Political Storytelling:
From Fact to Fiction

Frank Gadinger, Martina Kopf, Ayşem Mert, and Christopher Smith (eds.)
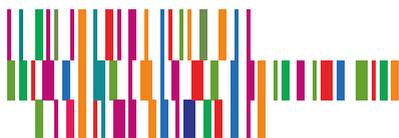
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Introduction
Facts Don't Speak
for Themselves ...

... they need to be told. And how and who tells them has significant implications. Recent political events such as the global refugee crisis, the Greek-EU bailout negotiations and the Russia-Ukraine crisis are apt examples of the malleability of facts, showing that truth itself is contested. Since these political events lack an 'ultimate source of evidence' (Rorty 1999: 151), the only way to transform vague descriptions into meaningful, coherent interpretations of 'reality' is to utilize the persuasive power of storytelling with all its intended and unintended consequences. Take the recent example of the global refugee crisis, which has challenged many of the core principles of the European Union. The many diverging positions on how to solve the crisis are deeply interwoven with different narratives used by political actors to make sense of it. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's famous statement 'we can do it' (German: *Wir schaffen das*) and resulting narrative of welcoming culture (German: *Willkommenskultur*) can be juxtaposed with naysayers' isolationist narrative of a return to national border controls. Different metaphors also play an instrumental role in the creation of these different narratives by evoking catastrophe through a 'flood' or 'stream' of refugees, which could be remedied through 'dams', 'boundaries', and 'walls'. As the refugee crisis has shown, the implications of these diverging narratives and the vivid imagery offered by their linguistic composition have great implications for the creation and justification of policy.

These brief insights on the important role of narrative in the refugee crisis are also relevant for other policy fields, in which actors are more or less willing to cooperate on common problems. Cooperation always requires understanding and appreciating each other's realities. In the context of international relations, this also entails a certain degree of agreement upon facts. In order to achieve global cooperation on any given subject, the parties must first agree on the definition and problematization of the solution to the issue at hand. Making sense of common problems requires a shared view not only on arguments and interests, but also on shared forms of narration. Even though this agreement is not a complete consensus, a policy area with a relatively concordant, intersubjectively constructed number of facts is needed to begin cooperation. Such concordance is possible when registers are shared, similar to what Hannah Arendt calls 'common world': A shared and public world of human artifacts, institutions and settings that provide a relatively permanent context for our activities. Understanding politics as a practice of collective storytelling, in which the role of fiction and narrative is a constitutive element instead of being 'mere rhetoric', is still under-theorized. From a narrative point of view, the boundaries between reality and fiction are always blurry.

Thus, an important but largely ignored part of this common world is shared imageries, which are expressed or represented in stories, myths, legends, and literatures.

The exceptional relevance of storytelling in politics has been stressed in political philosophy (e.g. Polkinghorne 1988) and in different research fields such as policy analysis (e.g. Stone 2002), organization studies (e.g. Czarniawska 1997), political movement studies (e.g. Selbin 2010), sociology (e.g. Somers 1994) and international relations (e.g. Krebs 2015). Despite their different objects of investigation, these strands share some core epistemological and methodological premises. Studying narratives implies assuming a dynamic mode of communication between discourse and rhetorical agency. The focus of analysis is political actors' everyday language, which is used to unveil normative backgrounds and drivers for conflicting interests. It is therefore deeply rooted in interpretative research methodology. Despite growing interdisciplinary interest in storytelling (White 1975; Bal 2009; Koschorke 2012), social scientists have primarily focused on the conceptualization of narrative (Fisher 1987; Patterson and Monroe 1998), therefore showing some hesitancy to engage with empirical analysis in cases of political storytelling.

Complex realities need complex ways of representation. A theoretical engagement with the importance of meaning-giving practices as constitutive elements of politics should not halt at the analysis and the critique of simplifying and simplified versions of the 'real'. The equally important question is: How and from which sources do we develop alternative and inclusive modes of narration? Against this background, this Global Dialogue focuses on narrative and fiction as a critical, albeit under-researched, element in the social sciences. Despite increasing interest, and the linguistic turn in the social sciences, the role of fiction and narrative in explaining, representing and inventing identities and frames as well as giving meaning to political practices has been largely absent. In order to begin to change this, this publication brings together different disciplines from the social sciences and development studies to literature and cultural studies to reflect on these various matters. This multi-disciplinary publication is the result of a workshop that took place in Duisburg in May 2015, which also sought to expand on how academic work in the social sciences is analyzed, written, and presented. The contributions are inspired and expand on this spirit and the various issues discussed at this event. For the sake of coherence, the texts are ordered in terms of the medium they analyze and the audiences they address.

The introductory piece, and the first in a series of contributions focusing on literature, 'Reflections on the dynamic relations between truth and fiction as imaginaries. Recommendations for global institutes in the 21st century'

by Nicolina Montesano Montessori, provides an overview of various takes on what qualifies as truth or fiction. To do this, she takes two examples from literature: the classic Spanish novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Cervantes and a collection of short stories from Mexico entitled *Relatos de El Viejo Antonio* by Subcomandante Marcos. These examples show that the ambiguous line between truth and fiction is a matter that has confronted political life for centuries and is ever more present in the complex challenges of the 21st century. Montessori suggests dealing with this reality by rejecting the idea that absolute truth or objective facts are possible and instead using participatory research and dialogue to gain insight into processes of innovation and the creation of new solutions for continuing problems.

Carla Gierich takes a more in-depth look at fiction and literature by examining the book *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*. She suggests that this book allows us to study how fiction can act as a foundation for the generation of narratives about a certain cityscape, in this case that of Los Angeles. Gierich ultimately seeks to reveal if the narratives resulting from fictional accounts manage to challenge and overcome dominant discourses or if it achieves the opposite; that is, they reinforce hegemonic understandings of the city and its various components. Ultimately, through this example she finds that literature has the unique ability to unveil challenges and problems from different, unexpected perspectives and concludes that it does, indeed, have the power to break oppressive, dominant narratives in favour of more complex, tolerant views.

Closing the section on books, David Lewis examines the peculiar rise of a new form of writing about development, which he terms the 'development blockbuster' book. With his publications on the role of fiction as a source of authoritative knowledge and on popular representations of development, Lewis has contributed significantly this past decade to opening development studies to a productive dialogue with literary, media and cultural studies. In his contribution to this issue he deals with yet another genre that has been paid little attention in academic research so far, but has considerably shaped public opinions on the meaning and substance of cooperation in North-South relations. These 'development blockbuster' books are written by academic experts and professionals who have worked in development policy settings. They are commercially published and claim to offer strident critiques of conventional international development policy and practice from an insider perspective. Through narrative analysis Lewis shows how these texts work in the same logic as the 'development gift' that they claim to challenge, ultimately underpinning the increasingly technocratic logic of international aid relationships.

