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Abstract

The paper draws from narrative theory to establish a cleared understanding of what we mean by narrative and how it may help us to understand social phenomena. It argues that the recent interest in narrative in the social sciences has emphasized narrative content but not necessarily narrative form. The paper argues that narrative form can help us understand how political actors understand and shape the social world. It can also help us understand why some narratives are more successfully in shaping social world will others are not. It does this by looking at political myth in transnational governance. More specifically, it looks at the European Union's foundational myth and its limited success in establishing a cognitive and normative map that gives meaning to governance in the EU.

Introduction

"Everybody loves a good story". This is a phrase that is heard in many languages and in many different contexts. Some would argue that stories are the basis of human communication and even social organization. It is not surprising, then, that in some languages, the same word is used for "story" and "history"; that is, that there is a single way in which we make sense of how societies come together and develop over time. They are present in practically every social relation and form of communication. As Roland Barthes argues, "narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (Barthes 1977 [1966]:79). Moreover, narratives are social acts, involving a series of relations that define social spaces and borders (Eder 2006:257). The telling of stories provide one of the ways of establishing who is included in a particular community and why. Moreover, narratives help establish and shape the "forms of normality" during and after periods of crisis and change (Eder 2006:258).

The Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce claimed, "[W]here there is no narrative, there is no history" (Croce 1951:26). What Croce was getting at, I think, was that stories create order to what otherwise seem like a random series of events. There is no other way to present historical accounts – and we can add the social sciences here – other than as narratives. Narrative, then, can be a useful tool if we want to understand how societies constitute themselves, create order and decide what needs to be done, how and why. Many have argued, including those who are part of what we would call the narrative turn in the social sciences, that all accounts that seek to create order of events are narratives.

But if all accounts are narratives, then nothing is a narrative. We need to begin to make sense of what we mean by narratives, what they do and how we can use them to make sense of social relations, whether this is in small communities or in transnational relations.

In this paper, I would like to do three things. First, I want to provide a brief discussion of what we mean by narrative in general and, very schematically, what we can derive from literary and narrative theory that might be helpful to us in the social sciences. I want to argue here that we have paid a great deal of attention to the content of narratives, but perhaps not enough to the form. Second, narratives are important in transnational relations (and not only) because they provide ontological security. They define actors and give them agency. I use ontological security as a way to assess if and how narratives are successful. It is not the only way to assess

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narratives and might not even be a useful way. But I want to highlight the point that in the same way that literary theory has tried to find ways to assess why some narratives "work" and others don't, we need to have ways to assess narratives in transnational governance and social phenomena more generally. Third, I want to illustrate the first two points by examining a specific form of narrative, illustrating how we might understand it using some of the frameworks we can draw from the first point to see how narratives can (or cannot) provide ways in which we might understand how forms of governance can gain the capacity to act and to do so with authority.

Narration, Narratives and Social Action

The social sciences, and we can add history here as well, have tended to ignore narratives – this was something that was best left to literature and literary criticism. When references were made to narrative, it was normally in the form of how we can understand social relations by reading Shakespeare or Dante. We have a version of this with the recent proliferation of references to how the popular series *Game of Thrones* might be useful to understand international relations or *The Hunger Games* late capitalist society. In international relations, we also have examples of authors who have looked to different forms of literature to gain understanding of the international system. For instance, Charles Hill's*, Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft and World Order*, is a panoramic look at how we can find in literature an understanding of everything from the emergence of diplomacy to the construction of states (Hill 2010). A different example comes from Debbie Lisle's, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Lisle 2006) which looks at how travel narratives not only captured but also contributed to colonial and post-colonial relations.

I cite these examples neither because they are exhaustive nor even representative but to begin to illustrate the different ways in which we understand narratives and narration in general, but especially in the social sciences. In the case of Game of Thrones or The Hunger Games, narratives are used as metaphors or even parables for the organization and use of political authority, for creating order in social relations and for dystopic consequences when power is not checked or order not maintained. In the case of *Grand Strategies*, narratives are used to illustrate the ways in which the questions of political order in the international system and in society have always been present and have been understood through literature. Implicit in this is the idea that fiction and literature might be a better way to understand international

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relations than social science research. Lisle's approach is different. Not only does she take texts that are explicitly narrative, she also uses narrative to understand them.

This brings me to my first main point; that is, the narrative turn in the social sciences provides a useful lens with which to understand but also construct social phenomena. However, we need to be more precise about what we mean by narratives and narration if we want to grasp the potential that the turn offers.

