldier today, the very simplest technologies of violence, reveals much. The ubiquitous standard 30-bullet assault rifle based around the M-16/AK-47 and derivatives is designed for optimal engagements of 300 yards, but infantry bullets will travel a mile or so if unhindered or simply missing their target. The latest generation of bullet typified by the American M855A1EPR

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(Enhanced Performance Round) has improved penetration capabilities that will punch holes through steel. Simply put, a modern bullet on hitting an organic target such as a human being will produce a small entry point with shock effect before travelling through vital organs and smashing out the other side of the body with a much larger exit hole that facilitates rapid blood loss, incapacitation, and in some, but not in all cases, death.

If a soldier runs out of bullets or engages in close-quarter combat, then a carefully designed knife or bayonet can be affixed to the end of the rifle to enable soldiers to close with the enemy and physically poke holes in them. The standard technique, used since World War I and earlier, is to stab a human being ideally in the body cavity area where the vital organs are located and twist the bayonet a half turn to enable it to be removed more easily from a victim (Winter 2014, 109), who at this point will be screaming in agony once the initial shock of being penetrated has worn off. In the Falklands Conflict in the 1980s, when British and Argentine soldiers found themselves fighting at night in cold mountainous conditions in the South Atlantic, soldiers would prefer to insert their bayonets through the eye sockets (Bramley 2011, 169) because the bulky Antarctic warm weather gear worn by everyone made the traditional technique less effective.

Alongside of these precise killing technologies, soldiers also carry less discriminate personal explosives in the form of grenades and anti-tank missiles. These powerful explosive charges either tear limbs from bodies, kill through concussion, or cause significant burn damage, if someone is unlucky enough to be caught within their effective radius. Grenades are designed to fragment into hundreds of little pieces in order to chop up bodies; others are comprised of phosphorus that burns victims alive and even if doused with water will not stop the chemical from burning incessantly deeper into the flesh and using the fat of the body to maintain the combustion process. These awful realities of combat, modern and ancient, are rarely considered by people (the majority around the world) to whom war is an abstraction, a place where the minority conduct their profession and where battle damage/destruction is impersonal, distant, and of little concern to their daily lives that are far removed from the sounds/effects of war.

Myth plays a very important role in mediating, negotiating, and legitimising the horror of contemporary warfare to societies in the West, especially in the twenty-first century. In this sense, it fits well with Roland Barthes's idea that 'myth is a system of communication, that it is a message'

(Barthes 2013, 217).¹ The ‘messaging’ of war, of applying violence to another society, on first glance should be difficult within a democracy.² Its intention is almost antithetical to a democratic nation-state built on the peaceful social principles of freedom, individual rights, and social order, unless in the direst of emergencies when facing a war of national survival in which the fabric of their state is threatened by another, such as Britain against Germany in World War II.

Nevertheless, even extreme danger carries with it surprising caveats for democratic states that need to be mediated by powerful myths that possess remarkable longevity into the modern age. It is often forgotten that in the name of national survival, Britain developed extraordinarily barbaric methods to inflict damage on the out-of-uniform elements of its enemies. The ‘firestorm’ technique of strategic bombing, for example, killed civilian city dwellers in the most brutal way imaginable. As a method of mass destruction, it deliberately created temperatures of 1000 degrees Fahrenheit and superheated air travelling at 300 miles per hour (hurricane strength winds) within a city (Murray and Millett 2001, 308). It involved the application of state-of-the-art bomber technologies and scientific thinking to methodically, coldly, and unethically incinerate a city from the inside out. The first waves of bombers used bombs with a high explosive content in order to destroy buildings by exposing the wooden roof beams so that they would act as fuel for the gathering firestorm; other bombers dropped fragmentation bombs to kill firefighters who potentially could interfere in the process before another wave dropped incendiaries to build up the fires and overall temperature within the target zone. Once a certain temperature and combustion was reached, the firestorm became self-sustaining and took a life of its own, burning uncontrollably.

The main victims of attacking a city, then and now, are the very people who inhabit it: civilians in the form of the old, the very young, and their mothers/fathers (justified as targets as workers contributing to the war effort) who are either baked, incinerated, or suffocated to death once the firestorm unfolds. The Royal Air Force killed 40,000 people when they bombed Hamburg in this way in July 1943 (Overy 2010, 47). Seventy years ago precisely, the United States took this approach to warfare to another technological and ethical level by dropping two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Hiroshima bomb alone killed approximately 75,000 people instantly, reaching a final death toll of 200,000 people (DeGroot 2004) over a five-year period due to the long-term effects of radiation poisoning. The ‘very good’ war of World

War II as opposed to the ‘very bad’ war (Bond 2014, 1) of World War I involved killing millions of people with the largest batches occurring not on the battlefield, but in cities and major towns among the civilian populace. This unfortunate truth is often airbrushed out of the memorialisation of this particular war of survival for the United Kingdom that remains the most destructive global conflict to date in human history.

‘Mature’ democratic states such as the UK and the USA maintain their own social stability by means of peaceful enforcement institutions such as the police and the law, but also through the normative marginalisation and regulation of violence through sport (boxing, for example) within society via educational establishments and public information campaigns. This is not to claim that such states are a peaceful ideal, because their citizens are shot dead by police on a worryingly regular basis and unregulated violence does exist though criminal acts be it murder, aggravated assault, or simply fighting between males and females in competition or out of jealousy or revenge. Nevertheless, persuading democratic states to fight in the twenty-first century is no easy matter and requires a campaign of messaging/persuasion by decision-making elites that span political and social realms, including academia, often simultaneously. As Malešević notes, ‘most violent actions require intricate and sophisticated processes of collective motivation’ (2010, 130). In the past, ideology in the form of fascism, for example, provided such a vehicle, but in the post-ideological age with the end of the Cold War that some described as the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1992), other means are necessary.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF WAR

Beyond their ostensible peaceful social orientation, democratic states, like all collections of people, clans, and tribes, possess a specialised ‘warrior’ stratum in their societies known as the armed forces. In association with the possession of specialists in violence, these societies also continue to mythologise war across a variety of different mediums—from literature to cinema and videogames—which contributes, consciously or unconsciously, to a process of legitimisation. Superficially, books and films are just enthralling stories, narratives, or fantasies that memorialise or celebrate famous military encounters. From *Rambo* to *Black Hawk Down* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle of the Five Armies*, to name just a few contemporary examples, these representations of warfare from fiction to fact and fantasy carry with them, beyond the pure entertainment

value, certain dispatches about war that perpetuate and influence social perceptions and understandings. The first concerns the perpetual social need to hero-worship supreme warriors/superheroes who defeat large numbers of enemies, sustain massive wounds as if they were paper cuts, and have a propensity (the true test of combat) to close with the enemy and kill them with knives or even with their bare hands. *Rambo*, a Special Forces soldier, captures well this portrayal, and the hyper-masculine physique of the ever-youthful Sylvester Stallone has mythologised this image of the modern warrior. The reality is, originally *Rambo* was a work of fiction written by a Professor of English Literature in 1972 (Morrell 2006). From book to film ten years later, a physically well-endowed actor, a cinematic invention in the form of the oversized ‘survival’ knife (not in the book or associated with Special Forces) combined with a plotline taken from a bestseller turned *Rambo* into an extraordinarily popular genre that continues to enjoy massive international audiences.

Nevertheless, the battlefield is not *Rambo* or any other cinematic renditions that are seen in the contemporary West. Enemies do not generally die quietly, quickly or without the messy detritus that clean and intact organic bodies automatically produce when punctured. Heroes are not bulletproof and tend to be incapacitated/killed by just one round from a modern assault rifle. And the overarching sound of victory is not stirring credit music, but rather the agonising noise of the wounded screaming for help, their mothers, or simply mercy. Paul Fussell, a World War II combat veteran turned professor, who knew the face of war better than most, cites the poet Charles Sorley to capture what happens when people die in combat: ‘First man; then, when hit, animal, writhing and thrashing in articulate agony or making horrible snoring noises; then a “thing” [when dead]’ (Fussell 2013, 136, explanation added). It is rare to see such depictions of battlefield reality in modern movies, where orcs, goblins, clansmen, and bad guys die with routine brevity, remarkable stoicism, and without all-too-human qualities.

Interestingly, notwithstanding these popular depictions that have tremendous social appeal around the world, warriors have always been, even during the great conflagrations of the twentieth century, a minority occupation/profession in the modern age. The vast majority of people will thankfully never see, hear, or experience a battlefield in their lifetime, which appears to support Pinker’s general thesis of a decline of violence in human affairs (Pinker 2012, xix). This bald fact means that the preponderance of people are susceptible to manipulation/management of perceptions about

the modern battlefield or war in general, because few have or will have first-hand experience of it. Emulating Barthes' 'message' idea (2013, 218), the mythology of war in the West through various mediums communicates an acceptable/plausible reality that wittingly or unwittingly supports legitimatisation strategies for the use of force in international relations.

The Antiseptic Battlefield

In the Global War on Terror (GWOT), from 2001 to the present day, the United States and its principal coalition partner, the United Kingdom, have been extremely active in terms of military operations in foreign countries, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, these nations committed military forces to invading both countries and sustaining garrisons without the initial consent of the original indigenous political administrations. There is a popular and long-standing notion that battlefields are isolated antiseptic places where armies battle against each other unencumbered by non-combatants and civilians. In previous centuries, this was true to a degree when kings and city-states organised large scale encounters in agreed places. This notion also survived into the early twentieth century when large armies faced each other across the Western Front in Europe divided by no man's land. It is largely forgotten that just behind the front lines, towns and villages existed that would eventually reclaim the valuable agricultural land and destroyed inhabitations located between the great hosts when the armistice was declared in 1918.

In the twenty-first century, the idea of the antiseptic battlefield, a place clean and free of civilians and non-combatants, has been replicated in its modern form in the political message of regime change, that somehow coalition forces were just fighting undesirable regimes, not their people, in order to liberate the latter. In reality, the 'Freedom Wars', Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, have been fought within the social landscapes of these nations. The putative separation of people from regimes has been a myth: the applied social violence was fought through and across villages, towns, and cities in Afghanistan and Iraq with inevitable wider effects, or what the military describes euphemistically as 'collateral damage', the unintended killing/wounding of civilians.

The term 'collateral damage' is a powerful mediating myth that communicates a lack of intent to harm and therefore in some way absolves or redirects guilt towards the victim. A corollary narrative that keeps popping

up in explanations (formal and informal) with regard to civilians deaths is the phenomenon of ‘human shields’ that somehow people, especially women, voluntarily throw themselves in front of their menfolk and so combatants had no choice but to shoot them. From *Black Hawk Down* to the film portrayal of the death of Osama Bin Laden in *Zero Dark Thirty*, these narratives are thrown out akin to perceptual smoke grenades to explain why ‘civilians’ were killed in particular operations. Yet the evidence for such incidents is highly contestable and against human nature. Most non-combatants in a combat situation or fire fight, as the military describes it in dehumanised terms, usually throw themselves to the ground, hide, or try to get away. This suggests that the notion of human shields as with collateral damage is a myth that mitigates the horror of accidental and unlawful killing of non-combatants to protect the legitimatisation of a particular military action. Otherwise, it would potentially carry grave legal consequences for all those involved, from the political leadership that authorised it to the soldiers whose conduct led to the deaths.

Since the 1990s, scholars in the field of international relations have highlighted a disturbing trend manifest in so-called new wars: the ratio of military dead to civilians has been disproportionately shifting away in terms of preponderance from the former to the latter (Kaldor 2012). The original claim was that ‘the ratio of civilian to military casualties was 20 % at the turn of the last century, around 50 % in World War II and exactly reversed at 80 % in the 1990s’ (ibid). These figures are contested, but nevertheless evidence from the Global War on Terror would suggest civilians make up in a disproportionate sense the largest number of deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq. A snapshot of military and civilian deaths in the GWOT on 31 December 2011 reveals: Afghanistan (coalition military dead=2846; Afghan civilian dead=11,221) and Iraq (coalition military dead=4802; Iraqi civilian dead=104,500–114,166). These statistics (Finlan 2013) indicate the ratio of civilian dead to coalition military forces killed running at 75 % in Afghanistan and 95–96 % in Iraq—which roughly correlates and exceeds, in the case of Iraq, Kaldor’s original claim.

The reasons why so many civilians have been killed in these conflicts are manifold, but to a significant degree, the accidental killing of people was inevitable in view of the fact that the ‘battlefield’ in these modern wars fits Rupert Smith’s new paradigm of ‘war amongst the people’ (Smith 2006). Smith argues elegantly that ‘war as cognitively known to most non-combatants, war as battle in a field between men and machinery, war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs: such

war no longer exists' (ibid). His thesis about 'war amongst the people' is quite simple: 'it is the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields—all the people, anywhere—are the battlefield' (ibid). The invasion and occupation (whether technically correct or not as a term) of Afghanistan and Iraq by predominantly US/UK forces and smaller coalition partners, with subsequent outbreaks of major insurgencies in those countries, found civilians living within the contested fighting space. Casualties were unavoidable, due if nothing else, to the prominence and proliferation of assault rifles and machine guns as the most numerous technology of violence in these theatres of operation.

It is an accepted truism that killing enemy combatants with modern personal weapons demands vast quantities of bullets to be expended in order to achieve just a single confirmed kill. During the American Civil War in the nineteenth century, some estimates suggested that 'one round in 500 ever hit anyone' (Guelzo 2013, 38). Since that period of time, rifles have become fully automatic, more accurate, and more deadly, and a number of staggering revelations have emerged quietly and often unnoticed in the Global War on Terror. The first is that the armed forces of the United States between 2002 and 2005 expended six billion bullets, which amounts to, according to one analysis, 300,000 bullets expended per insurgent kill (Buncombe 2005). This raises the question of what happened to all the bullets that missed their intended targets, especially in view of the fact that these engagements will have occurred within the population landscape of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In 2015, a British national newspaper by means of a Freedom of Information request revealed that the British Army in just one province of Afghanistan (Helmand) fired 46 million rounds of ammunition in total against the Taliban (Hughes 2015). In the context that only 30 million people live in Afghanistan, it is clear that the intervention of foreign forces has led to an exponential rise in the number of bullets (measured in multiples of millions per year) flying around these countries with the vast majority of them missing their intended targets. The British expenditure alone in just one province of Afghanistan represents more than one bullet for every inhabitant in the entire country. Logic and simple physics suggest that the vast quantities of expended bullets must have generated significant unintended, but not unforeseen, effects in a impoverished social landscape where people cannot afford to abandon homes, properties, and livestock due to the absence of modern insurance safety nets that the advanced nation-states in the West take for granted. Equally, if such quantities of

ammunition were expended in towns, cities, and villages in the USA and the UK, then the howls of outrage and concern would reach a rapid crescendo; yet in the Global War on Terror, these figures barely cause a ripple within the communities who are sponsoring these military actions.

Precision Killing

The idea of war in the West, even in the twenty-first century, is overshadowed by two images: World War II and the Vietnam War. The unifying element between both wars, often buried by mediating myths, is the horrifying amount of destruction caused by the blunt application of air power. In the last year of World War II, the Allies dropped ‘1.18 million tons of bombs on Germany and German-occupied Europe, or 83 percent of the tonnage dropped throughout the war’ (Overy 2010, 48). This caused the deaths of approximately 410,000 German civilians, 60–70,000 foreigners (labourers, prisoners and prisoners of war), 60,000 Italian civilians and 60–70,000 French civilians (Overy 2010, 43). In Japan, USA air power killed 900,000 civilians (Pape 1996, 129), a significant proportion of which were burned to death in an ‘incendiary campaign’ (Muller 2010, 73) that used the Japanese predilection for wooden construction in their towns and cities as a means to ‘burn out’ vast swathes of inhabited areas. In the Vietnam War, the United States managed to drop eight million tons of bombs (Thompson 2010, 107) in what was technically a ‘limited war’, which was many times the amount dropped on Germany and Japan in World War II. By the last decade of the twentieth century, strategic bombing (the cause of the bulk of the major visible destruction in World War II and the Vietnam War) had a deservedly poor reputation tinged with atrocity as a means of force that had somehow strayed outside the boundaries of legitimate violence. This reputation, however, was rescued by the myth of precision killing that was born out of a perception of strategic bombing in the Gulf War of 1991.

Operation Desert Storm was in many ways a ‘poster’ of a model form of warfare that deeply suited the West. It was mercifully short (it lasted just over five weeks), against a recognised ‘bad man’ of international politics in the form of Saddam Hussein (a staunch ally of the West until the Gulf crisis in 1990), and placed an emphasis on air power, as the ground campaign only lasted 100 hours (Olsen 2010, 177) after five weeks of strategic bombing. The USA-led coalition dropped just 90,000 tons of munitions

on Iraqi targets and the enduring image of the heavily media-controlled campaign was of television or laser-guided munitions (so-called precision-guided munitions or PGMs) hitting their targets, usually buildings with no sign of human occupation, with remarkable accuracy. What is generally not known is that the numbers of PGMs used in the Gulf War of 1991 amounted to just 8 % of the total munitions dropped in the fighting. So while the dominant imagery of war is one of precision killing, the reality was quite different, with a liberal use of B-52 bombers carpet-bombing Iraqi positions in Kuwait and also a significant use of cluster bombs (Finlan 2003). Nevertheless, it was the Gulf War of 1991 that created the myth of precision killing that has dominated and mediated narratives about strategic bombing throughout the Global War on Terror.

The notion of precision killing since the end of the Gulf War has appeared to reach new levels with the widespread introduction of satellite-guided munitions that were first used in the Kosovo campaign in 1999. These technologies that harness the power of global positioning satellites or GPS (that are very similar to the ‘sat nav’ systems in cars today) enable older types of bombs, often referred to as ‘dumb’, to enjoy a quantum leap forward in terms of accuracy when fitted with the relatively cheap GPS ‘nose and tail’ kit. Ostensibly, they offer a comforting narrative to air forces (and the political administrations that use them) that air power is now a precision instrument, akin to a scalpel, instead of a crude mallet to apply force from the air. In World War II, it took roughly 100 aircraft to destroy a target due to the accuracy shortcomings of unguided bombs (Finlan 2003); now a single aircraft can do it instead. This claim is true with regard to expensive laser-guided bombs that possess pinpoint accuracy, but at a price for the aircraft: the target has to be continuously ‘painted’ by a laser beam either from a specially designed/equipped aircraft or a buddy aircraft flying near the target or from soldiers on the ground. Both means involve a degree of vulnerability for the aircraft/pilots loitering over a defended target or for soldiers on the ground located in enemy territory. Additionally, pinpoint accuracy only occurs, if the weapon system works perfectly, without human error or interference with the laser beam by the simplest of environmental conditions such as dust (Singer 2010, 57).

In contrast, satellite-guided weapons can be dropped from any type of aircraft, and they are ‘fire and forget’: in other words, aircraft do not have to loiter or rely on ground troops. The myth enveloping satellite-guided munitions, whose relative cheapness in comparison to laser-guided

systems and ease of use has made them the weapon of choice in strategic bombing campaigns, is that accuracy is relative: they are more accurate than unguided weapons, but their accuracy is not pinpoint. Just like ‘sat nav’ systems in domestic cars, the first generation (used widely in the GWOT) had an accuracy of three to nine meters and, as this generation of bombs called Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) were 2000lb bombs (a very powerful explosive yield), the scope for collateral damage in built-up areas was extremely high. In Operation Enduring Freedom, ‘nearly 60 percent’ of all the bombs dropped were precision-guided (Lambeth 2010, 270). A final caveat with these technologies that bedevils domestic car drivers as well: the links with the satellites are relatively weak, can be subject to interruptions, jamming, or simple mechanical failure. Precision-guided munitions appear to offer a perceptual salve to the destructive capacity of air power, but its effects are distinctly limited and mask the limitations that remain with the alluring air-power technology that has always promised more than it could deliver, from World War I to the present day.