In the sole piece focusing on video games, Ayşem Mert and Sandra van der Hel present online climate games as a novel form of collective storytelling and propose a framework to understand and analyze these representations. An under-researched but popular medium, online video games have received much interest from dominant actors in politics in search of more effective public relations or teaching tools. According to the authors, games uniquely represent the problem of climate change and potential solutions for its governance. Using a theoretical perspective informed by Huizinga and Wittgenstein among others, they show how games simplify, problematize, and provide policies to address climate change. In the end, these games are studied to investigate the meaning-making in narratives surrounding the global climate crisis.

Martina Kopf opens the section on films by exploring the continuum of cultural representations of aid discourses floating between Africa and Europe from the colonial past to the present in the symbolic dimensions of 'giving' and 'taking'. To do this, she draws on the film *Hyènes* by the Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety, based on Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit* as a philosophical, artistic and political reflection on truths and fictions of giving and taking between the two continents. Oscillating between personal experience and analysis of the film's implications for the meaning of development and aid, Kopf delivers a unique exploration of the medium of film and theatre. Furthermore, it shows the importance of diversity in representations of contested policies and concepts.

The complex visual narrative and ever-changing accounts of the 'real and fictional' death of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden are presented in a contribution by Gabi Schlag. Analyzing the critically acclaimed film *Zero Dark Thirty,* written and directed by Katherine Bigelow, Schlag shows how the interplay between fact and fiction in the film and other powerful images, such as the doctored image of bin Laden's corpse, demonstrate the dynamics of the construction and deconstruction of key visual narratives. Indeed, she persuasively finds that they play an elementary role in legitimizing certain accepted interpretations of contentious events and practices such as torture.

Frank Gadinger analyzes another famous Bigelow film, *The Hurt Locker*, to expand on the importance of political storytelling as a cultural practice in everyday life. Gadinger choses this film since it aptly illustrates how the 'war on terror', the contextual setting of the film, has become one of the most powerful narratives in global political discourses in the 21st century. He argues that this durability lies in its continually innovative narrative configuration, which has managed to integrate ambiguous causalities and present various complex aspects of the war in Iraq.

According to his findings, various reconfigurations with multiple narratives enabled those affected by the aftermath of 9/11 and the ensuing military interventions to cope with the contradicting experiences of this episode. Significantly, Gadinger submits that these processes of political storytelling are deeply rooted in cultural practices of everyday life. For him, cinema, and Hollywood films in particular, provide great insight into the dynamics of how political storytelling is constructed and policies are legitimized. *The Hurt Locker* pointedly demonstrates the ambivalence of overlapping narratives experienced throughout the war on terror; these include, but are not limited to, robotization/technologization and dehumanization, and the impossibility of being both a highly-trained specialist abroad and a father at home.

In the final contribution, Axel Heck analyzes a 2012 online VICE documentary entitled *The Islamic State* to show how the volatile, insurgent political entity legitimizes its power toward an unsuspecting international audience. Documentaries, particularly those produced by alternative sources such as VICE, provide otherwise illegitimate actors and institutions with an opportunity to articulate legitimacy claims toward international society. By drawing on Weber's theory of legitimate authority, Heck manages to reconstruct the various justificatory narratives used by the Islamic State to creatively legitimize its brutal actions by evoking myths and fiction. All in all, Heck finds that the documentary becomes another part of the Islamic State propaganda machine as it does not feature any obvious criticism of it. This basically allows the documentary to become an effective tool to convince sceptics of its governance competency and instil fear by acknowledging its legitimacy.

With this publication, readers are not only given a vast glimpse into a burgeoning theme in the social sciences, but are also exposed to new and innovative ways of analyzing and writing about political occurrences. The interplay between fact and fiction and the impact of narratives on our understanding of politics have significant implications for how politics is perceived and how cooperation becomes an achievable, realistic goal. These contributions go to show that political life in the 21st century is increasingly complex and can only be grasped by taking these hitherto underrepresented aspects into consideration. We need to take seriously literature, films, video games and other mediums as objects of investigation if we are to begin to fully comprehend the diverse cultural embeddedness of policies. This contribution seeks to do just that, and calls upon scholars to foster a continuing global dialogue on narrative and fiction as constitutive elements in politics.

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Reflections on the Dynamic Relations Between Truth and Fiction as Imaginaries. Recommendations for Global Institutes in the 21st Century

Nicolina Montesano Montessori

This essay presents a summary of important perspectives concerning the distinction between what counts as truth or fiction. As a source of inspiration, it starts with two examples found in literature – the first a classical Spanish novel and the second a collection of stories written by the leader of a social movement in Mexico. These two examples of the conflictive relations between truth and fiction, authenticity and imagination serve as a source of inspiration for the rest of this article, which shows that this issue has been a subject of intense debate in philosophy and in the philosophy of science and still presents a challenge in the 21st century. The essay states that absolute, objective truth is a myth. It describes that what counts as 'truth' in a particular era, is, among other things, the result of power relations. It suggests productive ways to deal with this problem in modern society, through deliberative, emancipatory processes of reflexivity (Weick 1999), participatory research and dialogue, facilitating innovation and generation of new solutions.

Let us first look at the ways in which the truth is debated in the classical text of Don Quixote de la Mancha and in the

dialogue between Subcomandante Marcos, the charismatic spokesperson of the Zapatista Movement in Mexico (1994–2014), and El Viejo Antonio, the indigenous elder who introduced him to the traditions of Chiapas.

Fact and Fiction: Examples From Classical Literature and a Social Movement

Don Quixote de la Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (part 1 of this novel appeared in 1605, part 2 ten years later) is an eminent classic on the potential subjectivity of truth and fiction and the sources to determine what is what – rely on human perceptions, fantasies, chivalric literature, enchantment, the narratives of the church or the army, or mere common sense. Most of the dialogue between the long, thin, aristocratic Don Quixote and his short, fat companion, the peasant Sancho Panza, deals with this problem throughout the novel. Cervantes invented his characters during the transition from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, moving away from the enclosed environment of a village in La Mancha 'which name he has no desire to call to mind' into the wide world of La Mancha and, in Part Two, Catalonia, as well as from the very strict doctrines of the Church in Spain during the Counterreformation (Fuentes 1992). Walking away from imposed security causes confusion and, ultimately, personal responsibility.