There has been a sort of narrative "turn" in the social sciences, perhaps partly as a result of a renewed interest in the role of ideas in shaping social order (Boswell 2013; Czarniawska 2004; Franzosi 1998). We need to recognize that there are at least two ways in which narrative has been used in this narrative turn. First, narrative is seen as the basis of social life in that it is the way in which social actors make sense of the world (MacIntyre 1981:128-130). They use various narrative techniques to give order to events, actors and processes that otherwise might seem to operate randomly. The social actors are, in effect, story-makers and story-tellers. For instance, the literature on "framing" in sociology and policy studies is very much about how actors look to narrate a series of events so as to construct a desired outcome. *In this first usage, narrative is part of the ontology. We study narratives for us to get a sense of how the social world is constructed.*

Second, narrative is not just a way in which actors make sense of the world but it also is how observers make sense of social phenomena (Czarniawska 2004:118-125). The emphasis here is on observers of construct social phenomena by using narratives. According to this view, social sciences are also forms of narrative, including positivist accounts. The argument is that the sequencing of events is a narrative construction. In this second usage, narrative is a heuristic tool that we use to understand how the social world is constructed. In this instance, the observer is the story-maker and the story-teller. We could include, for instance, discursive institutionalism in this category. Another good example is Timothy Ruback's article in the British Journal of Politics and International Relations, in which he looks to how particular qualitative methods such as process-tracing are infused with all the advantages and limitations of nineteen-century narratives (Ruback 2010).

Of course, these two usages are not mutually exclusive. In both instances, narration involves what Hayden White referred to as emplotment, that is, looking for ways in which to create structure in what is seen or reported (White 1973). Along these lines, policy-makers "emplot"

events so that they can serve to bring about the changes they desire. Events are not important until social actors give them meaning and use them for their ends.

But the narrative turn, in its different forms, begs the question of what is a narrative. In simple terms, a narrative is the written, visual or spoken account of events or phenomena, connected in some sort of chronological order (Czarniawska 2004:17). The accounts have characters, usually a protagonist and an antagonist, as well as a setting (Bal 2009). What is important to underline here is what defines a narrative is not the content – this often distinguishes between different types of narratives (e.g., travel narratives, children's stories, biography…) – but the form. Narrative is above all else a structure or a form in the construction of events. Narratives assemble actors, actions and events in a way that makes their unfolding comprehensible and gives them meaning (Ricoeur 2010). Their success depends, in part, on the extent to which those who hear or read the stories recognise how they have been arranged (Bal 2009). The classic narrative form is Aristotle's three-part structure, with a beginning, middle and an end, which has been the basis for understanding of the narrative form since the neo-classical revival of the late Renaissance. Most texts on narrative use Gustav Freytag's pyramid (1863) or five-stage narrative. Like Aristotle, he identifies a beginning, essentially an introduction or exposition that has an inciting moment which disrupts the existing status quo. This trigger is followed by rising action in which the protagonists face an intensifying number of conflicts and tensions that come to a head in the third part, the narrative's climax; this is the peak of the pyramid, the point of greatest tension and provides a decisive turning point. Then follows the dénouement or falling action in which the consequences of the crisis or critical juncture play themselves out between the protagonists and the antagonists, leading to the fifth stage of the narrative arc, the resolution or conclusion in which a new order is established.

Plot, then, is central to the notion of narrative. Plots also involve some sort of change in equilibrium, which the ordering of the account helps to understand (Todorov 1977:100-115). Tzvetan Todorov highlights the five basic stages of a narrative (Todorov 1971:39):

1 . A state of equilibrium at the outset

2 . A disruption of the equilibrium by some action

3 . A recognition that there has been a disruption

4 . An attempt to repair the disruption

5 . A reinstatement of the initial equilibrium.

However, the traditional notion of narrative structure is concerned primarily with plot and the sequencing of events, usually with a single focus. More recent critiques have tried to look to ways in which there can be dual or multiple focus within the same narrative (Altman 2008). More importantly, this traditional approach to narrative is largely agnostic about characters and actors. It is action that drives the narrative not the characters, as they are simply vehicles. However, action also requires characters who can change the narrative arc. For example, if we think of how different actors playing the same character in a play can change our understanding of the narrative, we can see how action alone cannot define narratives. As Rick Altman argues, "Narratives are made from characters acting".