Killer Applications: The Rise of the Drone

The hallmark of warfare in the twenty-first century in the West is encapsulated in the emergence of what Peter Singer describes as the ‘Killer App’, a technology term for ‘new products that change the rules of the game’ (Singer 2010, 29). These technologies span land-based battlefield robots and aerial drones. It is the latter category that has generated the most profound impact in the Global War on Terror and has perpetuated the myth of precision strike or the ability to attack insurgents at will, anywhere in the world, from the air without cost to friendly human life. The Predator drone is perhaps the best known of these technologies. It is an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that can loiter over a specific area for twenty-four hours and is flown by a pilot often located thousands of miles away from the theatre of operations in the United States or the United Kingdom by means of satellite relays. Drones are nothing new in warfare, but the GWOT witnessed the birth of armed drones for use in combat. The original Predator drone could carry two laser-guided Hellfire anti-tank missiles, but its successor, the aptly named Reaper drone, is much bigger and more powerful, with the ability to carry four Hellfire missiles and two 500lb GBU-12 laser-guided bombs (RAF website). The significance of this technology is that

it offers countries that possess it the ability to operate in hostile environments (often in breach of their territorial sovereignty), such as in Pakistan, and engage suspected insurgents without risk to a pilot. It is arguably the most seductive form of warfare on offer to political administrations and societies in the West: a risk-free force option that offers pinpoint accuracy.

Nevertheless, the notion of cost-free warfare is another potent myth. The problems with this technology are manifold. Having an eagle-eye view of the battlefield at 50,000 feet is just that, a top-down panoramic perspective that lacks a human 'ground'-based perspective. As such, the scope for error is high. Equally, the precision kill technologies are designed to kill large objects such as tanks, rather than human-size targets. In other words, the ability to calibrate the amount of 'collateral damage' by virtue of the weapons used is very narrow. Recent reports suggest that attempts to kill forty-one specific targets using drone technologies led to the deaths of 1147 people (Ackerman 2014). The notion of 'targeted killing' using drone technologies is a powerful mediating myth that obscures the actual reality involving this technology: far more innocent people are killed than the intended targets. Nevertheless, this myth remains influential because drones offer the fastest and most risk-free military option for casualty-sensitive political administrations in the West, which feel they must do or be seen to do something in response to a specific threat. Drone technologies superficially seem to offer the holy grail of modern warfare: cheaper intervention/military force options that provide a military solution with few body bags and without any geographical boundary issues, and with enough drones, the ability for 24/7 air coverage over a particular territory. It is a revolutionary development and one that with future automation (the drone taking the kill decisions) will see humans being killed by machines: a potentially dark military age in human affairs that turns the ability to wage warfare into a purely digital activity.

CONCLUSION

Warfare remains horrific, but in the twenty-first century in the West, societies have developed certain messages or myths to negotiate and facilitate its practice. The Global War on Terror has been a remarkable series of interwoven conflicts that have ostensibly transcended ghosts of past wars such as the Vietnam War and its constraining legacy of young men cut

down in their prime and transported back home in body bags though the deliberate manipulation of stain-resistant myths. People in Britain look back to World War I and the censorship regime put in place by the government to mask the deaths of almost one million soldiers from the British Empire largely on the Western Front with incredulity. Yet the major wars of the early twenty-first century have witnessed a remarkable degree of cooperative self-censorship through the media, political messaging, academic writing, and the anodyne language of warfare put out by the military institutions conducting the wars. The combined effect, wittingly or unwittingly, has been the marginalisation of the human costs in Afghanistan and Iraq of the military interventions for the indigenous people of those countries.

Myths have played a very important part in this process of social delusion. The idea that the fighting has occurred within some framework of an antiseptic battlefield, in which regime forces have been separated hermetically from the populace, has been foundationally undermined by the disproportionate level of casualties amongst civilians and the sheer volume of bullets expended. The myth of precision killing has masked the return to favour of strategic bombing and air power in general, but the limitations of these technologies witnessed in the unhelpful failure of common GPS navigation aids in vehicles in Washington and London on a daily basis belies the veracity of these inflated claims in combat. 'Targeted killing' through the emergence of killer apps such as the Predator drone and its successors is without question the most persistent and pernicious myth. How pilots based in the United States and the United Kingdom can fly drones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria and kill insurgents/terrorists with absolute precision with no costs to innocents with weapons designed to destroy tanks and houses defies any form of logic.

The use of armed drones to conduct illegal operations that infringe on the sovereign territory/airspace of nation states is not warfare per se but rather the twenty-first century equivalent of gunboat diplomacy that found favour with colonial powers in the nineteenth century in order to project global power to cower or subjugate less advanced nations/tribes with more powerful technology. Unfortunately, such is the mediating power of the 'target killing' myth that such parallels and lessons of unacceptable colonial/imperial practices of the past are lost in technology.

NOTES

1. On Barthes's myth concept, cf. also Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2, and Müller and Sondermann, Chap. 13.
2. See also Millar, Chap. 9, on the mutually implicated myths of the democratic control of the armed forces and militarism.

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The Powerful Myth of the International Community and the Imperative to Build States

Katarzyna Kaczmarzka

The language of public debate on international issues is filled with appeals to and invocations of the international community.¹ Even though the term is in ubiquitous use, this pervasiveness has not rendered it devalued. On the contrary, not only has it become an idea of high currency, but more and more power is accorded to it. The international community is able to *organise* humanitarian action, *end* suffering, *denounce* violence, and even *build* states. According to this narrative, it acts for the sake of order, economic development, and poverty reduction. We may thus infer that the international community not only has agency but is, in fact, exceptionally powerful. Yet despite the international community being presented as possessing agency, obligations, and power, contemporary International Relations literature generally stops short of discussing the role and functions the idea acquires through its discursive uses. Surely, the potency of the international community is not sustained by any concrete material factor, such as nuclear weapons. Its authority rather stems from the usage

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of this special term and values attached to it. Yet since ideas have real-life consequences, questioning the international community becomes a task of perennial importance.

This chapter engages with the uses of the idea of international community in policy discourse produced in the area of development cooperation, with particular focus on international statebuilding. I argue that for policy practitioners the idea of international community has become a narrative that not simply helps make sense of experience but provides significance, inspires people, and guides action. The way the idea of international community is used and produced through discourse allows claiming that it performs functions ascribed by literature to political myths. The myth of international community motivates actors in their statebuilding endeavour, sanctions a particular model of the state, and allows for presenting statebuilding as necessary and good rather than interventionist. Moreover, actors undertake particular activities on the assumption that societal elements do exist between them. Under such conditions, statebuilding becomes not only the natural order of things but also the 'glue' binding elements of the imagined international community together.

I follow Chiara Bottici's exploration of political myths. Rather than approaching political myth as an object, Bottici proposes a relational and phenomenological approach to myths, placing emphasis on social processes accompanying their production and influencing their popularity. A myth, according to this approach, is best described as a 'process of continual work that responds to a perpetually changing need for significance' (Bottici 2007: 132). The narrative dimension is key to myths, as it allows reducing the complexity of social life, thus facilitating comprehension. Political myths are not any kind of narrative; they are specific in that they are believed to be true or acted upon as if they were true. Political myths perform a number of functions. They provide a sense of cohesiveness, define common purpose, and grant stimulus for action. In that way, political myths play an important role in shaping collective identity (Bottici 2007).

The chapter presents the results of a textual and discourse analysis of policy documents, speeches, and interviews, with special focus on discourse produced by national and international organisations and practitioners in the field of statebuilding. It approaches talk and text as social action and thereby language as constructive and performative (Johnstone 2001; Neumann 2008; Willig 2008). Policy documents selected for the purpose of this study were those authored by key actors or agenda-setters

in development cooperation. Arguments are illustrated with examples of statebuilding practices in Central Asia, in particular, in Kyrgyzstan, where fieldwork took place.

The chapter develops its argument in several steps. Opening with a brief overview of literature engaging with the idea of international community, it proceeds with the analysis of discursive uses of the idea in the political practice of development cooperation, with special reference to statebuilding. It illustrates how the idea of international community is subject to reification, first, as an international arrangement existing ‘out there’, and second, as an entity in possession of agency. The international community is agential when it is equated with international aid donors, but discourse produced by donors at the same time upholds the vision of a universal international community, which should be valued and protected.² Reification and agentification are components of the continual ‘work on’ a common narrative through which statebuilding practitioners provide significance to their specific political conditions. The final part of the chapter summarizes the features and workings of the international community as a political myth.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS STUDIED

Scholars usually approach the international community as a rhetorical and legitimising device (Blieseemann de Guevara and Kühn 2011; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005; Ellis 2009). Yet the international community has also been presented as ‘a desirable end goal which should be achieved for global governance to be effective’ and as ‘a community of morals, ethics, and common identities’ (Ellis 2009: 5). Some have been perplexed by the potential moral agency of the international community (Erskine 2003; Orford 1999: 692). Chris Brown asks whether the international community is ‘an unhelpful fiction’ or, given the continuous use of the term, whether one could think of an agency-bearing collective body of states capable of undertaking action on behalf of ‘common good’. He hesitantly concludes that ‘it is unlikely that this (international community) is simply an illusion’ but suggests that those who take an interest in the issue should stride away from the international community, which could be equated with a ‘rhetorical ploy’ and look straight towards international society, the master concept of the English School, in order to gain ‘intellectual substance’ (Brown 2003: 52–53).

Some academics argue that the international community may be rhetoric, practice, and a specific actor group (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2009: 74). Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn rightly suggest we should be approaching ‘the international community’ in the various contexts in which it is used by political actors. Such a research stance allows the exploration of changing images and protagonists of ‘the international community’ in localised contexts such as the intervention in Afghanistan or the manipulations of the image of the international community by local elites in the Balkans (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2009). In 2002, the journal *Foreign Policy* dedicated a forum to the question, ‘What is the international community?’, which indeed exposed a variety of interpretations, ranging from idealised—‘a shared vision for a better world’—to highly critical—‘a dangerous reference point for the naïve’ (*Foreign Policy* 2002).

The flaw shared by most of the interpretations, however, is that they approach the problem too literally. *Foreign Policy*, formulating the question in terms of ‘what is?’, proceeds from a standpoint assuming there can be a satisfactory answer given to the query. Such a question resembles a positivist search aspiring to discover and describe something existing in the *real* world to the disregard of potential strengths of reflexivist methodology in approaching this problem. Such framing is almost mechanically conducive to reification of what might have more value if approached as an *idea*. On the other side of the spectrum, arguments for the contextualization of the international community, though commendable, run the risk of removing one important aspect of discursive uses of the international community: the pretence of portraying the international in holistic and universal terms. Localisation, proposed by Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, does not allow for engagement with consequences of according global reach and universal validity to the international community. A cursory glance at statebuilding policy documents reveals, however, that these are important features the international community acquires in practitioners’ discourse.

IDEAS IN ACTION: THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND INTERNATIONAL STATEBUILDING

‘The international community’ is used profusely in policy discourse. Development cooperation and particularly statebuilding stand out as policy areas that resort to the term most eagerly. Indeed, it would be difficult

to come across a document in the area of development cooperation that would stop short of employing it. Yet rarely does the term get explained or engaged with in a more comprehensive way. Practitioners admit that the concept is in wide use but there is little reflection on its meaning, significance, or the message it conveys: ‘We operate with this term a lot in UN but maybe it is the first time I am actually thinking what international community is.’³

The document alluded to in most development and statebuilding policy texts, and one which for that very reason may be taken as the foundation for practical engagement in statebuilding, is the UN Millennium Declaration. Contrary to what might be expected, the declaration does not equate the international community with the United Nations. The document presents the international community as a separate being, something out there to which one can pledge and which can be motivated or urged to take action. There is no exploitation of the phrase. The international community is invoked only once and with regard to a specific issue of small island states (UNGA 2000: point III/17). Discourse produced by states and organisations engaged in development cooperation, however, employs the term international community as though the international community were the Millennium Declaration’s principal author. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), one of the most important UN aid agencies, states: ‘This issue is studied in the context of UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have been approved by the international community and which call for poverty reduction’ (UNDP 2010: 6). A similar line is taken by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which explains the MDGs as ‘a set of development targets agreed by the international community’ (IMF 2014). Various national aid agencies interpret the MDGs as the international community’s commitments (e.g. Poland 2010).

The Millennium Development Goals, which range from halving extreme poverty to securing universal primary education, have worked as the key guidance in various development cooperation activities. What critical discourse analysis makes us reconsider, however, is not necessarily the content of these goals but the assumption behind the MDGs. Positing that one may set global millennial targets is an illustration of how the world is imagined as a community capable of reaching agreement on and working towards meeting the goals by a specific date of 2015. Despite the widely admitted fact that the goals have not been met by the adopted

deadline, the discourse changed little. UNDP Administrator Helen Clark stated with regard to the post-2015 MDGs agenda that ‘the international community must set sights higher and leave no one behind’ (UNDP 2014). The OECD adopted a similar stance, first presenting the MDGs as targets adopted by the international community and then urging this international community to work faster:

In the target year for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community will have to accelerate its efforts to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs [...] The adoption of the post-2015 agenda by the international community will be an important driver in the OECD’s work on sustainable development for the next decade and beyond.⁴

Apart from the Millennium Declaration and MDGs, World Development Reports (WDRs), influential yearly publications produced by the World Bank, have a profound impact on policies of development and statebuilding. The very title of the series—*World Development Report*—is significant from a discourse analysis perspective, as it reveals the pretence of the document authors. The title states that the publication is reporting development in the world. It is thus implicit that there is *a world* that *develops*; the process is amenable to knowing and lends itself to be reported on. Such picture of the world’s development can be compiled by a bank which has a name no other than the *World Bank*. It is a clear discursive expression of power to name what the world is, to place it on a developmental trajectory, and to take upon oneself to describe this trajectory, selecting its most important aspects to be reported yearly. Two particular editions—the 1997 and 2011 WDRs—merit closer consideration. The 1997 document is regarded a paradigm shifter in international statebuilding, whereas the 2011 version makes some very explicit claims regarding the international community.

The 1997 imprint was devoted to the role and effectiveness of the state. By its title alone, *The state in a changing world*, it heralded significant shifts in how the World Bank perceived the role of the state in development. At the same time, the 1997 report constitutes a perfect illustration of the discursive construction of the ‘international’ in terms of the ‘international community.’ The report presents development as an explicit and dominant value for this international community and subordinates the state

to its service. The report redefines the state's responsibilities—focusing them around 'facilitating' world development. Among such fundamental tasks of the state are establishing a foundation of law, maintaining a non-distortionary policy environment, investing in basic social services and infrastructure, and protecting the environment (World Bank 1997: 4).

A particular vision of the international community becomes even more explicit in the report's discussion of international collective action. The goal of such action is to provide 'international public goods' and to prevent fragmentation of the 'community of nations' (World Bank 1997: 132). Such a framing is based on the conceptualization of the international as a community linked by certain values and composed of specifically organised states with well-defined functions.

International Community Reified

The way policy discourse approaches the state and state weakness contributes to the reification of the idea of an international community. Viewing the world in terms of a community of states allows for the identification of state 'fragility' as a problem. State fragility becomes a mode through which the international community is discursively constructed and reproduced. A fragile state is constructed as a significant 'other', not fitting and undermining the whole. Therefore, in order to maintain the community, it becomes indispensable to 'measure the state' and its capabilities (World Bank 1997: 34). As a result, the World Bank report relies on and constructs a purportedly universal reference point against which states can be assessed. Those who do not fit should undertake the necessary transformation and readjustment. This logic embeds the state in a particular vision of the international and presents weak states as unable to participate in 'global collective action' (World Bank 1997: 12). This image of the international community received a tangible form in the WDR 2011:

Regional institutions can bridge the distance between universal norms and local customs. Those customs or practices must conform, in substance, to the core international principles from which the international community derives its cohesion. Otherwise cultural diversity can simply override, and undermine, the international framework (World Bank 2011: 39).

State weakness or fragility as major threats to the reified international community is a narrative present in a wide variety of policy documents

(e.g. European Commission 2007). The very starting point for international statebuilding policies is the assumption that a part, i.e. a weak state, does not fit some sort of imagined whole and as such threatens the stability of this whole and undermines international security. Only the idea of the whole allows for depicting certain parts as not fitting, fragile, weak, and threatening. The next step is knowledge production about that problem, a thorough exposition of the components of the right model and the elaboration of policies aimed at bringing this model into life in different parts of the world. The accompanying assumption is that one can ‘deal with’ states and thereby resolve problems crucial for the international community.⁵

The objectification of state weakness remains a crucial element of this approach. States become the ‘object’ of statebuilding, they are analysed and meant to be cured. States are labelled as ‘in transition’ (EBRD 2013), which stipulates there is a goal for them to reach, a form of being they are transiting towards. Some of them are expected to ‘catch up’, to ‘converge’, particularly if they are ‘stuck’ or fail to ‘match the standards’ of more advanced economies. One simply needs to tackle, to deal with, this ‘weakest segment’ of the international community:

Least developed countries (LDCs) are considered to be the “poorest and weakest segment” within the international community, as their level of development substantially trails other categories of countries, and they have failed to emerge from poverty (UNGC et al. 2011: 11).

Ranking states is the order of the day, and derogatory language is omnipresent.⁶ A state becomes an object to be judged, classified, and ameliorated. Denigration seems justified if the intention is to ‘help’ and if the driving force of this process is ‘development’ or ‘statebuilding’. In defining what a fragile state is, mathematical and biological metaphors permeate discourse. Different institutions produce classifications and rankings which are to help determine the level of a state’s *fitness*. USAID, the US government agency working in the area of development cooperation, defines fragility as the ‘extent to which state-society relations fail to *produce outcomes* considered effective and legitimate, with effectiveness and legitimacy being equal parts of the *equation*’ (Lindborg 2014, italics added). There is an implicit assumption that states, members of the international community, need to be manageable.

The classificatory language is used side by side with highly rationalised discourse that makes frequent recourse to knowledge, expertise, and research. The World Bank presents its role as ‘one of the world’s largest sources of funding and *knowledge* for transition and developing countries’.⁷ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) states that ‘sectors and themes (of ADB’s) assistance programme are selected based on the results of diagnostic studies’ (ADB 2013). The European Union declares its ‘readiness to share its *expertise*’ concerning democratic reforms (European Union 2013, italics added). The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development claims: ‘This year’s Transition Report *explains why* some countries may be ‘stuck’ in traps with little or no reform’ (EBRD 2013, italics added).

Statistical data and indices are believed to allow for making informed decisions and guiding policy. The measures of statehood include Fragile States Index, Democracy Index, and ‘Freedom in the world’. Fragile State Index, an annual ranking of 177 countries across twelve indicators, is compiled by the Fund for Peace, a non-profit research and educational organisation funded partly by the American government. Democracy Index is compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit and measures the state of democracy in 167 countries. ‘Freedom in the world’ is produced by the USA-based Freedom House and it is often taken to be the measure of democracy.⁸

The ‘New Deal’ for statebuilding, proposed among donor states in 2011, follows the measurement trend closely:

By September 2012, a set of indicators for each goal will have been developed by fragile states and international partners, which will allow us to track progress closely at the global and country levels. These will allow us to measure objectively, as well as gauging people’s views on the results achieved.⁹

This process of assessment and ranking has become ubiquitous. In order to illustrate it in greater detail, I will refer to Kyrgyzstan. The 2015 Fragile States Index classified Kyrgyzstan under the label ‘high warning’.¹⁰ The USA evaluates Kyrgyzstan in terms of human rights (US Department of State 2012a), religious freedom (US Department of State 2012b), trafficking in persons (US Department of State 2013), and drug trafficking (US Department of State 2008). The discourse makes frequent recourse to the Millennium Development Goals and the annually published

Progress Report on the achievement of these Goals. For instance, the Asian Development Bank states:

The 2011 Millennium Development Goal progress report found that the Kyrgyz Republic had reached *benchmarks* for several *indicators*, including the reduction of extreme poverty, which fell rapidly up to 2008. But it is likely to fall short of *targets* on maternal and child mortality; gender equality; combating HIV/AIDS; and improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation (ADB 2013: 2, italics added).