Another example of negotiation of truth between people from different backgrounds is found within the relationship between Subcomandante Marcos and 'Old Antonio', an old man from the indigenous community in the Lacandon jungle, who became an important link between the revolutionaries and the indigenous culture (Nash 2001) and whom I studied as part of my PhD research on the Zapatista Movement (Montesano Montessori 2009). Their conversations are published in a collection of stories entitled Relatos de El Viejo Antonio (Subcomandante Marcos 1998). As they meet on their walks through the countryside, the story goes: 'Yesterday, I ran into Old Antonio for the first time. We both lied. He in telling me that he was going to his plot of land, me in telling him that I was going hunting. And we both knew that we were both lying and we knew that we were both aware of this' (my translation). Later, the conversation continues. Antonio sits down and states: 'You are not hunting'. 'I answer: And you are not visiting your land'. After that, they chat and get to know each other. In the stories that constitute the 'Relatos de El Viejo Antonio', Marcos and the voice of Mexican tradition compare the official versus the – in their view – authentic versions of Mexican history, especially the independence from Spain (1810) and the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917).

Of course, both literary texts are hyperbolic. In normal life, we are taught to speak the truth and most people normally do. Nevertheless, the sources of truth or even the distinction between fact and fiction may not always be so clear, especially when it comes to processes of investigating the world, defining the direction of an organization or a nation or when living in multicultural settings, as we will see below.

Fact, Fiction and Truth in Philosophy

The history of philosophy teaches us that the division between truth and fiction has been an issue throughout human history. The theologian Tommaso d'Aquino (1225–1274) distinguished between truth being revealed from above, known as cognition by grace, and cognition from below: cognition by nature based on observation (Tranøj 1964). Within the tradition of pragmatism, much thought has been given to the relationship between truth and practice in real life. A salient representative of this strand of thought was John Dewey who, drawing on the earlier work of Peirce and James, developed a correspondence theory of truth (Thayer 1964: 458–9). To him, truth is found in the relationship between the initial stage of inquiry in which a problem is presented and the final stage of formulating a solution or transformation. Dewey's theory of knowledge held that research implies a transformation of the subject that is being inquired into. Truth emerges when a problematic situation is resolved or made unproblematic.

Richard Rorty advocated a neopragmatist approach in which he denied that human knowledge is a 'mirror of nature'. Rather, he recognized the mediation of linguistic representations, thus claiming a relativity of truth (Rorty 1979). Seen from this angle, there is no such thing as a singular truth. Truth may well be a particular example of a 'objet petit a', the object of desire that can never be attained (Lacan 1994). Absolute truth is impossible to reach. What is true from one perspective is false from a different point of view, especially in a rapidly changing, heterogeneous society. What is true to one person may be false to another; what is true today may be false tomorrow. Foucault performed a historical, genealogical analysis of the conditions under which what counts as scientific or not was defined: the 'episteme' of particular periods of time. He claimed that the formation of an episteme is closely related to processes of power (Foucault 1980). A salient example is that homosexuality was considered an illness, whereas now in most western countries, homosexual couples have a right to marry. From a liberal point of view, the American philosopher John Rawls stated that difference in society is the result of freedom. People made progress in different religious, cultural and scientific directions. Since there is not one standard to

gauge what is true or what is good, the liberal challenge is to create ways in which different groups with different principles can peacefully live together (Rawls 1971).

Fact, Fiction and Truth in the Philosophy of Science

Kuhn developed the concept of the paradigm, which he defined as 'universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners' (Kuhn 1970: viii). A paradigm typically contains a set of epistemological, ontological and methodological principles which, taken together, frame the possibilities to generate knowledge. Important paradigms are currently the empirical, interpretive and critical emancipatory research paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; De Lange, Schuman, and Montesano Montessori 2012). Salient differences are that the empirical paradigm envisions the world as an object that can be studied objectively by the researcher. It is value-free and context-independent. It generates objective knowledge. It is a dominant paradigm in the natural sciences, and often within the social sciences – at least for those who insist that 'the social' can and should be investigated in the same way as the natural sciences.

   The interpretive paradigm is context-dependent. Its aim is not to generate objective knowledge, but to reach an improved interpretation of the topic under research, often in collaboration with those who form part of the particular context. It is important within anthropology and some strands of sociology, especially the Chicago school. The last paradigm is value-oriented and context-dependent. It explicitly investigates (the effects of) asymmetric power relations within a particular context. It is problem-driven and it investigates possibilities for improvement or increased justice in a particular situation. It is important within the critical sciences, such as critical management or critical discourse analysis. Especially when put to work with forms of participatory action research, in which insiders to the problem, such as managers, clients and employees in corporations are invited as researchers within the research group, it is a powerful tool for innovation, change and creating acceptance of change. It also has emancipatory potential through its involvement of practitioners or other stakeholders in the research process (Montesano Montessori and Schuman 2015). Paradigmatic thinking is important for the development of this essay, since it provides a kind of grammar of the social sciences, which allows science to be performed in accordance with its particular goals through different research practices which represent different schemes for achieving valid research results.

Knowledge, Truth and Power

As was established above, within science there are different ways of generating knowledge and within each paradigm different mechanisms are employed to establish what is true or what is false (observation, deliberative dialogue or building consistent arguments that something is 'true' within a particular context and under specific conditions). These processes have been identified as being subject to processes of power. Foucault (1980) described broadly and deeply the connection between discourse, knowledge and power, stating that knowledge, and established discourses such as Western medicine, are the result of the crystallization of social practices performed by powerful elites in society. In part, science is the result of powerful networks that have access to laboratories, meetings and scientific procedures, decide on the significance of research results, and determine what is regarded as health and sickness in particular historical periods. This, as much as the existence of alternative medical paradigms such as Western medicine versus Eastern medicine, provides evidence that truth is relative: it may vary across time, societies and places. Habermas (1972), furthermore, states that knowledge is never objective, but always serves the interests of a dominant group in society. It is the dominant group that defines what counts as proven – or, to use current parlance, what represents 'evidence-based knowledge'.

   An illustration of this connection between knowledge and power in the 20th century may well have been the systematic separation between theory and practice, leaving research to the realm of universities and practice to the practitioners. This has led to a gap between theory and practice, in the sense that output of research performed at universities was too abstract to be meaningful for practitioners. Also, from a statistical point of view, dominant research used a standard based on the dominant group, which then became the standard based on which schools, hospitals and other facilities were designed. Minorities – ethnic, sexual, the disabled or sick – had to deal either with institutional laws and practices that were not designed for them, or were assigned to specific institutes and practices which were kept separate from mainstream institutions, thus isolating them from society. Special education and special institutes for the disabled are a case in point (Topping and Maloney 2003; Schuman 2009).