Narratives, then, have all the elements for us to understand social phenomena: context or setting, action, characters, the need to sequence events and actions. Yet, how do we assess what is a useful narrative from one that is less so? I think we need to begin to integrate some of these elements of narrative theory then with other conceptual tools to address the questions we want to explore in our own research. In doing so, we need to make the distinction between the content and form of narratives along with the functions that they may serve, for the story-teller, the observer and the audience.

I now want to turn to the second part of my presentation and to look at a specific use of narrative in trying to understand a transnational phenomena such as European integration. More specifically, I have been looking at the question of political mythology.

Political Myth and Ontological Security

The term "myth" used to denote how the "reality" is distant from the narratives used to describe it. Setting aside how the same can be said about this distance with respect to the EU member states, myth has a much more important use as a concept. Myths are distinct narrative forms in that they are sacred narratives that are repositories of a collective representation of values, beliefs, aspirations, finality, ideals and attitudes (Bouchard 2014:38-42). Political myths provide a cognitive and normative map for understanding and making

appropriate why a political community has come together as well as what is done in its name (Bottici 2007; Flood 2001).

The issue is, then, not whether myths provide an accurate reflection of reality but whether narratives become sacred and are used effectively as normative and cognitive maps that define and give meaning to a political community. The question is not whether or not that there is a form of European identity or belonging, with its attendant narratives, symbols and collective memory, but that there is a diffused subjective understanding that it would be right if it were so. Moreover, a successful political myth is a sacred narrative that helps a political community define who, more than what, it is.

There is a significant and growing literature on political myth but relatively little that helps us understand why some narratives are more successful than others in assuming the characteristics of a political myth. A notable exception is Gérard Bouchard, whose "sociology of myth" tries to set various stages in the myth-making process. He divides it into three essential stages that lead myths to distinguish themselves from other narrative forms: diffusion, ritualisation and sacralisation (Bouchard 2013; Bouchard 2014). In the first, a range of actors, including cultural elites, public intellectuals and academics, emplot events in a narrative form, giving them a structure that is understandable and consistent with existing collective representations. In the second phase, these narratives become part of social life and the basis for decisions about collective action. The narratives become political myths in the third phase when they assume a sacred quality, defining the basis for the political community. To question the myth is to raise doubts about the very identity and existence of the political community. Some of the conditions that lead to this sacredness include: a coherent definition of the community, including but perhaps not necessarily its territory; adaptability that also comes from a diversity of meanings; the ability to leech or build from existing myths; the invention of adversaries; symbolic representation of the myth (Bouchard 2014:137-152). Myths do not lend themselves to multiple focus narratives as they aim at simplicity. The objective is to simplify cognitive and normative terrain of social organisation, they cannot allow themselves to be interpreted differently and for there to be any ambiguity about the lesson that they are meant to impart.

It is not just the content but also the form that narratives take that helps determine the extent to which they can become effective normative and cognitive maps. Whether or not political myths resonate with citizens is also partly determined by whether they are in a narrative form

that is recognisable and understandable. The classic narrative form is Aristotle's three-part structure, with a beginning, middle and an end. Gustav Freytag's pyramid (1863) or five-stage narrative arc provides a useful structure for understanding how political myths are constructed as stories. Like Aristotle, he identifies a beginning, essentially an introduction or exposition that has an inciting moment which disrupts the existing status quo. This trigger is followed by rising action in which the protagonists face an intensifying number of conflicts and tensions that come to a head in the third part, the narrative's climax; this is the peak of the pyramid, the point of greatest tension and provides a decisive turning point. Then follows the dénouement or falling action in which the consequences of the crisis or critical juncture play themselves out between the protagonists and the antagonists, leading to the fifth stage of the narrative arc, the resolution or conclusion in which a new order is established.

Successful political myths make the world understandable because they have a clear narrative arc that leads to a resolution that has an equally clear normative message. For instance, in many European states, the resistance to Fascism during the Second World War remains an important political myth with a clear narrative structure. The inciting moment was the emergence of fascism in the interwar years, leading to rising tensions and the critical turning point of war. It was the social and political forces of the resistance that led the struggle to defeat fascism and to construct a new order in the aftermath of war. The audience accepts the resolution, which is the legitimacy of the post-war settlement, in part because it understands how the story unfolded to this point. More broadly, the sacred narratives of the state and nation provide the audience with a clear picture of who the protagonists are and the forces they are up against, as well as a very clear resolution to the conflict. As will be illustrated below, the sacred narratives of the EU do not have the same clear post-crisis trajectory, although they are often based on the same pre-climax pattern.