Country-specific knowledge production and dissemination, usually in the form of country analyses or country backgrounds, accompany policy discourse. For example, a *Country Analysis* constitutes one of the annexes to the *European Community Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia* for the period 2007–2013. A *Country Background* is the first part of the *2013–2017 Country Partnership Strategy* for Kyrgyzstan (ADB 2013).

In parallel with the presentation of particular states as weak and in need of adjustments develops the assumption of the imperative to help. Specific actors take upon themselves the task of building other states. This, in turn, allows them to construct themselves as representatives of the international community. The discourse of the international community constructs and reproduces the *agential international community*.

The Agential International Community

A significant part of statebuilding discourse equates the international community only with a particular group of states, usually termed ‘donors’. This group consists of democratic capitalist states and includes various inter- and non-governmental bodies, mostly financed by these states. The donor-focused understanding of the international community is reproduced in a number of ways in written documents,¹¹ but it is also commonly shared by practitioners working in the area of statebuilding.¹² States such as China or Russia only rarely get mentioned as members of the international community, which is the result of an almost immediate linking of this community to a set of liberal values.¹³

Several features of and values accorded to the agential international community can be read out of policy discourse. Texts usually convey the message that ‘something needs to be done’ or that action is immediately

required. Since it is not only appropriate and responsible, but mandatory, to take action, the agential international community is presented as ready and willing to help. Activities it undertakes are for a good cause, which makes this international community an intrinsically positive *entity*.

The international community acts in defence or in the name of laudable values. ‘In the service of democracy, peace and development’ is the Hanns Seidel Foundation’s motto, which the foundation applies to its work abroad.¹⁴ ‘Happiness for all’, the motto of KOICA, the South Korean aid agency, is accompanied with commendable slogans such as ‘Making a better world together’.¹⁵ The concept of the international community is usually used with affirmative nouns like peace and affirmative active verbs like peacebuilding, which all construct the international community as a helpful entity worthy of trust. Commonplace usage of words such as partner, commitment, and cooperation presents the international community as highly engaged and caring:

We strongly believe that working together with other donors is key for the success of the New Deal in order to reduce the burden on our partner countries. We would like to invite all donors to partner us in building staff skills jointly, holding training, and team building so as to be more effective and coordinated in supporting the partner country’s efforts. At the same time, EU is looking forward to contributing to developing a post-2015 framework with the objective of ensuring a decent life for all—ending the poverty and giving the world a sustainable future, as spelled out in the recent Communication of the European Commission (European Commission 2013).

The international community as a representation of the global whole and the agential international community are interwoven. As a representation of the international realm, the international community is valuable as it encompasses the notion of global security, order, and prosperity. The agential international community is indispensable for preserving this global international community.

Statebuilding is portrayed as an activity undertaken in the name of the international community, and it relies on a particular understanding, description, and, ultimately, reification of this community. The need for statebuilding arises from what the international community is considered to be and the activity that is carried out by those claiming to represent it (the agential international community). The reified idea of the interna-

tional community allows for the discursive construction and legitimation of a particular state-member—the right kind of state. This paves the way for devising and implementing policies directed at the attainment of this model state. The work of statebuilding discourse, however, does not stop at reification and, as the next section intends to show, takes on much broader functions.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS A POLITICAL MYTH

Discussing ideas via the concept of myth has a long pedigree (cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2). It is relatively unproblematic for Western academia to think of ideologies as myths, especially if these are ideologies of the Soviet or another non-Western ‘other’. John H. Kautsky interpreted communism as a myth that, since it was believed in, could condition behaviour. Guided and inspired by such a myth, individuals would behave differently in comparison with their behaviour in the absence of the myth. Hence a myth, argued Kautsky, should be treated as in possession of real behavioural consequences (Kautsky 1968: 121–123). Since Kautsky’s writings, political theory has advanced the interpretation of political myth. It has been argued that myths, rather than dismissed as false, should be treated as components of modern political life. Their power has been exposed many times, the most outstanding examples including, but not limited to, two European totalitarianisms (Bottici 2007: 151).

In linking the insights on political myths with practices of statebuilding and the discourse of international community, which accompanies and structures them, it is crucial to explain what turns a narrative of international community into a political myth. Since a political myth depends neither on a narrative’s specific content nor exclusively on its claim to truth, the key characteristics are that it produces significance for a given group and addresses political conditions in which this group finds itself. It is not just the production of the myth but also its reception and reproduction that constitute the ‘work on’ a political myth. All social activities and practices, not solely discourse, can become the vehicle for the work on myth (Bottici and Challand 2006: 320–26). In that sense, statebuilding is a combination of various practices reinforcing the myth of international community. Conversely, the practice of statebuilding is informed and reinforced by the myth of international community. The international community, as a political myth, normalises a particular state model as the only conceivable option and international statebuilding as a natural and

desirable political practice leading to the preservation of the international community (cf. Goetze, Chap. 7).

Another important element transforming a narrative into a political myth is what Bottici refers to as ‘aesthetic translation’. Myths operate with icons, subtle associations of images and symbols that only allude to the given narrative (Bottici and Challand 2006: 325). The international community finds its expression in discursive elements other than official documents. The political development and statebuilding agenda is accompanied by symbols such as the UN dove, the USAID helping hands, or the Polish aid smiling face, to give just a few examples of the logos of various aid agencies. These graphic emblems help visualise the agenda. Through them the international community is made intelligible in a specific way, for these symbols are designed to create positive associations. Symbolic representations of the international community contribute to its reification, thereby perpetuating the work on myth.

The most paradoxical aspect, and one that the mythographical approach allows illuminating, is that aid activities are not necessarily focussed exclusively on states such as Kyrgyzstan. Statebuilding policies and the accompanying discourse of international community allow for maintaining actors’ identity and/or perception of themselves as cooperating, caring, and responsible. The political myth of the international community gives purpose, becoming the tangible goal and the result of cooperation. The enlightened project of helping those in need keeps actors engaged. Thus statebuilding turns into an exercise in *bonding* between highly developed states as much as it is an activity of *helping* other states. The *raison d’être* of the agential international community is predicated upon its image of a purposive entity, acting for the benefit of the imagined universal international community. This group of actors sees and presents its deeds as acting in a necessarily ameliorative manner. Helping, building, and developing are all elements of identity enabled and reinforced by the myth of the international community. Despite arguments that the work of a political myth under contemporary conditions is potentially global (Bottici 2007: 202), the international community functions as a myth predominantly among a particular set of actors, i.e. those implementing international statebuilding policies. For them, statebuilding becomes an exercise in bonding between the more developed states, just as much as it is a policy towards ‘fragile’ states.

Among broader audiences, particularly among governments and societies of states that subscribe to liberal values, lean towards cosmopolitan ideals, and tend to share a self-image of being guided by the humanitarian

feeling of responsibility, the actual existence of the international community may have become a lens through which the contemporary world is experienced. To this audience, the myth of the international community not only conveys the message of what is right but also answers and fulfils popular expectations of what is right and reserves responsibility to act for the agential international community. The political myth of the international community is reassuring and gives a promise of making intelligible what is currently different and odd. It allows for addressing the perennial call that ‘something must be done’ in the face of suffering on a large scale and caters to the imperative of ‘saving strangers’ (Wheeler 2000). It also perpetuates the feeling of righteousness among those who do the helping.

Fused with ideas of progress and benevolence, the myth of the international community feeds on the rhetoric of responsibilities and obligations towards the reified international community members. Purpose is very important for the myth of the international community. To sustain the notion of a community, there is a need for a common and conscious purpose, which, in this case, is assistance in the achievement of development and/or progress. Having a purpose is good and uplifting. Purposiveness is the defining feature of the agential international community, since without an objective the myth risks losing its appeal. The objective of development, which can be pursued by the agential international community, is, naturally, a fleeting target and thus, ultimately, illusory. This, however, is an asset rather than a disadvantage. The fact that this goal is simultaneously never-ending and unattainable is perversely appealing. The purpose-driven culture motivated by the relentless desire for progress is reassured by the prospect of an everlasting goal (cf. Müller and Sondermann, Chap. 13).

This community is valued as good and as undertaking good deeds. The myth relies on and reinforces classifications, such as that there are two types of states—those developed and those developing—and that certain states have obligations towards others; they also have an interest with regard to a specifically constructed order, which is why they seek greater uniformisation to undermine possible challenges to this order.

CONCLUSIONS: MYTH AND POWER

The chapter has argued that the idea of the international community works as a political myth and as such influences behaviour and endows it with meaning. This myth enables, legitimises, and shapes international

statebuilding practices; these, in turn, justify and constitute the idea of the international community. The international community becomes both an imagined whole and an agential entity. The international community is agential when it is equated with donors, but discourse produced by donors upholds the vision of some universal international community to be valued and protected. In this process, statebuilding becomes a natural and thus apolitical enterprise.

Bottici refers to political myths as ‘mapping devices through which we look at the world, feel about it and also act within it as a social group’ (Bottici and Challand 2010: 20). The myth of the international community performs these functions for two groups of actors. On the more general level, it may be seen as performing this work among societies of capitalist liberal states. Primarily, however, it is a powerful idea for practitioners of statebuilding, those who are the principal authors of international community discourse. As members of a specific transnational social group bound by and co-producing a specific set of practices, they employ and work on the narrative of the international community. Specific conditions of the narrative’s construction, such as the transnationality of the task of ‘assisting others’ and the assumed responsibility and good-doing, turn the narrative into a political myth (see Bottici 2007: 179). Yet neither from the perspective of liberal states nor from the point of view of statebuilding practitioners can the political myth be claimed to be conveying truth. No fruitful discussion can take place of the international community’s essence or its adequate definition. The political myth of international community may be an expression of a determination to act, it may work as a consolidator of a group’s identity, therefore contributing to the construction of social reality, but *no* sustainable claim can be made at the international community’s existence out there.

A more rewarding way forward, and one enabled by a mythographical analysis, is to ask questions about the continued work on and work of the myth of international community, to enquire about ways in which the myth as a process of continual work creates tangible effects. Among other things, such analysis exposes that discursive construction of the international community is intertwined with questions of power. Bottici argues that the work on myth is a forceful way of influencing people’s imagination and constructing a successful version of reality. As such, a political myth is the embodiment of symbolic power which may be as important as the control over the means for physical coercion (Bottici and Challand

2006: 330). These processes do not happen in and of themselves. Agency is equally important. The very fact that a particular group of actors claims the inalienable right to imagine and represent the international is, ultimately, the exposition of power. Those who claim the right to define the international community assert the privilege at defining what is universal. This activity is fused with the feeling of righteousness. With concrete policies supported by budgets, these actors also claim to be contributing to the maintenance of the international community as it is imagined by them.

Similarly, the relation of power permeates the process of standard setting, itself tightly bound with a specific representation of the international community. Defining what constitutes international standards of the right kind of state and who is expected to meet these standards is part and parcel of the ongoing process of significance creation for a specific group of actors. In this process, the term international community operates as a neutral descriptor and takes on the aura of self-evidence. In the process, the language of statebuilding becomes apolitical. The emphasis on 'institutions', denoting some kind of benign administrative arrangements and indisputable international standards, reinforces the seeming lack of politics.

The myth of international community has far-reaching consequences, for it structures the way things are done in contemporary international politics. It shapes expectations with regard to the state and legitimizes intervention aimed at adjusting certain polities to the expected model. The myth of the international community allows for presenting activities of statebuilding as intrinsically good and actors undertaking them as those working for the benefit of all.

What emerges out of this analysis is a preliminary suggestion that international actors need the embodiment of the idea of the international community. Donors act on the assumption that the international community exists, but through their activities and discourse they build and maintain societal ties between states. Statebuilding activities are an indispensable—though not the only—bonding element, a tangible form of 'cooperation', allowing liberal states to be driven by a joint, elevating purpose, which additionally reinforces their pulling power.

This analysis has been focused on specific actors—those engaged in statebuilding—but could be extended. The myth of the international community is an important part of how the West sees and constructs itself to itself and projects this image to the outside world.

NOTES

1. The use of a definite article in this case is an attempt to retain grammatical correctness rather than to suggest an essence may be distilled out of the many different meanings attributed to the international community in policy discourse.
2. By donors I mean agencies of capitalist democratic states, organisations, and institutions engaged in international statebuilding but which are not necessarily limited to the geographical West; the analysed discourse also draws on examples from Japan, South Korea, and the Asian Development Bank.
3. Interview, senior official at UN Kyrgyzstan, December 2014.
4. OECD webpage, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/post-2015.htm> (last accessed 20 July 2015).
5. This logic is also common in scholarly literature (Caplan 2005; Chesterman 2004; Chesterman et al. 2005).
6. The introduction of the word ‘partner’ has done little in terms of altering the prevalent vocabulary or masking power relations underpinning policies of statebuilding. A simple textual analysis reveals that donors describe their relations with ‘partners’ using words with positive connotations such as cooperate, engage, secure, improve, enable, maximize, philanthropic, collaborative. All these contrast starkly with vocabulary describing states receiving assistance as least developed, poorest, weakest, failing, and/or vulnerable. In addition, as observed by Rita Abrahamsen in the context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, even when language changed to ‘partnerships’, the content of donor-recipient relations remained largely untouched: power is exercised through simultaneous incorporation and exclusion (Abrahamsen 2004).
7. World Bank in Kyrgyzstan, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic> (last accessed 10 August 2015), italics added.
8. For a critique of measuring fragility, see e.g. Naude et al. (2011).
9. New Deal. Building Peaceful States, <http://www.newdeal4peace.org> (last accessed 10 August 2015).
10. Retrieved from: <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/> (last accessed 5 July 2015).
11. For example, ‘the government was in discussions with various parts of the international community—diplomatic, peacekeeping, and development—on pressing institutional transformations’ (World Bank 2011: 110); ‘the international community, encompassing both the neighboring countries, and bilateral and multilateral partners’ (UNDP 2005: 3).
12. Interviews with experts working for GIZ, UNDP, and Swiss Aid; Bishkek, September–October 2012.
13. Interview, senior official at Swiss Aid, October 2014.

14. The Mission of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, <http://www.hss.de/english.html> (last accessed 13 August 2013).
15. KOICA. 2014. Korean International Cooperation Agency official webpage, <http://www.koica.go.kr> (last accessed 10 August 2015).

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Global Governance and the Myth of Civil Society Participation

Charlotte Dany and Katja Freistein

The idea of ‘global governance’ is now firmly established in political science and practice. Most generally, it entails that policies affecting people around the globe should be supported by a plethora of actors to ensure their effectiveness and legitimacy. Yet how are these ideas made relatable to a public, particularly a global one? This chapter traces the mythical narratives that sustain global governance.

Policies (and politics) are in need of legitimation and explaining, and the political actions taken and goals envisioned for the future must be made compatible with the ‘collective desire’ (Nonhoff 2006, 148). For abstract ideas to be persuasive not just once but persistently, they need to be woven into an appealing story that binds the various elements to signal coherence, reconciling conflicting elements in a unified narrative (Glynos

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and Howarth 2007, 147). Even more, the story should be narrated in a way that is compelling and thus desirable to accept (Laclau 1990). We argue that the political myth of civil society participation (CSP) serves to render global governance appealing. Through a narrative analysis, we show how and why the idea of global governance has become so pervasive, both as a political and an academic paradigm.

Classically, global governance is defined as a heuristic concept embracing all sorts of transnational policymaking ‘from the family to the international organization’ (Rosenau 1995, 13). The concept has been nurtured by functionalist and normative ideals of world government, or at least wide-ranging regulatory spaces—taking on varied forms and procedures in line with different ideologies—and remains thus a subject of discussion and disagreement. While it was first mainly discussed in the context of policy formulation in areas of ‘low politics’, today global governance is a broad concept relating to the functioning of international institutions generally (Karns and Mingst 2009), aspects of global economic interdependence (Stiglitz and Kaldor 2013), or global civil society (Castells 2008). In these contexts, global governance always refers to transnational policymaking that is not exclusively, and not even necessarily, restricted to the actions of states. Instead, a variety of state and non-state actors influence world politics in different forums (Keohane and Nye 2000, 12). Systematically including non-state actors is the new and main distinctive feature of global governance, particularly in contrast with the earlier state-centric view on world politics.

Differentiating global from international governance, scholars have highlighted ‘the increased involvement of non-state actors in norm- and rule-setting processes and compliance monitoring’ (Brühl and Rittberger 2001, 2). Therefore, we posit here that CSP is needed as a normative and functionalist core of global governance. As political myth, it establishes the idea that groups representing civil society emerge beyond the nation-state which are essential for the functioning of global governance. We thus understand CSP in global governance as a myth in the sense of a narrative that is established, formulated, and repeated by policymakers and academics and that legitimises and naturalises political practices. This myth-function is important. Similar to (democratic) governmental politics, governance strongly depends on the acceptance by a majority of those it affects (Rosenau and Czempel 1992, 4).

To analyse the content and functioning of the myth, we first specify what ‘myth’ means in our understanding and introduce narration analysis as a tool to analyse the operation of myths in political contexts. We then present the results of our narrative analysis of core policy documents and academic-political reports on global governance. We discuss the ways in which the narrative of CSP in global governance works as a myth and show its political functions. Drawing on examples from the World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, we finally focus on the effects of this particular mythical narrative by showing how it continues to legitimise and naturalise global governance.

NARRATING POLITICS AS MYTH

Narratives are virtually omnipresent in social relations (including academia and politics). They can appear in very different forms and within various genres and subgenres, particularly when the lines between fiction and non-fiction are blurred (Culler 1984). Narratives can be individual, as ‘ontological narratives’ that establish and reaffirm a person’s identity, or ‘public’, as collective political programs; and they can be ‘conceptual’ in that they establish how a certain order should deal with political problems (Somers and Gibson 1994, 61), or ‘meta-narratives’—grand narratives that structure how we make sense of the world (Somers and Gibson 1994, 63).

Through narration, ways of perceiving reality can be changed (Fludernik 1996, 36). Political myths are a specific form of narratives in that they build on strong, symbolic pictures to carry significance and have clear historic dimensions (e.g. Munck 2002; Teschke 2003). Operating with the often vaguely used notion of myth, one can roughly distinguish a positivist use from a post-positivist use of the concept, with the latter being ‘ideological narratives that draw on deep-seated beliefs about the nature of reality’ (Little 2007, 51).

In a positivist way the concept is used, for example, to state that civil society organisations (CSOs) are overestimated as salutary political actors in world politics (e.g. Frankenberg 2008, 14ff; Heins 2002, 85). This is in line with colloquial understandings of myth as something supernatural and fictitious or imaginary, unreasonably exaggerated, and idealised. In contrast, we seek to explore the effects of CSP as a specific form of political narrative, thus concurring with a post-positivist understanding of myth.