Truth and Fiction in the 21st Century

Now that we are well into the 21st century, I would like to point out, in the context of knowledge, truth and power, that in the neoliberal era, a tradition of basing policy on invalid arguments has emerged.

A well-known example was the occupation of Iraq, initiated in 2003 by the Bush administration and based on two claims that were proven to be invalid: the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and Iraq's alleged ties with Al Qaeda.

Similarly, current dominant educational systems are based on the argument that knowledge is unnecessary and changes too fast, so that the emphasis is now on developing competence and skills, rather than profound cultural and philosophical knowledge, a trend referred to as the 'silent crisis' (Nussbaum 2010). While technological knowledge might quickly change, I would argue that this is not the case for much of the knowledge base within the humanities – unfortunately continuously under attack in universities, which are dominated by neoliberal thinking which expects a strong focus on output. In fact, I would suggest that a profound knowledge of linguistics and rhetoric is necessary to make sense of current society and to develop democratic citizens and practices. Precisely due to the heterogeneous and complex global world, in which grand narratives such as religion, science and politics no longer guide society and in which we have to learn to co-exist with radically different people in a multicultural society, we need – more than ever – the rhetoric skills to engage in processes of deliberation and argumentation. Deliberation includes free discussion; it entails formulating and listening to different points of view, and it helps to create a sense of shared responsibility. Arguments help to construct evidence for a particular view and offer tools to evaluate these arguments (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). Deliberation and argumentation, in my view, are fundamental ingredients for a healthy, productive and – hopefully – fair society and its institutions in the 21st century.

The Relevance of Narratives

Having sketched the problems of knowledge, truth, and power, I now turn to the relevance of narratives. Narratives create enormous potential within society at large, and organizations in particular, to engage in a collaborative process of making sense of the social world and our position within it. A narrative: 'can be understood as stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end that contains a conclusion or some experience of the storyteller. Telling a story is normally connected with some unusual event and some complication in the course of the events depicted' (Titscher et al. 2000: 125).

Narratives allow us to make sense of the complexity of our society and our personal destiny. As Jessop (2002: 92) states: 'In periods of major social restructuring there is an intersection of diverse economic, political and socio-cultural narratives that seek to give meaning to current problems by construing them in terms of past failures and future possibilities'.

Hence, narrative is a powerful tool to engage in shared processes of meaning making and of imagining and, ultimately constructing, an improved society. Narratives have the power to shape new realities. From a hermeneutic perspective, Ricoeur (1991: 33) states:

'The power of a text to open a dimension of reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby a possibility of the critique of the real'.

These three definitions indicate that narratives can be constructed both to make sense of the world as we know it and to imagine and reformulate an (improved) future. Narratives can be a significant tool to position and empower social subjects. As I have shown during the workshop that underlies this special issue, in the case of the Spanish Indignados and the narratives developed within the 15M movement, citizens designed their own protest boards and changed from victims of the crisis to critics of the political and economic system (Montesano Montessori and Morales López 2015).

Narratives may include goals and purpose, as well as values. Narratives can be inspired by other narratives, including aspects taken from literature, the grand narratives of the past or narratives from others. This is the freedom we have acquired in (post)modern times; rather than having to adjust to dominant narratives, such as the Bible, socialism or liberalism, we can now create our own narratives and rules by which we wish to organize our society or our institutions. Narratives provide a fundamental basis for the desired processes of deliberation and argumentation described above. It is precisely this take on discourse and agency which provides space for both individuals and organizations to acquire voice, and to fully contribute to the symphony needed to create harmony in a world marked by complexity, difference and radical change.

Recommendations for Global Institutes

Let us now dwell on the possibilities for global institutes, the target of this journal. While the tendency exists in times of radical change and uncertainty to freeze and reduce complexity to quantitative results and measurement, my recommendations invite institutes to explore a different avenue. Based on the above, it seems useful to engage in a corporate process of reaching a shared understanding as to why the corporation exists, what it delivers to the world, the true significance of its mission and vision and the reasons for the involvement of those who work there as employees or managers and those who benefit from its products or services: the customers.

I would advise organizing some meetings where people reflect on the 'myth of origin' of the corporation, so that it becomes a shared myth of origin that gains value for those who now work there or use its services. Invite the participants to relate their own narrative to the master narrative of the organization. Create a climate open to unleash (rather than control) the talents of employees and customers. When problems need to be resolved, rather than imposing new measures on the company in a top-down fashion, I would invite CEOs and managers to engage in a horizontal process facilitating discussion and engagement in a joint effort of co-creation. A process of co-creation may emerge as the result of sharing narratives, perspectives and deliberation. Furthermore, as I have described in detail elsewhere (Montesano Montessori and Schuman 2015), the combination of participatory action research with critical discourse analysis represents a powerful tool to reach an in-depth process of change. Rather than being overwhelmed by change and threats, now is the time to engage in processes of co-creation, using the tools of narratives, participatory action research and post-structural perspectives on discourse to give full voice to your company and to make it heard within the symphony of our complex society, while contributing to harmony within the global orchestra.

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A Clash of City Images – Appropriating Space in *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* by John Rechy

Carla Gierich

Places in general, and cities in particular, are not objective, unchangeable entities fixedly located in space, but are a social and cultural construction which gains various and changing meanings through social activities (cf. Wehrheim 2009: 19). Narratives, especially novels, are one such form of social interaction: they act in city space, describing and hence also forming it. In taking up and working with common tropes about the cities they are set in, they re-work, transform and change the meanings of city space proper. This is especially true of literature in and about Los Angeles, one of the most mediated cities in the world – movie city, immigrant city, car city, a kaleidoscope of city images built, deconstructed and re-formulated with every narrative about it. In the following, I want to trace these re-formulations in the novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991) by Chicano author John Rechy.

Los Angeles is a city shaped on the one hand by its image as a movie city: glamorous Hollywood, cars, freeways, palm trees and eternal California sun are images that spring to mind easily. But Los Angeles has also been the setting of apocalyptic blockbusters, consuming bush fires, earthquakes, and man-made disasters such as gangs and drive-by shootings. Somewhat cynically, one might say that the latter hints at the other dominant image of Los Angeles: it is one of the migration hotspots of the US with a Latino population that outnumbered Anglos in 1998 (Davis 2000: 2). In Los Angeles, one never knows what is fact and what is fiction as the narratives about the city almost overwrite the city space itself. Los Angeles is a postmetropolis where the real and imagined merge: 'An increasing blurriness intercedes between the real and the imagined city, making "the city" as much an imaginary or simulated reality as a real place' (Soja 2000: 150). This blurred hybridity of fact and fiction makes L.A. especially fruitful for the study of narratives, as the city consists precisely of them; they mingle and compete with each other to create a multi-faceted city image open to various interpretations.