Political myths serve a number of functions, from helping to establish political legitimacy to ensuring continuity of institutions (Schőpflin 1997). They also can serve to provide ontological security for a polity, including the EU. The debate about the *sui generis* nature of the EU centres primarily on *what* it is – confederal, post-modern, compound, federalising, etc. – more than on who it is and why. However, as a social and collective actor, the EU may also seek out ontological security; that is, practices, routines and narratives that help define who it is and why it remains as a political community (Mitzen 2006a; Steele 2008). Drawing from its use by Giddens and international relations scholars, ontological security refers to a sense of

confidence of one's identity (Berenskoetter 2014; Giddens 1991; Mitzen 2006c). Giddens claims that ontological security, "[r]efers to the confidence that most humans beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1990:92). Ontological security claims that social actors need basic trust in the continuity of the factors that give them their sense of identity in order for them to have agency, to set objectives, define interests and act strategically. This continuity is rooted in habit and routine (Giddens 1990:98) as well as in the stability of the environment that defines an identity. Scholars of international relations have extended the concept to argue that states seek security in ways that ensure a consistency in the narratives and stories they tells about who they are, what they do and why. Narratives, including political myths help provide this confidence. They provide a way to sequence events and the environment so that social actors can make choices in the face of uncertainty, rooted in the familiar and the understandable.

While political myths have been very much part of the nation-building experience, they have been not received a great deal of attention in trying to understand the European Union until very recently (Bostanci 2013; Bottici and Challand 2013; Della Sala 2013; Obradovic 1996). Perhaps this is because myths have been associated with meta-narratives of "thick" forms of belonging such as state and ethnicity. However, if we accept that narratives – that is, the ordering of events with a beginning, middle and end (Bal 2009) - are important not only for creating a political community but also for how we understand the organisation of that community and the basis on which it is governed (Somers and Gibson 1994; Somers 1994), then we can look to European stories, including political myths, as ways of examining what the EU does, why and whether this fits into cognitive and normative schemes that make it understandable (cfr: Nicolaïdis and Howse 2002) and "ordinary".

Foundational Myths

A feature of the argument that the EU is a *sui generis* polity is that we cannot use the same concepts and heuristic tools, including political myths, that have been applied to the modern Westphalian state (Bottici and Challand 2013:5). Without entering into the merits of the debate over the *sui generis* nature of the EU, we will argue that in least one instance, the case of foundational myth, the EU is not so different from the modern state. The literature on the construction of modern states has pointed to a number of common political myths. These include foundational sacred narratives about the birth or re-birth of the political community,

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those of a territory or political space, of a civilising mission, of trials and sacred narratives centred on military values and qualities (Schőpflin 1997:28-34). While it would be hard to argue that there have been narratives of the EU related to military conquest, many of the other types of political myth associated with the EU are present in one form or another (Della Sala 2013).

Political communities have their etiological or foundational myths: stories that recount how and why the political community was formed; as we will see below, the EU is no different in the attempt to weave a sacred narrative of its creation. Foundational myths "explain the present in terms of a creative act that took place in the past" (Tudor 1972:91). They seek to provide a story that places the political community within an arc of history and political development, providing it with a defining moment when it realised its destiny to change history. As in classical mythology, the hidden or guiding hand of destiny that led to the creation of the nation and the state is often present. The foundational myth has its heroic figures that possess some extraordinary quality – great courage or vision – but are still very much human and identifiable with "ordinary" citizens. Foundational myths tend to highlight the emergence of political order from "Chaos", the mythical darkness, and to put an end to it. Myths weave tales that link the founding moment with a broader universal category that is more inclusive for later generations. Thus, common ancestry is not necessarily only one of blood but of a shared commitment to a universal value, such as freedom and authority in the United States; ideology and culture, then, can play just as much a role in foundational myths as does genealogy (Smith 1999:56-57).

These cosmogenic narratives are often contrasted to what Henry Tudor called "eschatological" political myths; that is, sacred narratives that look to the end of things rather than the moment of creation. While classic eschatological myths may have had apocalyptic undertones, modern political myth tends to have presented the two as being much more complentary; this is especially the case, as we will see below, with the European Union. As Tudor argues, in these types of myth, "The old order is abolished and the new order comes into being, but the world as such remains" (92). More specific to political myth, the "creation of things" is, implicitly or explicitly, a counter-myth to usher in a new order. For instance, the modern notion of sovereignty as the basis of the international system is traced to 1648, with Westphalia marking the end of the fragmentation of political order (Krasner 1999). There