What Political Myths Are

Rather than as a detachment from reality (Dahl 1998, 31), myths should be understood and analysed as narratives that make something *seem to be* true (Weber 2001, xvi, 2). Myths in our understanding neither imply a true or a false content; they can be identified according to their social, or more precisely, their political function. This truth function refers to myth-making as a mundane aspect of politics, ‘an everyday practice that permeates the discourse of all political communicators’ (Little 2007, 70). The political nature of myths is ‘something in the relationship between a given narrative and the way in which it can come to address the political conditions of a given group’ (Bottici and Challand 2006, 317).

Accordingly, a myth has certain characteristics that make it stand out as an especially powerful narrative. The first is significance (Bottici 2007, 7–8). It operates by transporting a strong symbolic picture. The myth of global civil society, for instance, provides ‘a “co-ordinated picture” bringing together a series of images and sentiments with great intensity, thus providing us with an instant perception’ (Munck 2002, 349).

Secondly, a myth usually involves a historical dimension. On the one hand, myths are historic stories in the sense that they link the past, the present, and the future, through references to certain versions of the past and the anticipation of future events, possibly as desirable ends (Little 2007, 71–2). On the other hand, continuous repetitions in a process, ‘*over time*’, establish a myth (Dahl 1998, 30, original emphasis). Myths must be reiterated and at times readjusted by adding new or rather updated narrative elements to the core narratives of the myth. Ultimately, a myth is a historic story, although it is often made to appear ahistorical. Barthes emphasises the ability of myths to present themselves as ahistoric by veiling their origins and the dependence on particular social and political contexts: ‘myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made’ (Barthes 2009, 169). A myth, thus, is both situated in a certain temporality and detached from it.

Thirdly, a myth follows a certain pattern of narration and usually includes a certain configuration of protagonists and antagonists, although this is often missing in modern accounts of political myths. Tudor (1972) points to the role of heroes in political myth, stating that they are rarely individuals but rather social groups (including whole nations, ethnic groups, or others) that can be united against a common enemy or in order

to overcome some common ordeal. The social impact of struggles can generate political myths that create protagonists around the communities affected by these struggles.

What Political Myths Do

Political myths turn the radical subjectivity of storytelling into collective experience and help stabilise expectations, identities, and knowledge. Mythical narratives in politics include or exclude certain groups, create hierarchies between them, and produce subject positions. Political narratives are therefore always characterised by, and/or constitutive of, power relations (cf. Goetze, Chap. 5). Myths produce meaning (and significance) and, at the same time, work to exclude alternative renderings of reality (Munck 2002, 349). Through this process, myths convey a sense of political realities that eludes further critical questioning and have a particularly compelling impact on political practices. Throughout history, political myths have been employed to legitimise political systems as a whole and political decisions that depend on these systems. They still rely on powerful proponents and a continuous practice of telling and retelling for the sake of stabilising political systems, by giving ‘a persuasive account of how this is going to happen’, and generating support (Little 2007, 70–71).

Myths function in different ways: they give advice about the appropriate behaviour in a given societal context, guide moral decisions, and create a sociocultural framework that supports a certain social order. Their ahistoricity and validity in more than one particular context legitimises political orders by naturalising certain practices, processes, or ideas:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact (Barthes 2009, 169–170).

Thus, myths structure reality and respond to very particular problems. Barthes’ understanding also implies a depoliticising function of myths in politics. Their constant reiterations and actualisations, the spread of the mythical narrative across different social segments, and their reproduction in different contexts make them seem factual instead of political or politically motivated.

The Narration of Myth

The normalisation and naturalisation, i.e. depoliticisation, of certain ideas and concepts is sustained by narrating them and thereby suppressing other possible narratives. Narratives can create (the fiction of) authenticity, historicity, authority, and social acceptance (Kreiswirth 2000, 310), transforming ‘what is particular, cultural and ideological (like a story told by an IR tradition) into what appears to be universal, natural, and purely empirical’ (Weber 2001, 6). These functions of narratives are facilitated by the way they help us make sense of the complexity of information we are confronted with, by interpreting it in a certain, (seemingly) coherent way, affecting how people feel, how they make sense of reality, and how they relate to others (Fludernik 1996, 27; Patterson and Monroe 1998, 315–316). Thus, a political myth is able to produce and reproduce the objects and subjects of its own narrative—at least in its particular social context.

The idea of the *fantasmatic logic* (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Laclau 2005) can be used to account for the depoliticising effects of myths. The term originates from the Essex School of discourse theory, referring to one analytical field of social inquiry—the social—which impacts on the field of the political. The radical contingency of the social constantly challenges the identity of subjects, causing the need for stability. The fantasmatic logic contributes to protecting subjects’ identities and denies the possibility of politics by depoliticising social reality. It helps ‘to maintain existing social structures by pre-emptively absorbing dislocations, preventing them from becoming [politicised and transformed]’ (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 146). The fantasmatic logic thus prevents issues from becoming parts of the domain of the political, where these meanings, articulations, and identities are instituted and challenged through hegemonic struggles, contestations, resistance, and dislocations. This is important, since grand narratives—or indeed myths—of today’s politics function only because they are removed from the everyday business of political squabbling and thus are less likely to be challenged. For the analysis of social phenomena, identifying political logics helps to demonstrate *how* social practices are constituted and transformed, whereas fantasmatic logics reveal *why* certain political projects are supported whereas others are not (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 151; cf. Münch, Chap. 3).

To sum up and to make these theoretical underpinnings fruitful for our narration analysis, we can differentiate two functions of political myths: first, they serve as a narrated rendering of political practice and veil the

contingent nature of events; second, they legitimise political systems by depoliticising their central claims. We seek to show in what follows how fantasmatic logics are at work in the myth of CSP in global governance.

IDENTIFYING THE MYTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

We explored the narration of the myth underlying global governance by analysing key texts, that is, texts that were frequently referenced by others (UNCED 1992; CGG 1995; WSF 2001; Cardoso Report 2004; WEF 2009). These texts both summarise and propose what global governance means and can be regarded as milestones or important interventions in the debate. Systematically, we identified as key dimensions and elements of a mythical narrative the historic dimension of the myth and the symbolism employed in its narration, especially when it comes to characterising the heroic protagonists. Similarities, cross-references and striking repetitions were taken as signs for the existence and diffusion of the myth. They are signs of attempts to establish a coherent story and add up to the strong, symbolic pictures characteristic of myths. Based on this reconstruction, we show how the myth and thus the fantasmatic logic operate.

Historic Dimension: Linking the Past, the Present, and the Future

For a modern (political) myth, the founding moment needs to be believable and pervasive. The myth of global CSP commonly begins at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro/Brazil in 1992, when an unprecedented number of CSO participants attended the meeting. Based on that number, the summit is now often famously portrayed as the initiation of civil society involvement in global institutionalised settings (Munck 2002, 350). In many documents, academic texts and CSO accounts, we find references to this (apparent) watershed moment (e.g. Bäckstrand 2006, 470). While earlier world summits, especially the one in Stockholm 1972, attracted the attention of some 300 NGOs, UNCED 1992 marked the beginning of the decade that is usually equated with large-scale NGO participation in the UN: 'It was the series of global UN conferences of the 1990s that essentially rewrote the UN agenda and attracted thousands of NGOs (Bissio 2014,

196). The ‘success’ of Rio—not in the sense of outcomes, but in terms of inclusiveness, of legitimising the (lack of) results—has since been interwoven with the idea of CSP. By identifying that one moment as the beginning of CSP in global governance, the myth both creates and camouflages its own beginning. It anchors the founding moment in a certain version of history while also withdrawing it from a clear temporality, i.e. the events and processes leading up to the summit.

Reports like *Our Global Neighborhood* by the Commission on Global Governance added to this the belief that the time was ripe for a global representation of public interest which would change how global policies were being formulated and implemented:

At the global level, governance has been viewed primarily as intergovernmental relationships, but it must now be understood as also involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), citizens’ movements, multinational corporations, and the global capital market (CGG 1995, Chap. 1).

Accordingly, ‘a diversity of people and institutions’ became necessary for policymaking to be *effective*:

Effective global decision-making thus needs to build upon and influence decisions taken locally, nationally, and regionally, and to draw on the skills and resources of a diversity of people and institutions at many levels. It must build partnerships—networks of institutions and processes—that enable global actors to pool information, knowledge, and capacities and to develop joint policies and practices on issues of common concern (CGG 1995, Chap. 1).

The idea of ‘effective global decision-making’ is presented and conceptualised as a subject acting in its own right (it ‘needs’, ‘builds upon’, ‘must build’) and is linked causally to the actions of the variety of people concerned (‘diversity’, ‘at many levels’, ‘global actors’). This narration also builds a bridge between past and present, creating something new, namely governance ‘now (...) understood as’, and marking a change that would affect the future of global politics.

Often, both past and present represent a status quo that needs to be overcome. The future can either be very bleak—if things remain unchanged—or very bright, namely if the myth becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Among the problems that need to be overcome are general

global processes like ‘a process of capitalist globalization commanded by large multinational corporations and by governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations’ interests’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 4). But also concrete events that illustrate the present state of the world need to be left behind, such as:

the Gulf War, the enormities of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, brutal violence in Somalia, and genocide in Rwanda (...). And there is deepening disquiet over the actions—and in some cases the inaction—of governments and of the United Nations. Instead of coming together around a common vision of the way forward, the world seems in danger of losing its way (CGG 1995, Chap. 1).

The expression of ‘the world (...) losing its way’ incorporates the temporal elements of the global governance myth in a very teleological manner, linking future events to endeavours of the past and present. The present, however, is portrayed as a world in fear of the future and in urgent need of change:

Economic, business and social uncertainty is not a passing phenomenon but has become a permanent characteristic of our world. Our societies and nations risk being subverted by international crime, corruption and terror campaigns, not to mention threats from environmental degradation, disease and the social consequences of poverty, especially in the least developed parts of the world. Global cooperation is required to fight this (WEF 2009, 128).

When the UN stood ‘at a very delicate juncture’, it was in need of ‘the support of civil society more than ever before’ (Cardoso Report 2004, 3). Therefore:

The Panel strongly affirms multi-stakeholder partnerships for tackling both operational and policy challenges. This is not a new idea; some of today’s most important global advances emanate from partnerships, and their scale and breadth are growing (Cardoso Report 2004, 9).

The plot of the myth is thus focused on how the conditions of past and present and corresponding challenges can be overcome: by governing the world in concert with CSOs. When civil society plays its part, the future, as befits a myth, will be bright:

To make life in the twenty-first century more democratic, more secure, and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of this generation. (...) The world now has a real opportunity to improve on the record of the past and to respond effectively to the current challenges of global governance (CGG 1995, Chap. 1).

This brighter future would be enabled by ‘understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 14), resulting in ‘a planetary society centred on the human person’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 1).

On the surface, this looks like well-known political rhetoric. Things will improve if people act the right way. However, the narration is so all-encompassing and general (or unspecific and global, to put it differently) that it is not just directed at political decision-makers or a public of voters; instead, it seems to be directed at the most general public imaginable, mankind itself. It seeks to arouse the emotions of each individual human being. Single phrasings like ‘planetary society’, ‘relations among Humankind and between it and the Earth’ or ‘a new stage in world history’ are symbolic and fantasmatic rather than political; they evoke common fantasies, rather than being a sound basis for rational (in the sense of a *homo economicus*) decisions. Thereby, the idea of CSP in global governance becomes a mythical narrative. This style of narration can be found throughout the programmatic documents in this context.

The Protagonists: Heroes of World Politics

In order to make the world a better place in the future, mythical actors are needed who are endowed with special features. The narrative of global governance relies heavily on its promising protagonists: ‘Groups and movements of civil society’ are, for example, necessary ‘for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, [and the] free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 1). While it is challenging to create an idea of community that is global, the representation of individual citizens by civil society groups can be seen as the solution to the problem of finding the right protagonists. Furthermore, they have to be endowed with qualities that states do not have, and they need a status so unique that their relevance cannot be questioned. In a way, they have to be outside the realm of politics to become credible protagonists. Thus, in the narrative of global governance,

CSOs offer one of the most fantasmatically appealing elements of the storyline. Here, the myth builds on strong symbolic pictures to underline the importance of NGOs. Moreover, their role is practically enhanced by their participation in global governance, particularly the world summits. They become the protagonists that are needed to enact the myth: ‘CS actors are being produced by their participation in world summits’, which since the 1970s has ‘catalyzed NGO action, and significantly increased their importance on the world stage’ (McKeon 2009, 19).

Next to the character of NGOs as non-governmental, i.e. private, the absence of profit-seeking is usually named as characteristic feature of these specific CSOs. NGOs rather seek to enhance the common interest and basically have good intentions, such as ‘working for the welfare of children or a healthier planet’ (CGG 1995). They become credible through the ‘responsible and constructive role they play in society’ (UNCED 1992, paragraph 27.1). The narrative also stresses the crucial link between the resources of NGOs and their functions:

All in all, citizens’ movements and NGOs now make important contributions in many fields, both nationally and internationally. They can offer knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, a non-bureaucratic approach, and grassroots perspectives, attributes that complement the resources of official agencies. Many NGOs also raise significant sums for development and humanitarian work, in which their dedication, administrative efficiency, and flexibility are valuable additional assets (CGG 1995, Chap. 1).

The resources—‘knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, dedication, flexibility’—are decisive for making global governance more effective and less bureaucratic (as opposed to ‘regular’ politics). Civil society actors further bring to life ‘principles of constituency engagement, partnership, transparency and inclusion, with a special emphasis on those who are normally under-represented’ (Cardoso Report 2004, 12). Finally, ‘independence is a major attribute of non-governmental organizations and is the precondition of real participation’ (Cardoso Report 2004, 12). That can be seen as a case in point for portraying CSOs as potential oppositional forces in global affairs: ‘groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism’; ‘a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context’ and in ‘diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 9). The mythical narrative

becomes powerful by presenting global governance as a complete story in offering protagonists and antagonists, both needed to complement each other, since the lack of a common antagonist would put in question the role of protagonists.

The symbolism this story entails is expressed, for example, in the idea that CSOs are the transmission belt ‘from the local to the global’. CSOs are ‘engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world’ (WSF 2001, paragraph 8). Their function as transmission belts between different levels of political activity evidences the potential of CSOs to legitimise global governance (Steffek and Nanz 2008, 8). The title of the seminal report ‘Our Global Neighborhood’ also reflects the CSOs’ Janus face of local and global. The global sphere seems to become a local place where people take responsibility for each other as much as they ‘take control of their own lives’ (CGG 1995, Chap. 1). In this effort they are enabled by the use of ‘new information and communication technologies’ which make it ‘almost as easy for advocacy groups to be global as local’ (Cardoso Report 2004, 25).

While some caveats can be found in various sources of the narrative, in the overall picture painted of CSOs in global governance as critical voices but reliable partners at the same time, they are larger than life. Civil society representatives thus could be seen as being cast for the role of heroes, at least in the sense of moral superiority and opponents of dominant authorities (states). As protagonists of the myth, they can embody all those qualities lacking in official political leaders, those responsible for the state of today’s world that needs to be overcome. Measured by realistic standards, they are doomed to fail. That, however, makes it all the more necessary to uphold the positive claims about the new protagonists to justify why CSOs should have a say at all in international policymaking, in other words, why they are legitimate actors.

REPRODUCING THE MYTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL POLICYMAKING

One concern of CSP in global governance is lending legitimacy. By contributing to more transparency and inclusiveness, CSOs are said to force states to justify their decisions and to argue, learn, and be persuaded (Risse 2004, 304). CSOs may also help reduce the democratic deficit, diagnosed in international organisations, acting as a transmission belt between a transnational public sphere and international organisations (Nanz and

Steffek 2004; Steffek and Nanz 2008, 8). While this—assumed—effect has been discussed in depth in the academic literature, we assume that the myth we describe here not only builds on CSO participation to legitimise the process but is also reproduced by CSOs that gain legitimation from the same source. CSOs are thus not simply instrumentalised but willing participants that help perpetuate the myth.

The example of the two WSIS summits illustrates this reproduction of the myth—despite all well-known flaws—by civil society actors themselves through its enactment. As a consequence of their limited influence in the first phase of WSIS, civil society temporarily withdrew from the process when the first summit approached and drafted an alternative declaration with their vision of a sustainable information society (WSIS Civil Society Plenary 2003; WSIS Civil Society 2003). Although this was supposedly a statement against the limited legitimacy of the WSIS process, by ostentatiously dropping out, CSOs showed they never stopped taking the process seriously. Moreover, states had initially fought over whether CSOs should be excluded from certain meetings (Kleinwächter 2004, 61–62) but did not openly question the idea of CSP either. Eventually, CSOs re-entered the process in the second phase, not only signalling continued interest in the policy matter but also signalling, and increasingly so, their support for the overall idea of CSO participation in global governance. Indeed, efforts to strengthen participation rights within the WSIS and its follow-up processes became ever more important, sometimes even more important than arguing for substantive issues. Therefore, one observer described the primary output of the whole WSIS process with a series of UN Internet Governance Forums as ‘the creation of a perpetual motion machine for maintaining and sustaining these networks and networking opportunities for the already networked’ (Gurstein 2005).

This development did not go uncontested within the civil society community at the WSIS, and it created conflicts. One of the most pervasive criticisms directed against CSOs in global governance forums generally is their lack of inclusiveness. While the myth claims that CSOs act for marginalised interests, e.g. groups from the Global South, and that they represent those who would otherwise not be represented, the dominance of Northern actors within civil society (Roth 2005), the flawed representativeness of CSOs (Ottaway 2001, 266; Hertel 2006), their close connections with and functions for states (Brand 2000, 172), and their biased transnational advocacy agenda have been repeatedly criticised (Bob 2001; Carpenter 2007). This problem of inequality within the CSO community

is well known, yet the myth effectively silences it by constructing a (stronger) antagonism between CSOs and states or vague and concrete threats that CSOs as a group help counter. Any form of antagonism between the protagonists themselves, i.e. the representatives of civil society, however, is not part of the narrative. Yet, at the WSIS, for example, conflicts among CSO actors became visible. Although many civil society actors perceived the summit as a great opportunity to participate in and influence policy-making, their participation rights and influence were constantly restricted. Over time, some CSO representatives became increasingly frustrated not only with the limited influence but also their fellow CSO colleagues:

At the beginning I thought the voice of civil society in an international process sounds wonderful and I could make some difference in there. And now I don't believe that any more. Many of civil society are contaminated by power.¹

Different groups within civil society further openly argued about the civil society procedures to decide on the composition of the Working Group on Internet Governance, the most important multi-stakeholder working group of the whole summit process (PCT Working Group 2005). As civil society organised itself bottom-up, lacking procedures and agreement on best practices, a few civil society actors that came into the positions first were able to prevail, while others—arguably most of all those with less prior experience in UN conferences and/or from the Global South—were excluded (Mueller et al. 2007, 284).

The strong emphasis on the positive characteristics of CSOs in global governance documents camouflages the actual conflicts that arise between states and CSOs or among CSOs. What is more, CSOs are often seen as antagonists of unhindered liberal market economy and states' politics—their achievements are frequently measured in terms of reaching their goals in opposition to states but rarely in cooperative measures with them. This obscures the fact that co-optation often takes place, e.g. when only some CSOs are included in a meeting and others left out for opaque reasons. It is for this reason that CSO participation also seems to depoliticize global governance. Once CSOs are included and become part of the process, they are more likely to be co-opted and tamed, which reduces the diversity of views they bring into the policy process (Joachim 2011, 226; Dany 2013, 117ff.). Contrarily, there is no reason why CSOs should not cooperate with states for a common goal, so opposition need not be in

the best interest of good results. All in all, both sides, states and CSOs, effectively uphold the legitimacy of the process.