Not only movie makers but also writers have contributed their own interpretations. Mexican-American writers in particular use them to de- and re-construct city space in their writings: 'Their collective re-creations, regardless of their fragmentary or even contradictory nature, offer an oppositional counterhistory' (López-Calvo 2011: 6). Literature can hence serve as an empowering tool as it allows the minority to propel its own reading of the city narratives which can contradict the dominant narratives and open up new points of view. A book that elaborates especially well on the intersections of fact and fiction with regard to Mexican-Americans and the L.A. city space is John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991). The novel gathers the Los Angeles narratives and sends its main protagonist Amalia on a tour de force through these images of L.A. to find her inner strength and deal with long ignored problems. Various writers have made Los Angeles the backdrop for their novels about Mexican Americans in the US (e.g. Terri de la Peña, Helena Viramontes, Hector Tóbar), but only a few have delved deeper into the relationship of L.A.'s characters with the city space and its narratives itself. *The Miraculous Day* is one of these novels where Los Angeles is not only the backdrop for the story, but a character or agent of the story itself: '…[C]reative practices rooted in the Chicano/a imagination have helped to translate, reinscribe, and reclaim the postcolonial center – the modern metropolis' (Gámez 2002: 96). This makes this novel so interesting for the study of narrative. The question I want to follow here is whether this focus on city narratives can break up and challenge dominant discourses or if it is likely to reinforce them.

The Miraculous Day follows a day in the life of a Latina in her mid-thirties in Los Angeles. She wakes up in her dilapidated stucco bungalow in East Hollywood and sees a silver cross in the sky which she is inclined to interpret as a sign. The day unfolds in an unpleasant manner for her: she discovers that her eldest son Manny has committed suicide in jail, her younger son Juan is a hustler, and her daughter Gloria has been molested by her live-in partner Raynaldo. To flee these problems, she sets out for a walk through Los Angeles, but instead of solving her problems, it confronts

her with additional ones, such as violence, racism, and police harassment. In the end, she ventures into an expensive shopping mall where she is kidnapped by a criminal. Finally, she finds the inner strength to set herself free from the assailant, who is then shot by the police. The novel ends with an apparition of the Holy Mother outstretching her arms to Amalia.

The novel plays with and interweaves several dominant narratives. On the one hand, it describes Amalia as a typical Chicana (Mexican American) woman who struggles with machismo, racism, her low income and family. The novel picks up 'typical' Latino issues such as superstitiousness and (Catholic) religion, but also gang and domestic violence and machismo. In parallel, it plays with a way of storytelling which is seen as 'typical' Latin American – Magical Realism – due to the supernatural ending. On the other hand, the novel plays with Los Angeles stereotypes: the hot weather, Santa Ana winds, bush fires, a threat of earthquakes, violence and general sense of apocalypse, but also dreams of Hollywood glamour, and colorful to dilapidated Latino *barrio* scenes.

In the following, I want to show how the novel plays with these stereotypes, images and tropes and confronts its main protagonist with them. I argue that the novel reconstructs these narratives to emphasize the difficulties that L.A. city space presents for its Mexican American inhabitants. By clashing, intermingling and juxtaposing these narratives, the author exposes and hence deconstructs the L.A. myth and makes clear that an appropriation and their own interpretation of city space remain difficult for minorities such as the Mexican American community in Los Angeles, who are systematically disadvantaged by economic and political means. It remains problematic, though, that the novel deconstructs these narratives but does not offer new ways of dealing with and appropriating the city space.

The different narratives can roughly be clustered into two groups: the 'Latino/a' and the 'Los Angeles' narrative, which contradict, complement, and intermingle with each other. The novel constructs a 'spicy' Latino/a Los Angeles on the brim of being caricaturesque: Amalia herself is a lush, sexy woman in her thirties with ruffled dresses and flowers in her hair. She also suffers the economic and social hardships attributed to Mexican Americans in Los Angeles: abusive men and the general Latino machismo; her eldest son is a gang member who committed suicide in jail, her younger one is hustling the streets, and her daughter has a boyfriend with dubious gang connections. This colorful depiction of Latino/a-ness continues throughout the story: in her home, Amalia has a house altar decorated with paper flowers that is devoted to the virgen de Guadalupe, the national saint of Mexico. In general, Catholic religion plays a huge role in her life, from

the patriarchal, sin-ridden institution of the Catholic Church over indigenous curanderos to Amalia's very personal mixture of superstition, faith, and adoration of the Virgin Mary, which culminates in an epiphany at the end of the novel.

Latino/a places throughout the novel are described as just as 'spicy' as Amalia's life itself: she walks the Latino *barrio* of East Los Angeles to encounter vivid street life: mariachis, garage sales, beautiful mural paintings, and parades of lowrider cars: 'At that corner, near a doughnut shop, there would already be a cluster of *mariachis*, from whom, throughout the day but especially toward evening, those wanting to hire a band for birthdays or weddings, or to play at a dance or a bar, would make their choices while sitting in their cars' (Rechy 1991: 44). This open street life has been interpreted by critics as an appropriation of city space, as a means to construct a sense of place out of an otherwise indifferent to hostile city space (Acuña 1996: 11). This is especially expressive as Los Angeles is said to be a city which has lost its street life and public interaction (Crawford 1995: 5). *Barrio* social practices might hence be able to re-imagine dominant city space as a community-enabling place (Villa 2001: 6).

But this hopeful interpretation of *barrio* street life is destroyed and juxtaposed in the novel with increasing scenes of violence: Mexican American Angelenos are subjected to harassment, including destructive house searches, by the police, mocked by racist whites, and wounded in drive-by gang shootings. Positive and vivid street life is brusquely interrupted with outbursts of violence: in one paragraph, Amalia enjoys parades of customized cars; in the next, the area is dominated by gangs who roam the street and police 'prowling the area like leisurely invaders in their black cars' (Rechy 1991: 44). As Priewe (2007: 146f.) states, the increase in physical violence in the city mirrors Amalia's inner crisis: the more desperate her walking becomes, the more violence she encounters. Violence becomes a means of oppression by the dominant society that exerts power over Amalia: state, church, patriarchy, class and heterosexual interests control and dominate city space and hence Amalia's every step (cf. Saldívar 1997: 97–114). 'Violence represents in *The Miraculous Day* the elaborate patterns of closure that threaten to prevent Amalia from ever recovering the self that can sustain her and give meaning to her life – it thereby makes redemptive dialogue impossible for much of the text' (Giles 2000: 115). The violence trope thus overwrites the *barrio* narrative (which tries to create a homely place out of hostile city space) and emphasizes the segregation of L.A. and the clutter of unconnected city images that confuse and block Amalia's way.