The European Union may represent a form of governing different from the nation and the state, but this has not meant that it has been spared the attempt to create a repository of political myths that give it meaning. Historiographical debates have emerged in recent years as to whether or not the EU is ahistorical; that is, does the EU need a repository of historical memories to provide it with legitimacy, as is the case with the nation-state? Whether or not there is a repository, it is clear that there have been concerted efforts to "imagine" Europe through historical memory and myth (Bottici and Challand 2013) and that historians have been part of this process (Calligaro 2013; Ifversen 2011). Interestingly, while the EU tends to eschew the grand narratives that are part of nation-building (Calligaro and Foret 2012), we can nonetheless identify in its own genesis many of the different types of political myths that have been part of national projects. These have ranged from sacred narratives that trace why and how the EU was created to accounts of its exceptionalism, suffering and redemption, its missionary role, of its transformation and renewal and of a territory or political space. While the content may not be always that of the political myths of the nation and the state, the form is similar.

Europe's Foundational Myth

There is some debate as to whether the EU has a foundational myth. The clearest position in this respect is taken by Daniela Obradovic, who argued that the EU lacked, "the tangibility and intelligibility that would enable it to capture the imagination" because it did not have a foundational myth (Obradovic 1996:196). Obradovic sees the lack of a meta-narrative that defines the "birth" of Europe as a sign of a missing mythological discourse in the EU. She sees this as a fundamental stumbling block for the EU's attempt to establish itself as a legitimate polity. This perhaps overstates the importance for legitimacy of such a clearly defined starting point based on a common historical memory, conflating all mythical discourse with a foundational narrative; and understates the complex ways in which mythological discourses are constructed, diffused and ritualised so that they become sacred narratives. Recalibrating both the nature of the EU's foundational myth as well as the process of myth-making may give us a better way to understand the evolution and role of the EU's foundational myth.

Obradovic's argument is similar to Monserrat Guibernau's claim that the EU has not generated an emotional attachment and identity on the part of its citizens (Guibernau 2011). However, others challenge this view and argue that the EU is developing something akin to a thick form of belonging, through "banal" forms of nationalism that help make the EU part of the daily

lives of its citizens (Calligaro 2013; Cram 2009). Others claim that the narratives that are being weaved about a European identity are beginning to resemble those of conventional forms of nationalism, including foundational myths that are at the base of a collective memory about the ravages of war and, paradoxically, nationalism (Wellings and Power 2015). Like Obradovic, Wellings and Power argue that this search for a foundational myth results from the need to establish legitimacy for a new form of sovereignty. They conclude, differently from Obradovic and even Guibernau, that it is the memory of war and the EU's role in bringing an end to conflict that can invoke an emotional attachment to the integration project that can help the EU overcome its legitimacy crisis.

We can begin to understand the EU's foundational myths as part of a process of establishing its ontological security, which might provide a more useful lens than trying to establish its link with legitimacy. Arguments about ontological security allow us to steer clear from the difficult question of trying to establish the terms of legitimacy, made even trickier in the case of the EU's particular institutional ambiguity. Rather, the focus is on the extent to which actors are confident that their ordering of the social world remains intact and provides useful maps to guide their actions. Foundational myths are useful in this respect in that they provide the starting point for a narrative arc that emplots events in a way that can help address the questions of who is the community and why it acts. For instance, the root of how the EU can act in the international system is found in its foundational story of crafting a new order based not on power and sovereignty but cooperation and shared values.

There is near consensus regarding the story of how the original member states of the EU emerged from the ashes of the war to renounce nationalism as a basis for governing and for relations between states. It is replete with heroic figures such as Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Winston Churchill (Kølvraa and Ifversen 2011; Réveillard 1998). Even bureaucrats such as Jean Monnet assume a mythical status in the tale of the birth of the EU and in its evolution (Cohen 2007; Joly 2007). An identifiable group, "The Fathers of Europe", has been constructed, replete with museums, associations and networks dedicated to telling the story of how this group of "friends" challenged the forces of nationalism and led the rebirth of Europe (Constantin 2011; Kaiser 2011). Its basic premise is that nationalism brought the continent to the point of ruin in the twentieth century but it was in its darkest moment that the vision for a new order took root. The rise of fascism and the destruction of war were seen as the death knell of political power entrusted and enshrined in the sovereign nation state. A

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united Europe emerged as the response to the failures of the first-half of the twentieth century. Moreover, it has been responsible for the peace and prosperity that has followed. We see a clear narrative structure in this morality tale, very similar to the one of the Resistance mentioned above, that presents the reasons and the basis for the post-war construction of the EU.