These brief insights into the WSIS process illustrate the power of the mythical narrative. Even though the actual circumstances of a summit would suggest that CSP has built-in flaws, well known to all participants, the participants of the summit would all act upon the mythical narrative and sustain it. Thus, the impossibility of realising their role does not prevent CSOs from trying to fulfill it, since challenging the myth's storyline would possibly undermine their own participation. The myth needs to be enacted and re-enacted, otherwise it cannot live on.

CONCLUSIONS

One important insight of our study is that the myth of CSP works not only through global governance structures established by states but also through the participation of civil society actors themselves. CSOs reproduce the myth that, at the same time, produces them in the first place as protagonists on the world scene. This challenges how we think about the so-called 'CSO community' as such, not only about what they are able to achieve.

We find that the establishment of ever more inclusively designed global governance forums and institutions has reinforced exclusionary tendencies of CSP. Participation in global governance has unleashed conflicts and reproduced power hierarchies within civil society itself. This explains why the representation of marginalized actors through CSOs is often biased and why CSOs have been found to reproduce the North–South divide in international politics. We also find that CSOs do not routinely serve as oppositional or corrective forces to official politics. States and CSOs often pursue similar political projects, and CSOs are most willing to compromise for the sake of being able to participate in governance processes at all. Thus, while observers emphasise the potential of CSOs to politicise policymaking processes by bringing new issues onto the political agenda and facilitating public debate (Zürn et al. 2012, 79), their participation in high-level governance processes is, to the contrary, also assessed to decrease political struggles over fundamental political issues (Jaeger 2007, 258). Possibly, CSO participation may simply have become normalised to an extent that one of its main functions is upholding the myth rather than any form of opposition or antagonism to states' politics.

It is remarkable that despite these ambivalent and often critical findings on the actual achievements of CSOs, the mythical narrative remains unchallenged. The main idea of their participation and function is not questioned; states and CSOs merely discuss how this participation is best realized. Even though most participants and observers of global governance processes may have acknowledged the flawed or perhaps even impossible nature of their endeavours, they still adhere to retelling and re-enacting the myth. For the myth to work it is not necessary that the hopes equated with CSP are actually realised. As Weber (2001, 2) argues, all IR theories are based on myths, a kind of slogan, which makes them *appear* to be true. What matters is only the belief that the hopes will be fulfilled. The myth thus helps keeping the idea of global governance alive and justifies it, whatever critical empirical assessments there may be on the assumed influence and representativeness or the legitimising and politicising potential of CSOs.

Finally, the myth induces the acceptance of its main tenets through all segments of world society, ranging from policymakers to academics and CSOs themselves. That does not imply an acceptance in the sense that everyone agrees with the contents or political implications. It does mean, however, that people refer to generally the same mythical elements when they respond to the narrative, both in retelling it and in positioning themselves to and in fact also against it. What we observe and how, what categories we use etc. are all political decisions, and they are part of global governance's nature as a political myth. Ultimately, the perspective presented here reveals that global governance is an inherently political project, rendered acceptable and desirable through its constant retelling as myth.

NOTE

1. Interview with YJ Park, former co-coordinator of the Internet Governance Caucus in the WSIS process 2003 (15 November 2007, Rio de Janeiro).

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Myths of the Near Future: Paris, Busan, and Tales of Aid Effectiveness

Franziska Müller and Elena Sondermann

In a secularised, yet postsecular world, myths have again found a new refuge. While a myth seems opposed to truth or reality according to the everyday understanding, myths bear the potential to intermediate between both, or else create new (re)interpreted realities in the eyes of the beholder. Thus, myths acquire a productive and creative quality, most visible in their potential to create, fuel, and uphold grand narratives. For the field of International Relations (IR), a reading of political rationalities as myths allows for a deconstruction and reflection of familiar assumptions. Furthermore, it stimulates epistemological and methodological debates in poststructuralist and constructivist IR theory. While myths' function lies in the 'transformation of what is particular, cultural and ideological (like a story told by an IR tradition) into what appears to be universal, natural and purely empirical' (Weber 2010, 7), a critical understanding of

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IR would imply to explore, unveil, and interrogate IR myths in order to reveal their ideological and deeply political purposes.

Mythical notions (as well as the need to demystify them) also come to mind when thinking about international development cooperation. In fact, the development myth has been mobilised during a number of recent debates about development and development aid, albeit mostly as a counterpart to reality (e.g. Moyo 2009). By contrast, we regard collective beliefs as an important part of reality, insofar as myths bear the discursive power to create effects here and now. Thus, in recalling ‘myths of the near future’, we understand development as a collective belief. Development is understood as a core part of the Western and modern ‘religion’ which unites diverse societies and groups around the globe (Rist 2008). Facing this unquestionable and omnipresent belief in the possibility of collective linear ‘progress’ towards a positive future, differences and contradictions recede into the background. Moreover, the belief in development is performative in the sense that it ‘compels those who share it to act in a particular manner’ (Rist 2008, 22). Myths inspire and encourage development actors in their activities, as they offer them ‘something to believe in’ (Hirschman 1967). Obviously, ‘development’ works as a powerful myth which can appear in different forms and foci—be it the project of modernisation, be it a mythological story of caring, selfless, and cooperative women as a yet-to-be-unleashed potential for development (Cornwall 2008, 159), or be it the postmodernised versions of ‘sustainable development’ or ‘poverty reduction’. In all cases, the mythological notion works as an empowering, productive, and disciplining force.

Thus, our contribution is dedicated to identify and analyse myths of international development with particular attention to the ongoing debate on aid effectiveness, which is in fact as old as the institution and ritual of postcolonial development cooperation (Hayman 2006). It dates back to 1960, when the OECD’s Development Assistance Group (DAG) [as of 1961, Development Assistance Committee (DAC)] was established. In one of its first resolutions, the ‘Resolution of the Common Aid Effort’, the DAG promised not only to increase aid resources but also to ‘improve their effectiveness’. After the end of the Cold War, the hitherto predominant security and strategic rationales for aid gave way to broader discussion about aid levels and aid effectiveness.

Empirically, we begin our analysis with the DAC’s *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, which was signed in 2005 by more than 100 donors and recipients. The Paris Declaration marked a milestone of the aid effective-

ness discussions, which had picked up speed at the end of the 1990s and had been debated already at a High-Level Meeting in Rome in 2003. We regard the Paris Declaration as an important reference of what is presented as the current collective belief in development cooperation. We critically examine the developmental terminologies and various myths that have been brought up in the declaration and unfolded during the follow-up process. Therefore, we rely on structuralist understandings of myths bearing silencing, harmonising, depoliticising, or emancipatory functions (Barthes 1972), as well as on the reception of political mythology in poststructuralist IR theory. This allows us to critically assess to what extent development reform rhetoric nurtures a mythical imagination of aid-giving.

Our first step is a reading of the Paris Declaration's central norms (ownership, accountability, harmonisation, alignment, and managing for results), which organise relationships and practices of international development cooperation. With a focus on the DAC's Busan summit (November 2011), where emerging donors from outside the DAC played an important role, we finally analyse to what extent the myths have been retold and diversified. The year 2015 was an important year in international development cooperation as all attention focused on finding and endorsing a framework. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have served as the overall framework of development objectives since 2001 (the *what-to-achieve*), while the Paris Declaration provided principles for the *how* with reference to one important tool of development financing (aid). By establishing the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), the Busan High-Level Forum was able to respond to a changing aid landscape and refashion the aid effectiveness myth accordingly. However, as we will discuss in our conclusion, by opening a new chapter in the tale of aid effectiveness, the future of aid is not secured but remains rather uncertain.

DECIPHERING DEVELOPMENT: THE PRODUCTIVE POWER OF MYTHS

Roland Barthes' seminal work on political and sociocultural myths offers a unique way of dealing with the power that lies in terminologies and ascriptions of meanings. His understanding of myths allows us to decipher the apparently true stories that have been created around the idea of development. Following Barthes, we can distinguish between several

myth functions. First, an important effect of myths lies in the creation of *'stolen language'* (Barthes 1972, 115). If a myth can neither be a lie nor a confession, this refers to the way myths make use of language in political contexts. Language as a wide terrain of floating meanings falls prey to the myth. As soon as a term has no fully fixed meaning, certain carefully chosen meanings can be attached to it and create dynamics of their own—even to the point that any original meaning becomes subordinated under a hegemonial reading (cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2).

However, myths can become subject to struggles over meaning, as the creation and shape of developmental myths is no longer a privilege of the West. Developmental myths are subject to reinterpretation and contestation. Rising powers in the Global South not only act as new donors but also confront the discursive hegemony of developmental terminologies, by reinterpreting them or by creating their own development myths. Thus, myths can also carry emancipatory and empowering functions.

Third, myths are *harmonising*, insofar as 'mythology harmonizes with the world, not as it is, but as it wants to create itself' (Barthes 1972, 130). Myths thereby contain a utopian tendency, as they carry an idea of a near and better future, without contradictions and tensions but rather a more harmonious and moderate image. This harmonising notion also refers to the subjects that are addressed through the myth. In fact, myths achieve part of their power through consensus-building. The hegemonic meaning of a term is shared and becomes universalised, thereby creating a term to which different actors can easily refer without having to enter debate on differing definitions and interpretations. It thus fulfils the same function as Hajer's 'story lines' which condense the essence of discourse in a short-hand form, a metaphor. Actors use these story lines even though this does not mean that they share the same understanding or opinion on an issue (Hajer 1995, 2003; cf. Münch, Chap. 3).

Thus, despite strong political notions within myths, their universalising quality also expresses forms of *'depoliticized speech'* (Barthes 1972, 130). During the process of mythologisation, topics become unquestionable as their historical and political background blurs, while the myth itself becomes an 'emptied form'. This depoliticisation is functional insofar as it gives the myth a powerful meaning. As Cynthia Weber (2010, 7) puts it: 'power works through myths by appearing to take the political out of the ideological.' Two other effects closely connected to the depoliticising function need to be mentioned: silencing and naturalising tendencies of myths, which unfold as myths cover the historicity of a certain subject.

Thereby, myths become ahistorical, supratemporal truths. For the case of development, James Ferguson's ethnographic reconstruction of development aid in Lesotho as an 'anti-politics machine' gives evidence of how a mythological concept as development is able to wipe out any political or economic notions of rural development and replace them by depoliticised administrative and bureaucratic procedures (Ferguson 1990).

Deciphering and re-politicising myths is an interpretive and linguistic practice. Although we appreciate Barthes' seminal distinction between 'the signifier' and 'the signified', which become both interwoven in the form of the myth as a semiologic system, we will not pause at this point. While Barthes' semiologic system still follows a clearly defined structure, we prefer a looser coupling that denies the objectivities Barthes' structuralist view is still prone to, and would rather look at the *différance* (Derrida 1972; cf. Cooke, Chap. 4) that is left within the diffuse relationship between significations and interpretations, of which some might be privileged, while others are not. Following poststructuralist discourse theory, we do not aim to 'unveil' myths for the sake of greater 'enlightenment'. Rather we regard myths as manifestations of powerful discursive practice, which we seek to decipher through practices of de- and reconstruction. This being said, Barthes' concept of 'second order semiological systems' proves to be helpful, as it allows carving out at which stage a particular sign is emptied of all ascribed meaning, thereby becoming an empty signifier which can fulfil various of the myth functions Barthes has identified in his work on everyday myths.

Following Bell's elaborations on political myths and on the growing interest in mythology due to increasingly complex and rationally organised societies, we would also claim for the field of international development cooperation that there is a tendency to rewrite political myths in order to 'flatten the complexity, the nuance, the performative contradictions of human history' (Bell 2003, 75). Thereby, myths can play an important and constitutive role for storytelling and can thereby illuminate the political field (Sala 2010, 4), especially due to their ambivalent shape and structure, being partly connected to realpolitik and partly subject to political phantasies and narratives. This ambivalent quality is an important characteristic which allows myths to travel in time and change shape if necessary.

The myth functions Barthes has identified can give further evidence of how myths shape and transcend political actions. For a myth to be successful, various functions need to be exerted, and the myth must be able

to adapt to changing political conditions (Campbell 2002; Sala 2010). For the field of development cooperation, this implies that we are interested in how the myth of development cooperation has changed and travelled.

THE AID EFFECTIVENESS MYTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PARIS DECLARATION

The Paris Declaration emerged in the DAC-context and reaffirmed the DAC's position as a focal actor and agenda-setter in international aid. Following the debates on the 'lost decade' of development cooperation and the future of aid, an international consensus on aid effectiveness was proclaimed in the Paris Declaration, which was endorsed at the DAC's Second High-Level Forum in 2005. It sought to improve aid effectiveness and the way aid is managed, while the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have served as the overall framework of development objectives since 2001. Both the MDGs and the Paris Declaration implied answers to the massive critique and aid fatigue of the 1990s and functioned as high points of international deliberations on aid effectiveness. The five core principles of the Paris Declaration reaffirm generalised thoughts of 'modern' official development assistance (see Table 13.1).

New qualities of the Paris Declaration lie in its integrative role, as it strives to coordinate efforts to make aid more effective. The five core principles are presented as a coherent body of concepts organising social relationships and practices in the field of international development cooperation under the umbrella of ownership and partnership. The OECD-DAC depicts the principles in an aid effectiveness pyramid which implies a hierarchical order of the principles. The ultimate goal is ownership, while

Table 13.1 Core principles of the Paris declaration

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1. *Ownership*: Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption
 2. *Alignment*: Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems
 3. *Harmonisation*: Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication
 4. *Managing for Results*: Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured
 5. *Mutual accountability*: Donors and partners are accountable for development results
-

Source: Adapted from OECD (2005)

harmonisation of donor policies and alignment with recipient countries' strategies are necessary preconditions and processes towards ownership. Managing for results describes the organisation of the overall process along which aid is distributed and development cooperation projects are designed, operationalised, and implemented. Results-based development cooperation puts focus on the outcome and impact of said projects and assumes that while political objectives and norms may vary, the interest in solid results and successful projects can and should be shared by all development partners. In the Paris Declaration, mutual accountability serves as another principle which reorganises the relations between donor and recipient governments. Whilst partner countries are called upon to enhance the role of parliaments and endorse participatory approaches (increasing domestic accountability), from a donor's perspective it is supposed to mean that aid effectiveness endeavours are scrutinised not only by the already well-established OECD-DAC peer-review process but by 'partners' as well.

In a nutshell, the Paris Principles reflect a consensus of the donor community and tell a specific tale of development aid, which is evoked by the language it uses: cooperation, partner countries, harmonisation, ownership, accountability. The careful and universalising composition of these terms, their highly abstract content and the meaning that is ascribed to each of them update the development myth and rewrite it as a myth that speaks of effective aid flows between equals:

Donors and recipients are partners. They participate in an open and transparent dialogue, agree on development goals, share their ideas and thoughts, and hold each other to account. This ensures that development aid is safe, sound and effective. Development aid as such is a normality, a uni-directional transfer without reciprocal exchange.

In a first reading, the function of the aid effectiveness myth is a *harmonising* one. The myth tells us that after the 'lost decade' and the Washington Consensus, the very idea of development aid can be saved from former shortcomings and exuberant ideological aims. Good development aid is possible. Development aid can be objective, result-oriented, and free from contradictions if only donors and recipients commit themselves to the Paris Declaration's norms and operate according to them. Yet harmonisation also means a loss of political alternatives for the sake of an apparent consensus among 'development partners' (Hyden 2008). This

kind of consensus is preventive and pragmatic, as it rules out ideological conflicts over development aid and thereby assumes that a non-ideological standpoint towards development is possible. Furthermore, it works in a functional manner, as it allows for effective aid governance, although the donors' aims and ideologies may differ. Thus, the harmonising function of the myth is also productive inasmuch as it creates storylines which allow political consensus among donors on an abstract level.

Thus, the myth also bears various *depoliticising* notions. The Paris Principles—at least conceptually—move the final decision power over aid flows to recipient governments. Apparently breaking with the long history of clearly identifiable and unequal power relations that pervaded the donor-recipient relationship, the Paris Declaration blurs this understanding of power. Despite the fact that the boundaries between donors and aid recipients remain stable, power becomes a force that is no longer clearly located but is accessible for every actor. In that way, politicised aspects of this relationship, such as the historicity, the inequality of the donor-recipient relationship, and the divergences in interests get obscured as they are replaced by a relationship among equals.

As the myth unfolds, it also creates some *silencing and naturalising effects*. Whether donor countries are motivated by self-interest, e.g. colonial links, geopolitical interests, trade relationships, humanitarian needs (Easterly 2002), and whether these interests stand in contrast to needs and demands of the recipient, is not addressed any longer. Aid thereby becomes a necessity, that is, an almost natural constant of North–South relations, a non-political and ahistorical constant of international relations.

Counterfactually though, we also need to ask for *emancipatory or empowering functions* of this myth. While talking of partnership can in a postcolonial reading imply the denial of material differences, this term could at least be used to demand equal forms of participation and deliberation, which could be claimed e.g. from donors who promote budgetary support. Thus a critical appropriation or subversion of the term seems possible. Also the demand for accountability can, to a certain degree, involve the possibility of articulating discontent with aid. Yet this reading of accountability still takes for granted sufficient capacities of all actors involved—hence the empowering potential of this term seems limited. A compelling example for a subversion of the Paris Declaration's terminology is the case of Bolivia. Here, the claim for ownership was used to partly reverse donor-recipient relations and 're-own' the control over aid policy objectives. Conditionality of aid programmes is prohibited, and all pro-

grams need to pass through the Foreign Ministry. While this—together with action taken on other policy fields—led to the break of US-Bolivian relations, other traditional donors such as Spain kept to Bolivia’s provisions (cf. Wolff 2012; see also McGee and Heredia 2012). To be successful, however, such rereadings depend on certain material and discursive/normative preconditions: strategic alternatives and exit options, robust and interdependent aid relations, sufficient economic interests on both sides, and stable and sound (alternative) belief systems on the recipient’s side, as only then the power to redefine policies can be exerted.

THE BUSAN CONFERENCE: REFASHIONING THE AID EFFECTIVENESS MYTH FOR A POLYCENTRIC WORLD

The fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF 4), which was held in Busan, South Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011, differed considerably from earlier DAC encounters insofar as emerging donors (and civil society organisations, whose involvement and role had already been a central issue at the meeting in Accra 2008; cf. Dany and Freistein, Chap. 12) were incorporated into the preparation of the forum and participated in the various discussions. Being the largest and most diverse donor conference, with over 3000 participants, it represented a momentary end point of an institutional adaptation process (Mawdsley et al. 2013). While the mid-1990s had already given rise to some material and discursive shifts in the aid architecture, with South Korea joining the DAC and with the adoption of ‘ownership’ and ‘partnership’ as aid principles, the DAC had still been able to uphold its discursive hegemony over the meaning and objectives of ‘development’ (Eyben 2013a, 85; Manning 2006). Over the years, however, the DAC had given way to the increasing pressure to ‘invite’ the ‘new donors’ to the negotiation table, which resulted in a diversification of the actors involved.