Another 'Latino/a' trope threaded into the novel is that of Magical Realism: Amalia sees a silver cross in the sky, the dry rosebush in her yard sprouts new buds, a white flower

has blossomed out of a crack in the cement (Rechy 1991: 109). All these signs lead to an apparition of the Virgin Mary which empowers Amalia to thrust away her assailant. Magical Realism is usually defined as a literary form where mythical language and realist discourse intermingle instead of being juxtaposed. This form of storytelling is usually associated with Latin America, where the mythical supposedly belongs to daily life and is not separated from it into the non-real realm (Borsò 1994: 89). This can be seen as an ethnocentric perspective because it claims that Latin American literature has a genuinely different way of storytelling than 'Western' literature and hence focuses interpretation on ethnological distinction rather than on aesthetic text components (Borsò 1994: 323–4). *The Miraculous Day* uses this association of Magical Realism with the other and the exotic to further establish the Latino/a discourse and add to the feeling of alienation that propels Amalia's journey through Los Angeles. For a little while, it seems that Mexican Americans have been able to appropriate the Anglo-dominated city space and turn it into a place of home, e.g. in the scenes where Amalia contemplates the car parades and street life in East Los Angeles. But this brief impression is always destroyed by violence, be it by the police or by gangs, so that city space remains hostile and unapproachable. The Latino/a trope thus serves as a tool of othering throughout the novel and not as a positive addition of difference or variety to the city.

These Latino/a tropes are contrasted and complemented by archetypical Los Angeles tropes throughout the novel: as the Mexican American community suffers from state and gang violence, so is Los Angeles' social imaginary in 1992 best described as America's most dangerous city (Klein 2008: 114). The violence trope is hence archetypical for the Mexican American community and for the city of Los Angeles itself. Another dominant trope in the novel is nature within the city. Flowers sprout through city asphalt: 'In wreckage yards – which were everywhere, too – enormous yellow sunflowers with brown velvety centers peered at twisted chrome veins on mangled metal bodies' (Rechy 1991: 43). Flowers are in evidence throughout the novel; as roses they evoke the Virgin Mary and enhance the religiosity trope: 'At the far end of the court [...], there remained an incongruous rosebush that had managed only a few feeble buds this year, without opening. Amalia continued to water it, though, hating to see anything pretty die' (Rechy 1991: 6).

Where the flowers contrast with the concrete with which Los Angeles is usually associated, the nature trope also enriches the violence imaginary of the city: when Amalia arrives in Los Angeles, the city is chastised by the Santa Ana winds: ...'an eerie day when Sant' Ana winds blew in from the hot desert and fire blazed along the horizon' (Rechy 1991: 4).

This contributes to the feeling of threat permeating Amalia's perambulations. These winds, like the flowers, are a recurrent theme throughout the novel and accentuate the hostility of the city so often felt by Amalia. Another natural threat prominent in the novel are earthquakes, frequently mentioned: a crack in Amalia's bungalow wall, tourists who are glad not to live in this dangerous city, talks and failed predictions of 'the big one' all add to Amalia's anxiety.

The novel manages to lead the reader through all these different L.A. city imaginaries by sending its main protagonist on an extended walk through various parts of the city. As Amalia intends to escape her current problems (abusive lovers, problems with her children, poverty) and haunting memories (of abusive parents, husbands), she sets out for a walk (and bus rides) from her stucco bungalow in Hollywood through the Latino *barrio* of East Los Angeles to a fancy shopping mall in Beverly Hills. Through her walking, she relates these diverging parts – and aspects – of the city with each other and gives the city text a new meaning. She connects the Chicano/a imaginaries with the Los Angeles city tropes: violence originates from Latino/a gangs and racist whites, the flowers of the *virgen de* Guadalupe sprout from car-ridden L.A. and Hollywood dreams mingle with Magical Realism as Amalia has an apparition of the Virgin Mary in a shopping mall. Critics have attributed different meanings to this newly interwoven jigsaw puzzle of a city text. Priewe claims that Amalia tries to derive a meaning from the city's semiotic code (Priewe 2007: 139): 'Rechy's text portrays little hope for people such as Amalia to gain agency to "write" urban space; the possibility of selecting, rejecting and manipulating spatial and cultural elements of the city seems denied to her' (Priewe 2007: 143). Kevane sees Amalia's walk as a 'spiritual journey' into the wilderness of Los Angeles, where she fictionalizes the city and constructs a dream version of it as a survival mechanism to compensate for the horrors of her childhood (Kevane 2008: 13–15). According to León, she is on a religious pilgrimage that defies Mexican American patriarchal cultural patterns; she moves (physically and psychically) in order to survive (León 1999: 217–20). He argues that her quest for the sacred leads to empowerment, which helps her overcome the hauntings of her memories (León 1999: 223).

Overall, one might say that at first sight, her walking seems to be an empowerment tool to overcome the segregated city space and shattered dominant narratives with which the novel is filled to the brim. As her walking culminates in an empowering epiphany, it enables her to mend her past and future and connect the jigsaw pieces out of which Los Angeles city space is made up in her mind: segregation, Latino barrio, violence, nature, signs, and Hollywood dreams. But in my eyes, this mending and appropriating remains superficial:

her epiphany may enable her to counter a violent attack, but the problems due to which she started her pilgrimage remain unsolved in the end: she still suffers from repressive male society (Anglo and Mexican American alike), her family is still a mess and her love life remains as chaotic as ever. One might argue that the problems remain, but her view on them has changed, enabling her to finally take control of her life. But this is not in the novelist's text: the reader does not know how she will continue to deal with her obstacles, as the end remains rather open:

> '*The Miraculous Mother had appeared to her*.
> Suddenly with all her heart Amalia knew that,
> and she would never doubt it, because a surge
> of energy was sweeping away all her fear and
> she felt resurrected with new life.
> Triumphant, she stood up. "Yes!" she said
> exultantly, "I am sure!"' (Rechy 1991: 206).

But as Amalia herself notices, the apparition is caused by camera flashes, which profanes the religious appearance. Additionally, I am not convinced that the epiphanic ending can outshine the other, more negative narratives of Los Angeles throughout the novel. Overall, segregation, violence and difference prevail in the image of the city; Amalia is still encircled by dominant narratives. The narrator leaves the reader with the shattered remains of a jigsaw puzzle of images, but does not offer new ways of making a new meaning out of them which is not empowering, but discouraging and confusing. Amalia is not able to create a non-dominated, flexible and hybrid city space, but is blocked by and trapped in stereotypical city narratives.