Whether or not integration was the only answer to extreme forms of nationalism is not the question that concerns us now; nor whether or not the EU has been responsible for the peace and prosperity of the last half century. Arguably, the Cold War and the creation of a multilateral order under American hegemony have also played a considerable role. What there is no doubt about is that few people question the foundational myth of the EU: that European integration was the result of a desire to overcome nationalism as the means to ensure stability and economic security on the continent. For instance, at the height of the Eurozone crisis in 2010-2013, comments such as those by European Council Herman Van Rompuy or Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, warning that the spectre of nationalism and war would once again reign over the continent if the euro and the EU were to fail, were not uncommon. In a speech marking the fall of the Berlin Wall, Van Rompuy stressed the point made decades earlier by Francois Mitterrand, "Le nationalisme, c'est la guerre", when arguing the dangers of member states seeking national solutions to economic crises (Van Rompuy 2010). These were far more than exaggerated attempts at fear mongering by those frustrated with public opinion, which seemed to be reverting back to national narratives. They were evocations of one of the most enduring political beliefs of the European Union: that only an integrated Europe stood between stability and peace, on the one hand, and a return to the nightmare of twentieth-century instability and war fuelled by ideology, particularly nationalism, on the other. European leaders sought to transform a complex economic and governance crisis into simple, understandable terms which provided reasons why governing should take place at the European level. It was the past, symbolised by war and nationalism, which gave reason for the present and the future status quo of European integration. Moreover, this was done with the confidence that the audience understood the symbols of the past and what they meant for the legitimacy of the post-war political order.

This foundational myth has become institutionalised in many facets of European life and EU policy (Bottici and Challand 2013:Part II; Della Sala 2013). The Preamble to the Treaty of Paris, which remains the cornerstone of the EU's constitutional order, states unequivocally that the

EU does away with historic rivalries between states and that economic interdependence will lead to peace and stability. Moreover, it also states that this form of political organization in Europe will make a contribution to "civilization" and to a new form of international order. The attempt to formalise the notion that Europe was responsible for a democratic and peaceful Europe evolved from Article 1 of the Treaty of Lisbon (2007): "DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law". And it would seem that Europeans want to believe the story that integration was born from the need to bring peace to the continent. For instance, the European survey, Eurobarometer, found that even in 2012, close to 60% of respondents felt that peace and stability was the greatest contribution of integration, clearly outpolling any other choice (Eurobarometer 2006:31, 2013:604).

National experiences have tended to highlight the redemption, if not the re-birth, of the political community after long periods of suffering, sometimes inflicted but mostly imposed; this is a cardinal element in the EU's foundational myth. Narratives about Europe's rebirth through integration provide a way to understand the interwar period and the war that followed within a context that is both about continuity and rupture (Judt 1992). In the official telling of the EU story, the first-half of the twentieth century was a period of suffering at the hands of nationalism. But this is part of a broader narrative arc that leads the very same states that had brought about Europe's "suffering" to find redemption in seeking an "ever closer union". Member states may or may not have sought to break free of power politics of the modern era (some still had remnants of an empire in the late 1950s and Britain and France went on to become nuclear powers) is not so important here. Rather, the story of redemption through integration is one that provides a cognitive and normative map that resonates with the political desire to break free of continental rivalries and to adjust to a new balance of power with the Cold War (Bottici and Challand 2013; Milward 2000). The story of redemption made it seem "normal" that sovereign powers were transferred to or pooled at the European level. It made the destruction of war understandable as part of a historical process that led to both the "demise" of an old national European order and the rebirth of a new Europe.

The importance of this narrative of redemption is that has become widely diffused and part of the story that the EU crafts about itself. This is especially evident in the EU's commitment to human rights protection in Europe and beyond, linking it directly to the Holocaust as a

formative moment. For instance, the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan Quinn, launched the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) initiative on 16 November 2010. It was trumpeted as the largest single investment into research on the Holocaust, seeking to link archives across the continent and beyond in a virtual and (sometimes) material network of scholars and research resources. The Commissioner's speech helps illustrate a number of points about the EU's attempt to help build a collective memory about "Europe". First, she did not miss the opportunity to talk about the EU's broader research infrastructure and how this was preparing European society for the challenges of the next century. The Commission is always mindful not to step into areas that are national jurisdictions, especially politically sensitive areas such as the reconstruction of difficult historical events, like the Holocaust. IT stresses that it ventures into areas such as collective memory on the basis of its mandate to encourage the development of a research infrastructure to foster a "Europe of knowledge". The aim is presented as economic and technical, not political. However, the Commission's motives are more than transparent and this leads to the second point. Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn concluded her speech by citing a report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights on the teaching of the Holocaust, exhorting Europeans to remember the past so that they could build their common future. Teaching about the Holocaust, the EU agency argues, is a good way to have future generations understand the importance of fundamental rights, which are one of the central pillars of "European" citizenship (European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2010). This is more than just a public information or propaganda campaign. This the Commission actively engaging in myth making, telling Europeans that the current protection of human rights comes from a common historical trajectory that has propelled them to create a new political space and common future.