Notable participants from the global South were Brazil, India, Mexico, and China, who influenced the agenda and negotiation process in a remarkable way. These states presented themselves as unique development partners, whose aim was to strengthen South-South cooperation based on first-hand experiences of colonial heritage and liberation, cultural proximity, close trade and resource exchange boundaries, and being experienced with the role dynamics at the ‘receiving end’ of the aid flow chain. While some ‘emerging donors’ such as Brazil, India, China, and South Africa had signed the Paris Declaration—albeit in their role as recipient

countries—the content and goals of the Paris Declaration were and are of less significance to them as donors, as they do not share the same donor history (and in many cases not even the term ‘donor’) and rejected the blueprint of appropriate development that had been outlined in the Paris Declaration (Sondermann 2012, 2). At the HLF 4 itself, the fracturing of the aid architecture became visible, with unclear alliances and reluctant ‘emerging donors’ who made use of their diplomatic power by only signing the final document at the last minute (see Eyben and Savage 2013 for an ethnographic encounter with the Busan process).

The main outcome of the HLF, the Busan Partnership Document, represents a ‘new and more inclusive’ consensus (OECD-DAC 2011, 1) on the goals and norms of development cooperation, which particularly offers a reinterpretation of aid effectiveness and, in a broader sense, of development as such. While the legitimacy of development cooperation had been a questionable and recurring theme for established donors right from the beginning of the aid effectiveness discourse, the Partnership Document still refers to the older formula of legitimacy by effectiveness but seeks different ways of addressing legitimacy. Thereby it provides a more inclusive idea of legitimate development cooperation. At the same time, the scope of such commitments should be seen with a caveat. The declaration is voluntary by nature, and the southern donors insisted on explicitly noting this in the Partnership Document, thus underlining the non-binding character of all clauses. While not changing the nature and status of the clauses, it again marks a symbolic distance between established and non-traditional donors (Sondermann 2012).

As main commitments entrenched in the Partnership Document, two aspects are worth noting which reflect the changing dynamics of global donor relations and echo the search for a new donor consensus on aid effectiveness.

Search for Inclusive Positions and Appreciation of Difference Throughout the Partnership Document, the signatories to the declaration are viewed as ‘a new partnership that is broader and more inclusive than ever before’ (OECD-DAC 2011, 1). Yet for the first time the document also affirms the meaning of diversity in donorship, donor proliferation, and historically different justifications for development cooperation. Here the document speaks a language of inclusion when telling, for instance, that ‘we recognize that we are all part of a development agenda in which we participate on the basis of common goals and shared principles’ (OECD-DAC 2011, 1).

Also South-South Cooperation (SSC) becomes valued at least as a complement for North–South development cooperation. While the latter is still regarded as main form of development cooperation, SSC is taken as a sideline project that offers ‘additional diversity of resources’ (OECD-DAC 2011, 4). Besides this junior partner approach, the document also appreciates the positive sides of a diversified network of donors, that is, the merits of ‘distinct roles’ or ‘embracing diversity’. Even donor proliferation, which was previously viewed with high suspicion by the DAC donor community (Manning 2006; Naím 2007), now serves as a positively connoted tool for better local ownership of development goals and norms. The Partnership Document values the potential of SSC and triangular cooperation to bring ‘effective, locally owned solutions that are appropriate to country contexts’ (OECD-DAC 2011, 9). Being a donor and aid recipient at the same time is not perceived as a political paradox but as an opportunity to ‘enrich co-operation’ (OECD-DAC 2011, 10) and make use of local expertise.

Broadened Political Agenda and Focus on Results The Partnership Document distinctively aims to create terms and formulas that can be supported by a large number of donors, even if they belong to differing camps in terms of political/ideological meaning and justification/legitimation of aid. Thus, the document highlights in numerous paragraphs the potential and perspectives of ‘sharing’, for example, when talking of ‘shared principles’, ‘shared growth’, ‘shared experience’, or ‘shared lessons’ (OECD-DAC 2011). This is characteristic, as it expresses the search for inclusiveness and tries to operationalise this concept at the policy level. Sharing thus translates to a distinct set of common terms, of which a silencing of the terms aid and poverty reduction in exchange for a more intense focus on results is a remarkable discursive effect. Instead of reaffirming aid effectiveness, the document now speaks of ‘development effectiveness’, thereby making the development discourse more accessible for all those actors who reject subsuming their activities under the umbrella of aid (Sondermann 2012). At the same time, it keeps to the idea of achieving legitimacy through highly efficient and systematically evaluated development policies. As an overarching goal, the document concentrates less on poverty reduction than earlier documents but rather emphasises the goals of economic development, growth, and results-oriented program coordination (cf. Hensell, Chap. 14).

This identification of goals avoids a language of deficiencies and practices of othering, which had been familiar for traditional development relations (Ziai 2004). Furthermore, as ideological positions may vary significantly, its focus on results allows accepting opposing political paths and concentrating on objective, measurable outcomes. Thus, the idea of development cooperation becomes justified mainly by output legitimacy, though at the price of leaving questions of input and throughput legitimacy to the individual concern of the respective donors (Kindornay and Samy 2012). The focus on results-based development is thus able to create a different and (in today's fractured aid architecture) more powerful storyline about development policies, which prevents falling prey to the well-known irritations and misunderstandings that have thwarted communication between Western and non-traditional donors. To focus on development results bears the potential to create neutral terms that allow for consensus building, even if the donors only partially share an intersubjective perspective on development.

So how has the aid effectiveness myth further evolved? In the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), previous tales of aid and aid effectiveness are erased and rewritten using different phrases and a more inclusive and compromising tone. These discursive shifts happen in parallel to spatial and geopolitical shifts which mark the transformation of a 'closed space' (Gaventa 2006) to a negotiation arena which becomes accessible for a variety of actors (cf. Eyben 2013a, b; Eyben and Savage 2013). Basically we can identify two discursive components that reformulate the aid effectiveness myth:

A Tale of Diversity in Donorship This aspect responds to the *changing donor architecture*, while striving for more inclusiveness. It is nurtured by the idea of more inclusive, global development cooperation between development partners who share a common set of principles. It proposes a division of labour for global aid governance that values the roles and achievements of 'emerging donors' while the main responsibility is still located at the established donor club. However, in doing so it composes programmatic roles for 'emerging donors' that build on their local expertise, their spatial and geopolitical position, and their capacities as North–South bridge builders, thereby recreating a kind of dichotomy between donors (Mawdsley 2012).

A Tale of Development Effectiveness This aspect refers to *the concept of development and development effectiveness* as such. While it seeks a broad consensus among Western donors, emerging powers and recipient countries, it promotes a set of terms that are obviously regarded as facilitating consensus building, as they seem to be shared by a broad alliance of donors. Important points of reference are ‘growth’, ‘results’, and ‘effectiveness’. That being said, the concept of development becomes more driven by the growth dogma and is ‘post-aid’ (Haymen 2012, 9) insofar as it seldom mentions aid as the central material source but instead focuses solely on economic and technical cooperation. By now, this allows different readings of development effectiveness. Development effectiveness might for once stand as a synonym for aid effectiveness, albeit with a clearer focus on results, whereas other understandings refer to development effectiveness as a broadened agenda that goes beyond aid, and a third understanding speaks of development effectiveness in order to stress the need to integrate human rights and social justice into the development agenda (Eyben 2013a, 88). Through this variety of possible interpretations, the aid effectiveness myth can become a productive discursive tool for a highly diverse group of actors. Although there exist remarkable incommensurabilities, the myth serves the function of bridging the gaps between the different discourse partners.

A closer look at the refashioned aid effectiveness myth reveals to what extent the reformulations limit discursive space (silencing), whether they open up negotiation arenas and bear productive powers (emancipation), or whether they also entail harmonising and depoliticising functions.

Regarding the tale of diversity in donorship, the *harmonising* function seems to be the most important one. In contrast to earlier accusations of ‘rogue aid’ (Naím 2007) or at least critical perceptions of donor proliferation (Manning 2006), especially with referral to China’s role in the aid monopoly, the refashioned aid effectiveness myth intermediates between the different camps and allows reinventing the DAC as an arena which is characterised by inclusiveness, sharing, and learning. Thereby, the myth becomes *productive* in creating a set of roles for established as well as ‘emerging donors’. While the traditional geography of donor relations is still taken to be the most important one, the material and symbolic power of aid, gift, and giving is dislocated, with ‘emerging donors’ now fulfilling complementary functions. While this ascription is in line with a partial power shift, it also leads to the creation of new dichotomies of knowledge

and capabilities: the established donors still claim the role of ‘development experts’ driven by objectifiable, measurable knowledge, whereas emerging donors are viewed as the ones who can provide localised expertise. This perception of emerging donors creates certain roles and responsibilities, whereas other characteristics of their activities—especially the very material aspects of South-South Cooperation and the ‘knowledge capital’ (Eyben 2013b, 4) attached to this—become less visible. Thus, this new version of the aid effectiveness myth also bears some *silencing* functions that go hand in hand with depoliticising the roles and history of non-traditional donorship.

However, the refashioned myth can also carry *emancipatory* functions insofar as it can be taken as a vehicle in order to make the DAC arenas more accessible to non-traditional donors. How far this function can be carried out depends on the audience, the structure of the negotiation arena, and the way non-traditional donors acquire development discourses and modes of aid governance. At the moment, the careful framing of their roles as ‘participant observers’ (Mawdsley et al. 2013, 35) tells as much about role inconsistencies as it does about the non-adoption of common principles. However, some emancipatory trajectories may lie in the readiness of ‘emerging donors’ to engage with traditional donors, their knowledge-sharing, and the embedding of the GPEDC into reconfigured aid governance structures (Eyben 2013b; Mawdsley et al. 2013).

The tale of development effectiveness also displays a *harmonising function* as it seeks to create a term that serves the interests of different actors. The ability to offer a compromise-building formula comes through the creation of a storyline that is open for differing interpretations and allows overcoming ‘incommensurabilities’ (Yanow 1992), while at the same time it facilitates communication and policy learning among a diverse community of actors. While development effectiveness is in fact clearly operationalised with a set of indicators, it provides at the same time a flexible framework for mainstreaming efficacy, transparency, and results-based management within all fields of development policies. While this is a fairly neo-liberal approach that can be traced back to advanced liberal modes of governance and new public management, such roots (and their implications) play a subordinate role, as first and foremost the harmonising function of development effectiveness represents a crucial and unique strategic achievement for a diversified donor community.

Thus, the harmonising function is closely connected to *depoliticising* notions: The MDGs had already been criticised for their ahistorical and depoliticising tendencies (Ziai 2006), yet they were less influential in creating a universal concept of development. Here, development effectiveness might be more successful, as it systemically broadens the policy agenda as far as possible so that the positivist idea of development as linear, universal, and measurable can be adopted by an even wider community of development actors. This being said, the tale of development effectiveness might also serve *emancipatory functions*, inasmuch as it stresses local ownership of development goals and seems to support a wide understanding of ownership that focuses on local agency, including veto-player options, which is a conceptual evolution/change we can also witness in the post-MDG negotiations. Yet this directly depends on how non-traditional donors and civil society make use of the DAC arena or alternative fora, a question which remains unsolved until today.

The GPEDC opens a new chapter in a story which began more than a decade ago. By bringing developing countries, new donors, and civil society representatives to the table, it represents a break from the DAC-dominated past. Yet it seems that this new beginning might also constitute the end to a more ambitious aid effectiveness endeavour. Broadening the agenda and widening the set of actors has not been met by an appropriate follow-up process to streamline agendas and interests or bridge differences, as the proceedings of the first High-Level Forum of the GPEDC in Mexico in April 2014 showed. Instead, non-traditional donors have kept their cautious attitude, partly politically motivated by the OECD-DAC's continued co-leadership of the process, while DAC donors have—as reviews show—dramatically failed to live up to their commitments. Moreover, it remains unclear and unsolved which role the Busan partnership shall play next to the UN-led ‘global partnership for development’ (which the MDGs had called upon) or the more ambitious ‘global partnership for effective sustainable partnership’, which came out of the preparations of the post-MDG agenda. The Busan Partnership is not a UN process and it seems even more difficult to reconcile the two processes (and also the third stream of debate on ‘Financing for Development’) now that the aid effectiveness agenda has lost its initial narrow but more clearly defined purpose—a process interpreted as OECD-DAC mission creep by UN staff and some countries.

CONCLUSION

This chapter invited readers to take a look at myths of international development cooperation, thereby choosing a perspective that differs in its ontological and epistemological standpoints from many existing studies on development cooperation. We introduced the Paris Declaration as a set of principles which have coined a particular aid effectiveness myth with certain effects on aid discourses, namely through its harmonising, silencing, depoliticising, and emancipatory functions. The follow-up policy process, especially the High-Level Forum in Busan 2011 and the follow-up process in Mexico 2014, give evidence of changing dynamics not only within the donor community but also regarding the norms, goals, and principles that form the legitimacy backbone for development cooperation. They also show, however, that the role of the GPEDC and thereby the power of the refashioned aid effectiveness myths remains unclear.

The perspectives for a more inclusive interlinking of North–South and South–South Cooperation as well as the concept of development effectiveness will shape the ‘near future’ of international development cooperation. They bear the potential to significantly change the international aid architecture and thereby result in forms of shared development governance. The selective opening of the DAC arena might be an important step in that direction, yet it could also mean a phase between two different settings and stories. To regard them not just as policy outcomes displayed in an expert language but as political myths that tell tales about certain actor dynamics as well as about the idea/utopia of development (cooperation) offers the possibility of exploring their potential as carriers of meaning and significance, driven by dynamics of their own.

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Organising Babylon: The Coordination of Intervention and the Denial of Politics

Stephan Hensell

International intervention, be it with the aim of emergency relief, peace-building or development aid, often involves such a multitude of actors that it is hard to get an overview. The intervention machinery is sustained by an amazing number of organisations. Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) with their various separate agencies, a skyrocketing number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and government agencies are present on the ground in crises zones to distribute food, organise elections, or reform the police. The result is a complex, shifting constellation of organisations tied together in local–global relationships.

Organising this ‘Babylon’ of actors has become an issue of increasing concern which is discussed by scholars and practitioners under the heading ‘coordination problem’. The term coordination refers to the attempt to bring together disparate actors in order to make their work more effective. At the heart of coordination are three types of activities: sharing of information, sharing of resources, and joint action (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 117–119). The coordination problem, in turn, refers to the lack of these activities, which is seen to lead to a host of unwanted effects such as the duplication of services or the inefficient use of resources. While the topic of inter-organisational coordination has for a long time been on the

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agenda, urgent calls for more and better coordination have become widespread and are increasingly invoked in a ritualised manner, like a sacred formula. However, putting coordination into practice still seems to be difficult, and the declared aim of more coordination contrasts with the lack of its implementation.

Several works have tried to understand the reasons behind successful or failed coordination, applying various concepts from organisation theory (cf. Jones 2002; Paris 2009; Herrhausen 2009; Gillmann 2010). This chapter seeks to contribute to that debate by interpretatively exploring the coordination problem in intervention. To do so, the chapter builds on sociological institutionalism of the so-called Stanford School.¹ The chapter starts from the bewildering myriad of organisations in contemporary crises and poses the following question: why is coordination so widely supported but seldom implemented?

The central argument put forward here is that the coordination problem reflects more fundamental political conflicts that are, however, disguised by the principle of coordination. The reason for that is that coordination has become an institutionalised rule or ‘rationalised myth’ which is embedded in an institutional environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott and Meyer 1994).² All actors have to support the principle of coordination for reasons of legitimacy. Thus, the rule of coordination is not only incorporated into official statements but also embodied in specialised organisations officially tasked with coordination. However, the principle of coordination is often adopted only ritually by organisations and remains decoupled from their actual activities, which diverge in response to the more fundamental political conflicts that underlie the coordination problem. The result is a ‘denial of politics’ through the downplaying of the political conflicts that are inherent in international intervention (cf. also Paris 2009, 59).

The chapter is structured as follows: In the first section, starting from the theoretical understanding of ‘rationalised myths’ in sociological institutionalism, I develop my central argument that the dense institutional space of intervention is conducive to the rise of the ‘rationalised myth of coordination’. The next section seeks to provide empirical evidence for this thesis by analysing organisational interactions and their effects as they can be observed in current crisis zones of the Global South. It starts with mapping the interveners and their coordination problem and then outlining persistent obstacles to coordination, namely four typical political

conflicts. This is followed by tracing the rise of the myth of coordination in the official statements of major international actors as well as its manifestation in coordinating institutions. I then turn to the case of Albania, where the norm of donor-to-government coordination is widely endorsed in the realm of public sector reform, but decoupled from the actual practice of coordination in the face of the persistent problem of ‘policy slippage’. The final section discusses the implications of the empirical findings.

COORDINATION AS A RATIONALISED MYTH

Early theoretical propositions of sociological institutionalism have been developed in an influential article of John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977). The proponents of the Stanford School start from the assumption that institutions are cultural accounts or rules of how the social world works (Scott 1995, 33, 141–2). In modern society, many products, services, management instruments, and programs have acquired a rule-like status in social thought and behaviour. As classifications built into society, they are templates and prefabricated formulae of organising. Hence, they have become institutional rules or ‘rationalised myths’ in the sense of exemplary models (Eliade 1963, 1). Some of these myths, such as expertise, universalism, restitution, or contract, are very generalised, while others are more specific and may, for instance, describe a particular organisational practice. These myths are imputed with legitimacy based on the assumption that they are rationally effective. Thus, the term myth is not to be understood as a sacred narrative or false belief clung to against all evidence. It is rather a manifestation of ‘widespread understandings of social reality’ (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343). These understandings may take the form of organisational rituals or rules that are taken for granted and supported by public opinion, political agendas, the law, or social prestige (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 341). They are uncontested truths but are also grounded in common expectations. ‘[T]he basic “myths” of society operate primarily by establishing beliefs about what others think and expectations about how others will behave’ (Jepperson 2002, 232). In modern society, increasing numbers of rationalised myths emerge and prevail (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343–4, 347).³

The central assumption of Meyer and Rowan is that rationalised myths which are embedded within an institutional environment have a significant impact on organisations. Organisations incorporate the myths of

their environment in order to gain legitimacy, resources, and stability, with the ultimate goal of organisational success and survival. Hence, the techniques, programs, and procedures of particular organisations are often only manifestations of wider institutional rules which have been adapted for practical purposes (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 340, 343). To give an illustration: institutions define what schools, firms, or hospitals are to look like and what they are to do (Scott and Meyer 1994, 3). Thus, schools as organisations exist not because of their particular effectiveness but because of conformity with institutionalised myths in the wider society, such as the basic idea of what a school is, what a grade is, or what mathematics is (Jepperson 2002, 234).

Moreover, myths have two effects: first, they define new domains of rationalised activity or organising situations, and they indicate the means for handling them in a rational way. In doing so, rationalised myths ‘identify various social purposes as technical ones and specify in a rule-like way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally’ (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343–4). Thus, rationalised myths suggest suitable procedures in order to pursue goals that are often pseudo-technical. Second, myths give rise to practices of loose coupling. Organisations must support the socially legitimated myths but they also have to consider problems of practical activity or efficiency. When these two requirements are in conflict with each other, organisations can create gaps between their formal structures and actual work activity. Loose coupling means maintaining legitimate ceremonial rules while everyday activities vary in response to other considerations (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 356–60).

These notions are also applicable to the subject of International Relations and more specifically to the context of intervention, where the proliferation of actors has led to a plethora of coexisting, overlapping, and interconnected organisations. Theoretically, the interactions of these organisations can be conceptualised according to two basic processes, namely opposition and cooperation (Dillman 1969, 17). Opposition, defined as the struggle of units against each other for a good, goal, or value, can take on different forms such as competition, rivalry, or conflict. In contrast, cooperation can be understood as the joint striving of units in pursuit of the same good, goal, or value (Dillman 1969, 17–20). One special form of cooperation is coordination. These two types of interactions are similar to each other but need to be distinguished. Cooperation denotes the collective and voluntary efforts of actors who are willing to

associate to achieve specific objectives. The notion of coordination builds on the idea of cooperation but in addition refers to conscious and constant efforts in achieving these objectives. Thus, the principle of coordination can be regarded as a more inclusive form of cooperation. Coordination involves executive management, concerted action, and deliberate harmonisation in order to bring together the activities of disparate actors.