One might argue that this mirrors the actual situation of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, but I think that this perception would be too uni-dimensional, as there are examples of more successful interplays with city space. Literature does have the power to point out existing problems and illuminate them from unusual, different angles, and can serve as an empowering tool. An example of this is Helena Maria Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came With Them* (2007). As replete with L.A. narratives as *The Miraculous Day* (freeways, torrential rains, barrio life), *Dogs* manages to create characters that are more complex and deal with city space in more complex ways than Amalia. *Dogs* does not promise easy solutions to the problems Mexican Americans in L.A. face, but it takes the city, its inhabitants and its narratives seriously. Another interesting novel with a special focus on city space and narratives is *The Barbarian Nurseries* (2012) by Héctor Tobar. The protagonist seems as stereotypical as Amalia at first sight: a Mexican maid in a rich suburb who gets into trouble.

But on closer inspection, the whole novel plays artfully with images and shows how the media and people in general like to believe in easy tropes, but reality is far more complex. Literature about and in L.A. is developing in interesting directions, and even if not all of it may be empowering in a political sense, it certainly helps to break up dominant narratives and add to a kaleidoscopic panorama of scattered city tropes that opens the real-and-imagined realities of Los Angeles up to more creative, tolerant and hybrid views and uses of city space.

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Deconstructing Development as Gift in the Development Blockbuster*

David Lewis

Development Writing and Personal Wisdom

This article explores the recent rise of popular books about international development by insider authors, a literary genre that I have termed the 'development blockbuster'. Such books are best typified by titles such as Jeffrey Sachs's New York Times bestseller *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (2005), William Easterly's *White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (2006), and Dambisa Moyo's *Dead aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is Another Way for Africa* (2009). There are many others, and each of these authors has gone on to produce sequels to these works. There are less well-known examples of the genre too, including Thomas Dichter's *Despite Good Intentions: Why Development Assistance to the Third World Has Failed* (2003) and Michael Maren's (1997) *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity.*

These books offer an up-to-date analysis of global poverty and development for both the general and the more specialised reader, provide wide-ranging diagnoses of key global development problems, and then usually go on to prescribe a set of solutions that are claimed to be far-reaching, radical, and definitive. These books are usually – though not always – published by a commercial publishing house, seek to reach a larger market than traditional academic books, and are heavily promoted by publishers. The aim is to reach as wide an audience as possible and to engage and influence public debate. In this paper, I am not so much concerned with

whether these books have interesting or useful things to say (and some of them undoubtedly do), but instead with the form and substance of the commodified personal wisdom that is found within them.

Although each book is different, this genre has certain distinctive characteristics that are shared in terms of structure, form, and content. First, I suggest that an autobiographical element is central to the genre, though this is not always immediately apparent. The authors of the development blockbuster are normally development 'insiders' who have once worked within an official or non-governmental development agency, but who now look back and re-evaluate the meaning and effectiveness of their earlier work. A second key characteristic is the primary concern of the writers of development blockbusters with 'big picture' issues and the promise of implementable, generalised prescriptions. Most authors aim to challenge what they see as conventional wisdom and public perceptions around the role of international aid, the work of development agencies, and the impact of humanitarian action. Conventional approaches are first established, and what then happens in most of these books is that an element of re-evaluation takes place. Third, there may be an epiphany experienced by the author that takes place, which then helps to make room for a new perspective on the right way forward. Fourth, this epiphany informs an element of memoir that lies at the heart of these books, which I suggest are essentially concerned with communicating a form of expert knowledge as 'personal wisdom'.

Deconstructing the 'Development Blockbuster'

In *The End of Poverty* (2005), Jeffrey Sachs argues that it is the inability of the poorest countries to get a foothold on the 'bottom rung' of the ladder of economic growth that poses the main barrier for development and poverty reduction. He outlines his ideas for diagnosing the problems of specific countries through a 'clinical economics' approach that takes account of a country's specific complexity in order to diagnose its problems and prescribe suitable treatment. He argues that international development aid should be increased to meet United Nations targets and that, if development interventions are more carefully planned and delivered, extreme poverty can be eliminated by the year 2025. An academic macroeconomist, Sachs has served as economic adviser to a range of countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union since the 1980s, and the book is illustrated with case studies that draw on this experience.

Another high-profile blockbuster, William Easterly's book *The White Man's Burden* (2006), is a direct critique of Sachs's approach.

[1] The 'misery memoir', a term believed to have been originally coined by *The Bookseller* magazine, has been described as a form of 'extreme confession' (Tim Adams 2006).

A former World Bank economist, Easterly takes issue with Sachs's faith in the ability of the development industry to address global poverty effectively with a swingeing critique of top-down planning, which he sees as both inefficient and ineffective. He argues instead that development can only be built from the bottom up, based on local entrepreneurship and innovation.

Moving from the higher profile books that have populated some of the international bestseller lists in recent years, we can also illustrate the genre with an example of the more personal, niche book aimed at a smaller, more select readership and produced outside the world of the mainstream commercial publishers. Dichter's (2003) *Despite Good Intentions* is the author's reflections on thirty-five years of work in the international development field with a variety of development agencies, including the Peace Corps, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank. Dichter's analysis ranges over the aid industry's well-intentioned but ultimately incompetent and self-serving efforts to reduce poverty. The book adopts an innovative style and structure, with eight chapters accompanied by a total of eighteen semi-autobiographical short stories featuring an aid worker character named Ben. Each story illustrates a different example of the ways that development interventions fail. For example, Story Twelve is entitled 'For the People, By the People', and outlines the compromised reality of development professionals' efforts at undertaking a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercise in a local community in Bangladesh.

Another example of this niche is Maren's (1997) *The Road to Hell*, a book that operates as a kind of 'misery memoir' about the author's 'experiences with aid organisations over nineteen years around Africa' (Maren 1997: 11).[1] The tone is one of profound disillusionment and unease. The book characterises the world of aid and charity 'as an industry, as religion, as a self-serving system that sacrifices its own practitioners and intended beneficiaries in order that it might survive and grow'. Indeed, it has been pointed out that there is an overlay of Christian morality that informs both religious and secular Western development work (Stirrat and Henkel 1997). The author begins his story working as an idealistic Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya during the late 1970s, but concludes with observations from a period of working in Somalia two decades later that 'made me see that aid could be worse than incompetent and inadvertently destructive. It could be positively evil' (Maren 1997: 12). Such brief summaries cannot do justice to what is a diverse genre, but they can give a flavour. I suggest that although these books vary in their form and content, they share the following common characteristics:

1. They are prescriptive, offering a robust diagnosis of what is wrong with the world of development and indicating how things should be done differently.