Another example comes from a video to promote enlargement that had appeared on the Commission website but was later removed.[1] Setting aside the alleged racist overtones that led to criticism, the video is interesting for the story that the Commission tells of who is the EU and the rest of the world. It opens in an abandoned factory building with a female dressed in a blue and yellow outfit reminiscent of the European flag and the movie, *Kill Bill*. Three menacing characters – one clearly Asian, one representing the Middle East and one Africa –

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[1] The video called, *Growing Together*, can still be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9E2B_yI8jrI.

appear in succession to threaten "Europe". Her response is to multiply, creating a circle of multiple but identical "Europe", at which point the threatening figures sit down, ready to talk and negotiate. The video captures how the world of states and ethnic belonging is necessarily menacing and conflictual but the EU is different. Interestingly, it does away with its own internal ethnic and national diversity when it increases its membership, all of them clones of "Europe". While there may be "union in diversity", the member states are all the same when they deal with the rest of the world. More importantly, the cohesiveness of the EU centres on a set of values that favour dialogue and negotiation, not the violence that has been the hallmark of national (and ethnic) rivalries.

The narrative of the video would not work if the audience were not familiar with the EU's foundational narrative nor would it be necessary if there were not the perceived need to have continuity of its foundational narrative. The menacing figures are stuck in an almost primal conception of politics, much like Europe was before its "birth", looking to violence and power to achieve their ends. It was reason that sought "unity and diversity" amongst previously warring nations and it is what will convince those who are caught in history to sit down to find solutions to common problems. The video is just as much a narrative of where the EU has come from as it is about where it is going with enlargement. Moreover, it seeks to affirm the EU's rebirth as part of the process of transforming the way in which order is maintained in the international system. Whereas in the immediate postwar period, this involved European states laying down their weapons and sitting in a circle, the rebirth today has the EU spreading this narrative beyond its borders.

The video captures, as do other representations of the EU's foundational narrative, how the ontological security of the EU is weaved into the decline of a political order based on power and even ethnicity. Eschatological narratives have been part of the EU's foundational myths from the start; for example, Monnet spoke of how states were like provinces, destined to disappear but the Community was the basis for a new world order (Monnet 1976:788). Interwar and post-war proponents of a united Europe, such as Alexandre Kojève, spoke of "political unreality of Nations" in the face of the march of history (Kojève 2004). Kojève's view of the future of Europe was very much influenced by his understanding of Hegel and saw the birth of the European "empire" as part of a historical process that was reaching a terminal point. The theme of the birth of Europe as part of a historical process that was leading to the end of the nation and state is one that is found repeatedly over the last seventy years, in both

statements by political leaders but also in scholarly research. One can find clear traces of Kojève in Ulrich Beck's claim that European cosmopolitanism was born out of the ruins of nationalism and the state in the middle of the twentieth century (Beck 2003). His claim that, "People who want to preserve the old nation-states have first to pretend that those old states still exist, that they are still national containers from which others are excluded" (p.36) is not all that different from Kojève's and interwar federalists argued that the nationalism that led to war was a sign of the decay of the state and the nation. This was an argument that Monnet would hark back to time and again.

The foundational narrative of the birth of the union is almost always told in relation to the "decline" of the state and nation in the international system. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's *Pan-Europa* described a Europe of declining states and warring nations that could only be rescued by some form of European union. If it did not learn the lessons of history it "hare the history of the Holy Roman Empire" (Coudenhouve-Kalergi 1923:23-26). Nearly ninety years later, John McCormick gave a name to the belief that the decline of the state and nation were giving birth to a new order, "Europeanism". He argued,

> Europeanism has meant not just the retreat of the state and the weakening links between authority and the state, but also new approaches to understanding the nation, citizenship, and patriotism, driven by the cosmopolitan ideas that all human beings belong to a single moral community that transcends state boundaries or national identities (McCormick 2010:67).