In international politics, forms of intervention comprise the whole range of possible inter-organisational relations. Among the multitude of IOs, NGOs, and state agencies, cooperative *and* non-cooperative forms of interactions are equally common. However, the principle of coordination has become the dominant prescription and representation of what these interactions should look like. Coordination is seen by a wide range of actors across different policy fields as the exemplary model of inter-organisational relations. Thus, the principle of coordination can be characterised as an institutional rule which functions as rationalised myth. Coordination has become a rationalised myth in the sense of an uncontested and unquestioned organisational formula that is taken for granted and grounded in common beliefs. The basic assertion of the institutional rule is that coordination among the ever-increasing number of actors will make intervention more rationally effective and operationally efficient. It is thus imputed with legitimacy and seen as fundamental for achieving broader goals such as enhancing aid, development, or peace. Like other policy myths, this is presented as a statement of fact without argument (Yanow 1992, 414).

As a legitimating narrative, the rationalised myth is incorporated into official declarations and statements. Moreover, as myths define new organising situations and suggest appropriate procedures to deal with them rationally, the lack of coordination is primarily tackled in a technocratic way, namely by the creation of a specialised bureaucracy tasked with coordination. However, the myth of coordination also gives rise to loose coupling. The principle of coordination is often adopted only ritually by organisations while the practice of coordination diverges in response to disguised political conflicts underlying the coordination problem. Thus, coordination in intervention features elements of organised hypocrisy, which tends to deny the political dimension of the coordination problem (cf. Brunsson 1989; Lipson 2007; Weaver 2008). The next section provides empirical evidence for these processes.

THE RHETORIC AND REALITY OF COORDINATION IN INTERVENTION

The Coordination Problem and Its Political Roots

Intervention is carried out by a multitude of international and national actors, among which four different types can be distinguished: The first are the IGOs such as the UN or the EU. These organisations combine a collective of states with an administration or secretariat which acts in the name of the organisation and operates offices at a global and at a country level (Bauer and Weinlich 2011). On the ground, the organisations are usually present via a number of separate agencies. Most notable in this respect is the UN with its numerous programs, funds, departments, and agencies which operate independently with separate budgets and staff. The same is true, however, for other collective agents, such as the EU. Second, there are the national and international NGOs. As is the case with IGOs, the largest international NGOs are further segmented into subagencies and act as collective agents. Major aid groups, such as Save the Children, World Vision, Oxfam, or CARE, operate global and country level offices and are divided into multiple and independent national country branches, which act as *de facto* autonomous entities. Most of the large multinational NGOs exist in the form of an international federation or alliance and are characterised by complex corporate structures (Walker and Maxwell 2009, 119–21, 125–6). Third, there are national agencies or ministries, such as USAID or the German GIZ, which act in the name of a particular state and deal with global issues as part of their mandate. A fourth type of organisations consist of national agencies and departments at the domestic level in a crisis region which are supposed to act as local ‘partners’ of the interveners and play an active role as recipients of resources.

While all these actors are rhetorically committed to cooperation, achieving coherence among them has become a challenge and is aptly described as a hopeless endeavour similar to ‘herding cats’ (Crocker et al. 1999). Empirical indicators for coordination, such as agreements on responsibilities, information exchange, joint assessments and planning, common policy goals, or visions on priority objectives, all point to a lack of effective coordination (Jones 2002; Bensahel 2007, 64–7; Herrhausen 2009, 192–3; Paris 2009, 73–5; OECD 2011a, 43–67, 120–36). Thus, coordination problems are widespread. At the field level, the coordination problem exists between the various IGOs and NGOs as well as between them

and the domestic actors. At the headquarters level, coordination problems exist between all the major international actors and the national governments supporting them. Within major IGOs, such as the UN or the EU, there are coordination problems, too, between the various departments and agencies.⁴

For instance, within the UN system, with its long established fragmentation of responsibilities and bureaucratic turf battles, coordination problems can be observed within the UN Secretariat and between the various departments, agencies, funds, and programs (Müller 2010). Similar problems also exist within the EU, where the European Council and the European Commission regularly encounter coordination problems, as both of these bodies have competencies in crisis management and stability operations. The results are frequent clashes and turf wars over areas of responsibility to the point that the Commission has even sued the Council in the European Court of Justice (Bensahel 2007, 61–62). At the operational field level, where organisations implement policies in the form of projects, coordination problems are equally obvious. The combined presence of several UN agencies, other IGOs, NGOs and bilateral donors often leads to a coexistence of political, military, humanitarian, and development actors (Jones 2002; Strand 2005; Cutillo 2006, 24–5). With different mandates and capabilities and reporting to different headquarters, in which responsibilities are equally scattered, the situation quickly produces a coordination problem.

The technical, neutral term of ‘coordination’ refers to managerial aspects and challenges to improve collaboration. However, the existing lack of coordination has its roots in well-known problems that are basically political in character. Persistent political conflicts that are about the power to control resources and to determine tasks continue to hamper coordination. Four of these typical conflicts can be distinguished (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 119–22):

The first relates to threats to organisational autonomy. Agreeing to coordinate means giving another actor greater discretion over one’s own programs and resources. Coordination can impose significant costs because the alignment with other actors requires adjustments in the programming cycle, procurement, auditing, and evaluation procedures (van de Walle 2005, 76). Thus, coordination is seen as a threat to organisational autonomy. This is especially true in the marketised aid sector where NGOs compete for money and contracts. Here, the imperative of organ-

isational survival undermines coordination efforts (Cooley and Ron 2002; Bennett 2000, 171).

The second conflict is related to the lack of task consensus. A workable task consensus involves agreement about the groups to be targeted, the services to be provided, and the technologies to be employed. Resolving a lack of agreement here can require long-lasting communication and negotiation (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 120–1). The lack of task consensus is especially evident in the simultaneous presence of humanitarian, military, and political actors who are involved in the same operations but disagree about strategic objectives such as peacebuilding, development, or statebuilding (Paris 2009, 59–60).

Third, organisations are subject to conflicting requirements from horizontal and vertical linkages (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 121). Agencies have to maximise their budgets. This forces them to generate support for their activities and to satisfy key domestic constituencies and stakeholders. Thus, organisations are interested in the visibility of their efforts and in making them directly attributable to the donors' activities in order to prove success. However, a coordinated effort and collective outcome makes this clear attribution more difficult. This, too, negatively affects the likelihood of coordination.

The fourth conflict relates to local 'policy slippage'. Low administrative capacity is often characteristic of those states that receive foreign assistance. A high degree of politicisation, clientelism, and scarce resources impinge on the quality of the civil service (van de Walle 2005, 96–7). Thus, interveners are often concerned about efficiency, credibility, and trustworthiness when they are supposed to use the partner countries' institutional infrastructures (OECD 2011a, 48–67). When planning and budgeting processes are compromised by patrimonialism, interveners may prefer unilateral action instead of coordination with their host countries.

The persistent lack of coordination can, to a large extent, be traced back to these unresolved political conflicts which have long been known and often been highlighted by academics and practitioners. While all these conflicts indicate that non-cooperative forms of organisational interaction will most likely persist, the unmet goal of coordination is neither declared untenable nor is the coordination rule questioned. Instead, all actors remain rhetorically committed to it and support the rule of coordination.

The Call for Coordination: Incorporating a Rationalised Myth

Calls for coordination have become widespread in different but increasingly related fields. This is true, for instance, with respect to peacebuilding. As early as 1995, the Secretary General of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a Supplement to the Agenda for Peace, devoted a whole chapter solely to the issue of coordination within the UN system as well as between UN agencies, NGOs, and regional organisations (UN 1995, 19–23). The issue was taken up again in 2000 in the so-called Brahimi Report (UN 2000, 8) and in a follow-up report four years later which highlighted the importance of harmonisation with respect to peacebuilding: ‘Effective coordination is critical’ (UN 2004, 61). One year later, the Final Document of the World Summit 2005 emphasised again the need for a coordinated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation (UN 2005, 24), as did the so-called Capstone Doctrine on Integrated Missions issued in 2008 (UN 2008, 69–74). In 2009, the UN once again highlighted the need for better coordination within the UN system and called for a renewed global partnership for all peacekeeping-related activities within the UN through a ‘coordinated effort to optimise the contribution of each’ (UN 2009, 7).

In the field of development aid, calls for coordination are especially pronounced, to the point that ‘one can hardly say “aid” without adding “coordination”’ (Easterly 2002, 240). In the last decade, the coordination issue received considerable attention within the debate on aid effectiveness (cf. Müller and Sondermann, Chap. 13). A series of four international high-level forums sponsored by the OECD established principles related to better aid coordination. The Rome Declaration on Harmonisation in 2003 outlined the broad goals of better donor-to-donor as well as donor-to-government coordination. This was followed and made more explicit by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 (De Haan 2009, 145–8). In 2008, the Accra Agenda for Action reaffirmed the principles of the Paris Declaration and again called upon donors and developing countries ‘to ensure the maximum coordination of development co-operation’.⁵ As a follow up on the preceding declarations, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in 2011 once again reaffirmed the principles of the Paris Declaration and thus renewed the commitment to better coordination.⁶

In the field of humanitarian aid and emergencies, calls for coordination are equally frequent. For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has highlighted the issue in regular and almost ritu-

alised annual statements to the UN General Assembly since 1995. These statements focus constantly on strengthening coordination of UN humanitarian and disaster relief assistance with almost identical phrases, such as: ‘Humanitarian Coordination remains of paramount importance’ (ICRC 1998), ‘The International Committee therefore strongly believes that the strengthening of the humanitarian coordination is of paramount importance’ (ICRC 2000), or ‘The International Committee of the Red Cross... wishes to thank you for giving the opportunity to speak on a subject of paramount importance, namely humanitarian coordination’ (ICRC 2001).

Coordination and related terms such as ‘alignment’, ‘harmonisation’, and ‘partnership’ have become buzzwords in the debate on peacebuilding, development aid, and emergency relief (Rottenburg 2009; Paris 2009, 59). Calls for better coordination can be found in a host of official statements, declarations, and policy papers. Being constantly evoked like a sacred formula by donor governments, IGOs, NGOs, and state agencies, the idea of coordination can be characterised as an institutional rule or rationalised myth. The myth says that improved coordination will result in greater efficiency and effectiveness and is therefore fundamental for success in meeting broader goals, be they peacebuilding, aid, or development. As a legitimating narrative, it has been incorporated into the strategies and policies of a wide range of actors. The political conflicts that are at the heart of the coordination problem, however, are rarely addressed or even mentioned in these official representations. Instead, the typical solution to the lack of inter-organisational coordination is the creation of yet more organisations.

The Rise of the Coordinating Bureaucracy

The task of coordination can be seen as the attempt to rationalise the relations between organisations by agreeing on formal rules and procedures in order to establish a predictable and calculable environment. In the field of intervention, these attempts have often led to the setting up of new institutions. The typical result of putting coordination into practice in the last decade has been the establishment of specialised departments, bureaus, or secretariats tasked with coordination.

This development has been favoured, first of all, by a typical perception among actors that considers coordination as a centralised top-down command structure, whereas *ad-hoc* or consensus-driven approaches have been seen as less favourable (Gillmann 2010, 58). Moreover, the establishment

of special coordination bodies or agencies is seen as necessary to achieve better coordination results. Reindorp and Wiles (2001), for instance, see coordination as a full-time task that requires resources and skilled staff to perform essential functions and services. According to these authors, coordinators need to have sufficient management skills as well as elements of command at their disposal, such as control over funding. Furthermore, coordination needs clear lines of reporting and accountability and a clear structure of competencies, including monitoring capacities, in order to reward good or sanction poor performance (Reindorp and Wiles 2001, 18, 22). Hence, the authors conclude that,

the challenge is to construct a body or structure with sufficient authority to be able to manage and guide humanitarian action—whether directly through a management line of one single humanitarian agency, or through a sufficiently powerful new structure that stands above existing funds and programmes (Reindorp and Wiles 2001, 51).

Many coordination approaches follow such logic of institutionalisation and involve the creation of institutions in the form of councils, commissions, consortia, committees, or umbrella agencies. Typically, the setting up of such institutions includes the establishment of by-laws and statutes, the election of a board, or an executive committee and the establishment of a secretariat which administers a budget, manages the day-to-day activities of coordination, and is answerable to the board (Bennett 2000, 169–74; Strand 2005, 92–3). Moreover, such institutional arrangements often embody a hierarchy, because effective coordination is mostly perceived as requiring leadership by one actor as well as bureaucratic control (Gillmann 2010, 51–61). Current UN approaches at better coordination, such as the Humanitarian Coordinator System or the Cluster approach, are very much based on hierarchical arrangements and can be portrayed as centralised top-down processes, similar to a pyramidal, single-headed structure (Gillmann 2010, 93–103, 173–4). The more actors to be coordinated, the more complex coordination becomes and the more likely the organisational complexity of the coordinating organisation.

A prominent example has been the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the peacebuilding tasks after Dayton were divided among a plethora of IGOs, NGOs, and donors. The establishment of the Office of the High Representative aimed precisely at the strategic and operational coordination of all actors, who were brought together within an unwieldy admin-

istrative framework to implement the Dayton accords (Jones 2002, 90–1; Caplan 2005, 35–7, 179–94). A more recent example is the Peacebuilding Commission of the United Nations, which is designed to bring greater coherence to the myriad activities of UN peacebuilding and is supported by a Peacebuilding Support Office. Another example is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, whose responsibilities encompass the mobilisation and coordination of humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. While NGOs are difficult to coordinate and favour non-hierarchical arrangements (Bennett 2000, 171; Gillmann 2010, 26–7), the same institutionalising tendency is true for larger NGO coordination bodies such as InterAction, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the Inter Agency Standing Committee, or the Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies (Walker and Maxwell 2009, 126–8). Specialised offices serving as focal points for interagency coordination in the field of statebuilding and peacebuilding have also been created at the national level in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada (Bensahel 2007, 43–54). At the operational field level, attempts at coordination have often resulted in the simultaneous establishment of parallel coordinating bodies because of the coexistence of political, military, humanitarian, and development actors in many countries (Jones 2002, 107; Strand 2005, 95–7; Cutillo 2006, 24–5). Thus, the rationalised myth of coordination has not only been incorporated into policy doctrines but is also reflected in the creation of specialised bodies which are especially mandated with coordination.

LOOSE COUPLING IN ALBANIA

Organisations must support the socially legitimated myth, but they also have to consider the political problems that are at the bottom of the coordination problem. And as the conformity to the myth is frequently at odds with political considerations, the ceremonial façade of coordination remains decoupled from the actual coordinating practice and diverges in response to more fundamental political issues. This shall be illustrated in the following paragraphs with reference to the case of domestic coordination in Albania, where the problem of local ‘policy slippage’ is prevalent.

Albania has not only been the least developed country in Europe since the fall of socialism, but its transition has also been marked by upheavals and political instability, culminating in the violent collapse of the state in 1997. In the wake of the turbulent 1990s, a host of IGOs and NGOs

came to Albania to provide aid, enhance development, and rebuild the state. As the number of intervening international and regional organisations has increased, so has the problem of coordination and so have the efforts to tackle the problem. As elsewhere, the result of these efforts has been bureaucratisation in the form of a Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) in November 2005. Being part of the Albanian state and with eight specialised coordinators, the department has been responsible for organising major donor coordination activities. Moreover, its task has been the implementation of an Integrated Planning System (IPS), whose main objective is the integration of all donor-assisted processes in the national planning and budgeting system and greater alignment of external assistance with the strategic priorities of Albania's government. This structure is furthermore supported by the so-called Sector Working Groups. The groups concentrate on information exchange about ongoing projects but also focus on policy coordination issues, prioritisation of assistance, and monitoring of implementation. These Working Groups are portrayed in all official statements of the coordinating department as a very important segment of the coordination structure and crucial for coherent policy coordination (DSDC 2011, 64).

The coordinating bureaucracy has fully incorporated the rationalised myth of coordination. Since its creation, the department has made continual reference in all its documents and progress reports to the aims of alignment, harmonisation, and coordination as well as to the Declarations of Rome, Accra, and Buzan. The same applies to the international organisations, which also continue to uphold the ideal of coordination in their official documents and press releases. The coordinating department, according to its own evaluations, has brought about significant improvements in coordination in several areas. However, the empirical evidence suggests the persistence of political conflicts which remain unresolved and obviously hinder better country-level coordination.

This is especially evident with respect to the major international reform effort, which aims at the modernisation of the public administration. The public administration reform has been a key object of the donors. Since the late 1990s there has been a foreign drive to restructure the state administration, in which international actors such as the World Bank, the EU, the OSCE, the UNDP, USAID, and others were deeply involved. External assistance related to the development of strategies, the drafting of laws, human resources management, and technical assistance. The reform of the administration has been an objective across a very large number of donor

projects (Republic of Albania 2008, 20; Elbasani 2013, 92). However, not much has improved in 15 years. While input to legislation and civil service training still mostly depends on international assistance, the state bureaucracy continues to function in a patrimonial manner (Hensell 2009, 128–62; Elbasani 2013). The public administration remains heavily politicised at all levels and is subject to widespread party patronage, corruption, weak enforcement of rules, and lack of accountability. The state apparatus is continuously seized by partisan interests, while the polarisation between the government and the opposition has led to a reform deadlock (SIGMA 2012, 6–15).

Despite the persistent failure of the externally supported public administration reform, the international and national organisations continue to highlight their successful coordination in achieving these reforms, to which the political class itself is only paying lip service. For instance, the World Bank claims that ‘(t)he IPS exercise is a very good example of donor coordination but, more importantly, it has been an excellent example of Government ownership and leadership in a number of public sector reforms’ (World Bank 2012). At the same time, the DSDC highlights the alignment of the donors to the governmental priority of Public Administration Reform (DSDC 2011, 19, 64).

The rhetorical commitment to coordination, however, is only loosely coupled to its actual practice. This can be illustrated with the respective Sector Working Group, which is part of the coordinating bureaucracy and brings together donors and government representatives working on the reform of the public administration. Although administrative reform is a priority aim according to all official statements, this group has met only very erratically: once in 2008, three times in 2011, and once in 2012, while having a complete break in 2009 and 2010.⁷ Another indicator for loose coupling is the donors’ hesitant use of the Albanian public financial management and procurements systems. Despite the commitment to improve coordination in this area through using ‘partner’ countries’ institutions, donors are very reluctant to rely on the planning and budgeting processes of their host country (OECD 2011b, 2). The continuing patrimonialisation of the state apparatus and the resulting failure of administration reforms are, at least in part, the cause for the actual lack of an effective donor-to-government coordination in the realm of public sector reform. The persistent ‘policy slippage’, however, is denied, while the commitment to coordination is carried forward and all actors collusively reproduce the vocabulary of ‘alignment’ and ‘partnership’.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing aid, peace, or state stability around the world is often conducted by a bewildering multitude of IGOs, NGOs, and state agencies. The dense institutional space resulting from the 'Babel' of these organisations has also given rise to the problem of coordination. While there is undoubtedly a need for inter-organisational coordination, the overwhelming and almost ritual approval of coordination across a wide range of actors and policy sectors cannot solely be explained by a functional necessity. A more appropriate explanation for the wide support of coordination is that this principle functions as a rationalised myth. Organisations are confronted with normative expectations which must be taken into account. In order to be perceived as legitimate, they have to conform to the basic myth in the institutional space of intervention that is the coordination rule.