The story of the creation of the EU is, in certain respects, the counter-myth to that of the state. This is not to say that the state is disappearing but it is in "decline", "restructuring", "adapting", "post-modern", "post-national" (Bartolini 2005; Eriksen and Fossum 2000).

An important part of Europe's foundational myth was not just the end of nationalism and the state as the organising principle for the international system (or, at least, Europe) but it was the every end of history itself. In this narrative, history is reified as marching ahead, shedding layers as it reaches for a final destination. This foundational but also eschatological story has worked its way into how EU decision-makers and institutions look to the world and make decisions. For instance, in the wake of the Russian occupation of Crimea and the instability in

eastern Ukraine, political leaders repeatedly stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin was out of touch with history. One constantly finds references by EU political leaders as well as the heads of the governments of the member states to how Russia was not living in the twenty-first century. The reference here was not to a lack of economic or technological sophistication but to the fact that, to use the words of former European Commission President Jose Maria Barroso, it was one of the states that had not understood that history was over. Russia, according to the European view, still operated as if power politics and geo-strategic interests mattered in international politics. It was tied down by considerations of territory that no longer were assets but liabilities. The protestors in Maidan Square were seen as re-telling the myth of the EU's creation. As President Commission claimed, they were "writing a new narrative" for Europe (Barroso 2014:325). The EU as the beacon for political communities seeking democracy and prosperity was still seen to be a powerful narrative not only for the protestors but also for citizens of the EU member states. On the other hand, In a September 2013 speech calling for an enhanced defence policy, President Barroso spoke of how conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood were, "powerful reminder that we have not reached the end of history" (Barroso 2014:300).

It is the Ukrainian crisis, however, that has helped underline the limitations of the EU's foundational narrative in that it has highlighted that the myth that the EU was the vanguard of a new order and represented the end of history – that is the complementary eschatological narrative to that of peace and prosperity – has not been successfully diffused and ritualised. To use the language of ontological security, the two sides of the foundational myth do not provide the confidence to exert agency by political actors. Ontological security is about constancy and consistency that allows political actors to order their social world and give meaning to their actions. The Ukraine crisis highlights how the narrative of peace and prosperity in a new order in tinged with ambiguity that prevents it from providing the basis on which policy decisions are made (Youngs 2014). The birth of the EU did not mean the end of power politics nor that states had ceased to think strategically or see the world in zero-sum terms (Guzzini 2012). The EU seemed unable to know how to respond to events in Maidan Square and the ensuing conflict with Russia. It saw the protestors as the re-iteration of its foundational narrative but the Russian reaction did not correspond with its complementary end of history story.

Conclusion

Despite the claims that the EU is *sui generis* actor that has gone beyond the techniques and practices that led to the meta-narratives of state and nation, it has faced the same tension of having to reconcile universal values within the constructed boundaries of a defined political community as well as with other political actors. However, unlike states, narratives of the EU can provide only a beginning and a middle but not an end. The fact there is no clear political destination means that even compelling myths of creation and foundation can provide only a limited amount of certainty about how things should end and why. This limits how much they can contribute to the EU's ontological security. They cannot provide the routinized responses that contribute to collective actors sense of being whole and consistent in time. The success of a political myth requires that they resonate with existing cognitive schemes and with a political ideal that is clearly defined. The crisis in the Ukraine and the economic crisis have highlighted how the answer to the question of who is the EU requires both the narrative form and content that makes the ending understandable and acceptable.

More specifically, the EU's foundational myth does not have a corresponding eschatological narrative. The inability to define a finality to the foundation means that it is not clear what will replace what is in decline, if it will disappear at all. Successful myths have to resonate with existing normative and cognitive maps as well as provide a clear alternative if they seek to change those maps. The EU's foundational story stops at the climax, when "an ever closer union" is created to put an end to war in Europe. Readers want to know how the story ends, what happened to the antagonist and whether the protagonists go on to change the world and how. The EU has a birth but its sacred narrative does not tell us what will happen to the community after that.

What does this story about the EU's foundational myth tell us about narrative and narratives. First, that narratives require action and characters; and that both need to be understandable to the reader or audience. Narratives in and of the EU have not become sacred not so much because of the content but because the characters were not clearly defined, thus creating questions about the story's actions. Second, our search for narratives in social relations and phenomena is a never-ending story. We are as much story-makers as we are story-tellers when we try to map narratives on what we observe. Finally, narratives can also have an important role in empirical research and how we construct the social world. The lack of a foundational

sacred narrative for the EU highlights the limitations of a polity that cannot identify itself. This lack of ontological security limits what can be done in its name.

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