One central feature of the coordination problem is that it usually reflects more fundamental political conflicts such as competition for resources, disagreement about strategic objectives, or lack of trust in institutions. These issues, however, are rarely mentioned and represented in the coordination game. This is so because of the depoliticising effects of the coordination myth. Rationalised myths define new domains of activity and suggest appropriate procedures to deal rationally with an organising situation. Thus, the usual approach to tackle the lack of coordination has been the creation of coordinating bureaucracies. As a result, political problems are proceduralised or framed by the participating actors in procedural terms, namely as the 'coordination problem' (Paris 2009, 59). This representation is mainly produced by the agencies themselves, because organisations tend to define solutions to problems in ways that favour formal and procedural action—values that legitimise them (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 9). Yet myths also give rise to practices of loose coupling. Though coordination does make sense from a legitimacy perspective, it often does not from a practicality perspective in view of persistent political conflicts. A typical solution to this problem is that the rule of coordination is only ritually incorporated but remains decoupled from actual activities. Loose coupling permits continuing work in the face of contradictory aims between a legitimising organisational rule and unresolvable political conflicts in order to arrive at acceptable results.

Thus, the rule of coordination has become something of a 'happy peace formula' for a consensual approach that tends to disguise more contentious and controversial issues by seeking rationalised solutions through

the technical jargon of coordination. The emphasis on coordination across policy fields can be seen as yet another stage in the global rationalisation of relations among actors. The effect, however, is a denial of the political and conflictive dimension underlying the coordination problem in intervention. Chantal Mouffe has interpreted the attempt at reconciling conflicting interests and values as a post-political vision and a misguided search for a rational consensus. If this is to be avoided, there must be space that allows for contestation and the confrontation of different political projects (Mouffe 2005, 3–4). Acknowledging the deeply political dimension of intervention means that its inherent conflicts also need to be provided with a legitimate form of expression:

We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground (Wittgenstein 1953, 46e).

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NOTES

1. On the relevance of sociological institutionalism for IR, see Finnemore (1996) and Buhari-Gulmez (2010). On the development of sociological institutionalism as a research program, see Jepperson (2002).
2. I use the terms ‘institutional rule’ and ‘rationalised myth’ or ‘institutionalised myth’ synonymously. See the following section for a clarification of the meaning of these terms.
3. For other approaches on the role of myths and organisations, see Brown (1994) and Yanow (1992); cf. Bliesemann de Guevara, Chap. 2.
4. However, these organisations are also special cases as they are multifunctional and need to coordinate internally and externally.
5. Accra Agenda, p. 3. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ACCRAEXT/Resources/4700790-1217425866038/AAA-4-SEPTEMBER-FINAL-16h00.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2013).
6. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/busanpartnership.htm> (accessed July 14, 2013).
7. Data compiled from the Calendar of Sector Working Group Meetings. Available at <http://www.dsd.gov.al> (Accessed May 7, 2013).

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PART III

Reflections

Mythography: No Exit, No Conclusion?

Michael Loriaux and Cecelia Lynch

MYTHS AND MYTHOGRAPHERS IN IR

In lifting out and examining the centrality of myth in International Relations (IR)—and exposing us all as mythographers in the process—this volume forces us to confront in new ways the disciplinary politics of truth and power, objectivity and the limits of knowledge, and the histories and goals of what we do. Our own past work has confronted and exposed myths that wield oppressive power in IR even as they reveal their own weaknesses with every retelling, such as appeasement and isolationism (Lynch 1999), and European nationhood, its emergence from poetic whimsy, and its resistance to ‘trans-nationalism’ (Loriaux 2008). What is to be understood by exposing the prevalence and workings of myth? And how do we become more reflexive in understanding that mythographers are not only ‘out there’ but also imbricated in the very essence of our work as political analysts, commentators, and critics?

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MYTHOS AND LOGOS

The first task is to untangle and examine the aspiration for ‘truth’ through some form of linguistic *coup de main*. The essays in this collection, for example, especially those by Münch, Goetze, Bliesemann de Guevara, Kühn, and Dany and Freistein, raise forcefully the question of the cultural and historical locatedness of the language we use to debate world politics, and its possible ‘transcendence’ in the form of a transhistorical, universal discourse. In other words, they expose the relationship between *mythos* and *logos*, myth as narrative that makes culturally specific norms and conceptual constructions meaningful, and the effort to translate myth into *logos* so as to rise above it, to discern and deploy conceptual thinking that is universalisable. In addition to this relationship, several essays also probe other conceptions of myth, non-narrative and deconstructive (Cooke), myth’s affective and performative aspects in both intentional and tacit, or unconscious, action and belief, and the strategies—especially ontological and methodological—that scholars have used to attack it (Müller, Münch, as well as each of the empirical chapters), as well as the ways that IR as a field of study has tried to avoid it (Bliesemann de Guevara).

The second task is to explore *mythos* and *logos* in more depth. Both convey the idea of ‘speech’. But their derivatives veer in divergent directions. The words derived from *mythos* (*mythizaomai*, *mythikos*, *mythologeô*, *mythographêô*) connote the idea of fable, the escape from truth, or the ‘objective’ or ‘rational’. The words derived from *logos* (*logizomai*, *logikos*, *logistês*) all lean in the direction of calculation and analysis. The observation that much of our thought is governed by ‘fables’ or myths that are part of our linguistic and cultural heritage—either *inherited* or in construction—acknowledges our cultural finitude, our boundedness within habits of thought. It raises the question of transcendence through unbounded and unconstrained reason. Are we the captives of myth? Can we transcend it?

The progressive and optimistic answer to this question was provided by Ernst Cassirer, one of the most influential voices of the neo-Kantian resurgence in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Cassirer introduced a significant innovation into the Kantian scheme by conceptualising the a priori not as fixed but as historically and culturally located and subject to evolution. He treated symbolic forms, of which myth is one, as instances of the imagination’s spontaneous creation of a priori conditions of thought. Symbolic expression creates its own reality. It builds an

objective world that invites and enables growth, exploration, and mastery in specific cultural settings. Cassirer was a pluralist to the extent that he acknowledged that there was no conceptual limit to the array of human symbols that could provide humanity with categories, schemata, and transcendentials. But he remained loyal to the Kantian principle that the symbols of western science claimed metaphysical primacy, standing as they did at the highest stage of productive abstraction.

Transcendentalism is central to Kantian thought. It tells us that the mind is a spontaneous (not reactive) faculty that shapes the experienced world according to forms of intelligibility that it creates and imposes. Culturally located myth and symbol have their origin in the spontaneous, productive imagination. Though they emerge from the finite conditions of human experience, they can achieve objectivity and independence with regard to those same conditions. By this reading, all symbolic systems and the myths that compose them can lay claim to objectivity. They can all lift the human mind from its finitude and enable thought and the sharing of observations. There is no relativism in Cassirer's thought, despite its pluralism. Pluralism is subject to a robust teleology in the form of reason's dialectical advance from myth to modern science. Scientific concept formation is the highest stage of symbolisation. The path from myth to science is one of progress through crises, which are produced by radical ruptures with primitive modes of symbolisation (Cassirer 1953, 1962).

As the chapters by Bliesemann de Guevara and Goetze point out, sovereignty is one of the foundational myths of international politics. While there are a number of ways to treat the mythological status of sovereignty, Jens Bartelson, in *Sovereignty as Symbolic Form*, draws specifically on Cassirer's philosophical anthropology, searching for an answer to the question of how the concept of sovereignty endures in spite of the disclosure of its mythological nature. Despite that revelation, 'arguments to the effect that the meaning of sovereignty is mutable and [historically] contingent are vulnerable to the objection that any actual account of its variation across different contexts must presuppose that this concept has some stable connotations' (Bartelson 2014, 11). Rather than seek that invariability in some essence, Bartelson prefers to see in sovereignty a kind of spontaneously invented concept that facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of modern territorial organisation. Genealogical, historicist, and deconstructive treatments of sovereignty have not freed us from our dependence on the concept. 'If sovereignty is understood as a blueprint for perceiving and organizing the political world, the question

whether it is real or constructed makes little sense...’ (Bartelson 2014, 17). Bartelson (2014, 60) adds: ‘what one contests, one always presupposes and therefore also to an extent de-contests.’ Both citations suggest that there is something conceptually indispensable about the ‘myth’ of sovereignty, that it is somehow difficult or futile to try to imagine the territorial organisation of humanity without it.

Though Bartelson adopts elements of his argument from Cassirer, his tone is also more fatalist. There is no mention of a teleological transcendence that would enable us to envisage a ‘post-sovereign’ world politics. Nor is there any expression of confidence in the mind’s creative spontaneity to invent a successor. On the contrary, the modern mind’s reliance on the concept or myth of sovereignty has endowed the term with remarkable conceptual flexibility, which Bartelson explores in some detail. By flexibility we refer to the transformation of the concept of sovereignty from one that traditionally justified non-intervention to a concept that today withholds or confers recognition by states, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations on other states according to whether or not they conform to dominant biopolitical standards. Bartelson (2014, 87) writes:

Sovereignty is no longer a constitutive attribute of states, or an inalienable right whose ultimate source is to be found within the state. Sovereignty is no longer the prize of successful claims to self-determination or declaration of independence, but rather a grant contingent upon its responsible exercise in accordance with the principles of international law under the supervision of a host of global governance institutions and non-governmental actors who claim to be maintaining the order and stability of the international system on the grounds that this is in the best interest of mankind as a whole.

Bartelson makes no reference to rational teleologies, but prefers the term ‘fetish’ to characterise the myth of sovereignty: ‘the endurance of sovereignty in political and legal theory is due to what I will call fetishism, ascribing inherent powers to inanimate objects’ (Bartelson 2014, 40). Reverence for sovereignty-as-fetish helps us understand how sovereignty-as-myth could lose its basic connotation of immunity from foreign intervention and come to refer instead to the authority of ‘a thousand petty emperors acting on behalf of an imagined international community’, yet still retain foundational importance to any discursive articulation of world politics (Bartelson 2014, 87). Several authors in this volume echo

this observation by noting that our status as mythographers trumps our attempts at critique. Mythography can reproduce the myth of sovereignty. It can endow the word with meaningfulness as the world changes around us.

Bartelson's fatalism duplicates Cassirer's own philosophical and political disappointment regarding the capacity of myth—specifically the myth of the state, race, and fate—to resist reasoned inquiry and be co-opted by the crude and historically fallacious 'theorizing' found in Nazi doctrine (Cassirer 1961). Cassirer attributes that resistance to twentieth century philosophy's disavowal of Enlightenment ideals. Bartelson attributes the survival of a mythical concept to the ease with which neoliberalism co-opted the myth of sovereignty into its project of governmentality. In this way, we can also see the mythological production of related concepts of 'the international community' and 'civil society' that have taken hold in our contemporary neoliberal imaginary, and which legitimise the alleged problematique of intervention in the context of sovereignty by constructing the myth of successful 'coordination' (see chapters by Kaczmarek, Dany and Freistein, and Hensell).

Both Cassirer and Bartelson express frustration at the tenacity of the conceptual 'line' that divides 'provincial' myth from cosmopolitan transcendence (Cassirer) or cosmopolitan scepticism and the search for new possibilities (Bartelson). R. B. J. Walker, in a book that examines specifically the surprising longevity of the provincial, notes that lines—political, temporal, and spatial—that separate provincial myth from transcendent moral insight, or subjugation from future emancipation, or politically organised territories from their neighbours, become agonistic sites. In this volume, the chapter by Müller and Sondermann does similar work, noting the agonism—and taming—of 'aid effectiveness' with the incorporation of new players who are both donors and recipients of aid. For Walker, though, both adepts and critics of conceptual or temporal transcendence meet at the 'line' or frontier, populate it with arguments, and thus inscribe it more visibly, controversially, and emotionally, in political and academic debate. The frontier to be outstripped becomes instead a frontier to be settled, a *maquiladora* of academic publication and punditry. Our ability to imagine novel forms of political organisation will therefore depend on our willingness to understand 'boundaries, borders, and limits' as 'complex sites and moments of political engagement rather than as lines that merely distinguish one form of politics here or now, and another form of politics there and then' (Walker 2010, 6). We have to acknowledge that the

line that separates provincial, culturally and historically located myth from universal reason (or endless deconstruction) becomes a 'site of a mutual production' as a result of its colonisation, and that 'much of what is interesting about it concerns the very active and diverse practices of mutual production that are enabled once the demarcation has been made' (Walker 2010, 73). Walker (2010, 95) invites us to develop 'other ways of thinking about lines', an invitation that also runs through many of the chapters in this volume. By this reading, the critical interest in 'provincial' myth brings arguments to the 'line' so as to unsettle, destabilise, and relativise dominant and common sense constructions of the world, and thus inspire and enable the imagination to conceptualise rival worlds of possibility. In Walker's reading, provincialism is not transcended, but political debate is enriched, and new possibilities are discerned. As Walker (2010, 244) observes, 'much of what is of interest about modern politics effectively works *within* lines rather than on either side of them.'

Yet as contemporary debates about militarism, civil society, and aid effectiveness demonstrate (see chapters by Millar, Finlan, Dany and Freistein, and Müller and Sondermann), working within the lines to keep modern politics interesting continually runs up against universalising attempts to shut politics down. The activity that occurs at the conceptual line separating provincial myth from universalising theory need not be limited to unsettling, relativizing, and imagining, however. It can also be a site of casuistry. Casuistry, the value and relevance of which was defended by Stephen Toulmin in the 1980s, and which has seen a revival in the study of religion in IR (Lynch 2009), invites us to embrace the complexity of the singular case so as to complicate and contest the value of the distinction between provincial myth and universal theory or universal good (Toulmin 1992; Jonsen and Toulmin 1990). Interpretation of the singular case, especially one that appears to be 'new', unforeseen, or the result of crisis, requires much labour, including reconsidering and possibly reformulating the normative guidelines provided by the mythological constructs that govern moral action. Just as no law applies to the facts of a case unambiguously and fairly, no theory and no myth bring light to some event in a way that 'does justice' to the complexity of values, ambitions, and normative constraints that conditioned or caused it. The distinction between the mythical construction of the world and the demands of transcendent reason may be clear from a high altitude, but the distinction all but disappears as we descend and try to make sense of history's details. Even the line separating modernity from postmodernity,

with which casuistry is sometimes associated, becomes muddled by the historical complexity of the singular ‘case’. From this perspective, the line of separation is itself ‘located’. It is located at (mythically) high altitude, toward which our theoretical ambitions strive. As we forsake that altitude, however, we discover in casuistry a less ‘violent’ model of agonism and negotiation ‘across lines’.

Not dissimilar in spirit is the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004). The word hermeneutics signifies the effort to translate or otherwise make sense of an idea or action that occurs in a ‘provincial’ universe of discourse and values that is foreign to the reader. This is a task that Yanow has taken up in much of her work on policy mythologies and meanings (Yanow 1999, 2003; see also foreword to this book). Gadamer emphasises the importance of ‘prejudice’ to that effort. Gadamer (coming from phenomenology) differs from Cassirer (coming from neo-Kantianism) to the extent that he makes no allowance for spontaneous leaps of intuition that create new conditions of possibility for the advance of knowledge. That perspective is itself culturally located and is itself a source of prejudice. We cannot therefore discard prejudice in favour of some transcendent perspective. The ambition to do so is an illusion. Hence, from the Gadamerian perspective, the ‘line’ that Walker alerts us to is not one that separates provincialism from cosmopolitan reason, but one that locates mythologies on either side. Gadamer invites us to try to make sense, interpret, and understand thinking that is foreign to our own so as to become aware of the prejudice that simultaneously inhibits us from interpreting but nevertheless makes interpretation possible and necessary because of the foreignness that it inscribes in the text of the other. The interpretive effort brings prejudice to light and ‘transcends’ it in a modest, bounded sense, by introducing us to ‘foreign prejudices’, that, however ‘prejudicial’, open us up to new worlds and new perspectives. Our prejudicial, provincial horizons ‘fuse’, providing us with a broader array of concepts, values, and articulations with which to engage political life. The line that separates the allegedly provincial from the allegedly universal becomes a line not of agonism and dispute but of mutual enrichment. By Paul Ricœur’s reading, Gadamer’s hermeneutics invites agonism, not with the other, but with the prejudice that prevails prior to the interpretive exercise. Ricœur uses Gadamer to outline the contours of a resolutely critical hermeneutics that opens productive possibilities as yet unforeseen (Ricœur 1981).

Walker’s image of a line that is simultaneously frontier and site of mutual production is possibly most effectively explored through the

thought of Jacques Derrida and of those whose writing has been influenced by Derrida, including Judith Butler, Marc Crépon, and Emmanuel Levinas (whose writings in turn also had an influence on Derrida's own thinking). In addition to the insights provided by Robert Cooke (Chap. 4), two ideas are relevant here. The first is the deconstruction of the self, the radical interrogation of the autonomy, sovereignty, and coherence of the self that undergirds so much modernist thought, and which remains a core but uninterrogated assumption in the overwhelming majority of writings on world politics. The deconstruction of the self follows logically from the observation that language 'works' interrelationally. Words assume meaning in relation to other words with which they share a context, whether immediate (sentence, paragraph, book) or literary (one's education) or even broadly cultural (common sense and its critics). This interrelationality confers a palpable unsettledness on language by continually enabling variety in meaning and interpretation. The meaning of the self is affected not only by this unsettledness, but by the fact that otherness colonises the context from which meaning is derived (forever provisionally). Selfness and otherness are mutually constitutive, locally, and provisionally. The other is inscribed in the self. Other, self, and line of separation are all inscribed mutually, interrelatedly, precariously, locally, and provisionally.

The second idea that issues from this Derridian perspective is that of justice as hospitality. Because deconstruction applies to language, to its interrelatedness and instability, hospitality that occurs without linguistically expressed preconditions and reasons cannot be deconstructed. Hospitality thus provides us with a primitive, structural image of justice. Hospitality thus understood is the condition of possibility of deconstruction, and therefore of our deliverance from provincialism through deconstruction. Justice 'at the line' effaces the line, as hospitality 'across the line' unsettles the language that inscribes the line. It enables the ethics of play that Cooke (Chap. 4) enjoins. In so doing, justice and hospitality unsettle both *mythos* and *logos*. Both are spoken. Both 'provincial' *mythos* and 'cosmopolitan' *logos* participate, as language, in the corruption or denial of justice. Both indulge in what Levinas calls 'thematizing', to which he opposes the 'infinite' openness to the other (and, Derrida adds, to the deconstruction of self and other) that is hospitality (Derrida 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001a, b; Levinas 1969, 1998, 2003, 2006; Crépon 2013, 2012; Butler 2005).

Interrogating the deconstruction of the self in conjunction with justice and hospitality returns us to the limits of transcending provincialized/universalising mythology and our status as mythographers, and to the possibilities that might be opened by acknowledging these limits along with a reinvigorated commitment to deepening our understanding of the liminal politics at play. To discern and bring to light the mythical conceptualisations and articulations of political life is to express scepticism regarding the universalist pretensions that we find so readily in the study of international politics, perhaps more readily than in any other discipline of the humanities or social sciences. But to discern myth is also more than that. It is an invitation to interrogate horizons, lines of separation, and prejudice in a way that ‘blurs the lines’ and opens the imagination to new worlds of possibility. Scepticism and hope, then, are not necessarily antagonistic (cf. Cooke, Chap. 4) but can be understood as constitutive of the agonism that this book seeks to recover.

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