2. They claim to offer a comprehensive view or diagnosis of a whole field of development, a substantial sub-sector of the field such as humanitarian work, the role of agencies such as international NGOs, or the problems of a particular country.

3. They are aimed at a broader readership than academia or policy researchers, and seek to engage public debate and reach as wide an audience as possible – with some (such as Sachs) having broken into the international bestseller lists.

4. They are each to some extent personal narratives, drawing on the author's own career experiences as a practitioner, applied researcher, or consultant. Such experience is central to the 'truth claims' that are made in the books, and to the type of personal wisdom that they contain.

Development Blockbusters as Texts

If we now turn to the analysis of these books as texts, it is possible to identify a number of recurring rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices deployed by the authors. The first is the idea of personal transgression of rules or boundaries, which the authors use to position their argument within a counter-cultural frame. This is intended as a means to challenge conventional thinking, or even to shock the reader out of complacency. For example, Easterly (2006: 4) begins his book by suggesting that he somehow feels bad having to point out the extent of the terrible damage caused by well-meaning development people with good intentions. He implies that he has – at least in the eyes of some people – perhaps crossed a line in terms of modern morality:

'I feel like kind of a Scrooge pointing out the second tragedy [the failure to get medicine to dying poor children] when there is so much goodwill and compassion among so many people to help the poor. I speak to many audiences of good-hearted believers in the power of Big Western Plans to help the poor, and I would so much like to believe them myself. I often feel like a sinful atheist who has somehow wound up in the meeting of the conclave of cardinals to choose the successor to the saintly John Paul II.'

A second trope is the way that the writers of development blockbusters usually invoke the power of professional experience in giving weight to the analysis and prescription. For example, this faith in the power of experience comes across as underpinning the solutions to the problem of 'fixing failed states' proposed by Ghani and Lockheart (2009: 6) in the context of their work in Afghanistan:

'There is now a stock of experience in transforming states; practice has been far richer than theories of politics and power. The last sixty years have witnessed enormous progress in innovation and governance, particularly in the relationship between the state, the market and civil society. As a result, the scale of the challenge is much more manageable than it was in 1945 (…).'

What is particularly distinctive here is the idea of the renewal of professionalism in a strongly managerialist sense as providing a concentrated technology of organisation as the most appropriate solution to problems around the state that many others would more conventionally see as a set of primarily political problems.[2] This signals a central idea that is found in the development blockbusters of the positive transformative power of a new, pragmatic type of professionalism that is mostly oriented towards letting markets work within a post-Washington Consensus policy setting. This is, of course in line with the increasing dominance of managerialist ideology: the idea that there are organisational solutions to all types of problems.

This leads us into a third device, which is the critique – at least on the surface – of conventional development thinking. In *The Bottom Billion* (2007: x-xi), Paul Collier begins by sensibly arguing that unhelpfully narrow framings of knowledge about development from within traditional professional specialisations and academic disciplines tend to limit vision and practical application:

'Part of the reason that single-factor theories about development failure are so common is that modern academics tend to specialize: they are trained to produce narrow beams of light. However, in my career I have written books on rural development, labour markets, macroeconomic shocks, investment, and conflict. And for a while I was working for Joe Stiglitz, who was really interested in everything and had something ingenious to say about much of it. This breadth had its advantages.

[2] Rendering the political technical through the construction of expert knowledge is a governmental effect of development that is discussed at length in the work of Tania Murray Li (2007).

Eventually I came to see that four distinct traps explain the countries now at the bottom.'

The critique of the existing development knowledge frame is made apparent through a personalised referencing device, in this case a reference to an earlier working experience with Joseph Stiglitz. Stiglitz is, of course, another writer of development blockbusters, with his book *Globalisation and its Discontents* (2002) having reportedly sold more than two million copies.

A fourth rhetorical strategy is that of confession, which may be used to confer moral authority on the writer's position and arguments. For example, for Thomas Dichter (2003: ix), the process of re-evaluation of his assumptions that led to him writing his book *Despite Good Intentions* was prompted by an apparently straightforward request for information from a member of his local community. At the start of the book, he explains:

'My doubts became concrete a few years ago when my neighbours asked me for my "professional" opinion. They were starting to have considerable disposable income and wanted to contribute money to a good cause, preferably something that would help third world people. (...) I could not give them the assurance that they wanted. I knew of no organisation that really accomplished much in the way of sustained alleviation of poverty (...) I hemmed and hawed. Finally I told them I felt like a restaurant critic asked by good friends if he could get them in to see the kitchen of one of their favourite spots: "You don't want to know what goes on in there," I said, and left it at that.'

It seems that what appeared on one level as a relatively straightforward question began to eat away at him, destabilising his professional equilibrium and ultimately leading him to reflect upon, and question, his identity as a development expert.

Another key feature of these blockbuster narratives is the power of testimony, which constitutes a fifth trope. Testimony is an idea related to that of witnessing, but brings the additional component of providing a statement of the truth of a matter. In the development blockbuster, it is common for authors to choose to try to 'put the record straight' as part of an account of their earlier experience. One prominent example of this is in Sachs's (2005: 137) *The End of Poverty* where, in the course of providing case studies of what he considers successful policy interventions, he also attempts to engage with critics of his earlier policy advice roles:

'Many critics later accused me of peddling a ruthless form of free-market ideology in Russia. That was not the case. My main activity for two years was an unsuccessful attempt to mobilize international assistance to help cushion the inevitable hardships that would accompany Russia's attempt to overcome the Soviet legacy.'

Continuing with the religious theme, a sixth feature of the development blockbuster genre is the turning point or 'epiphany' – a key event or moment that leads the author to revaluate what has come before and construct a new narrative. For Dichter (2003: ix), this was more of a slow turning point than a big-bang-type epiphany, where he began to realize that development work was not a pure moral realm for doing good, but a real world arena of competition and business that shared the 'tainted' characteristics of the many other less value-driven areas of human endeavour. The uncomfortable recognition of this basic truth that development work involved strong self-interest, and not just altruistic behaviour, became a growing source of discomfort:

'In my naiveté I was not used to thinking of development assistance as an industry. I had for years genuinely believed that we could meaningfully help foster others' development, and for me that meant we occupied a different realm of endeavour from commerce or government. The more I saw that we – the professionals and the organisations for which we work – behave as self-interestedly as any other industry or field and those in it, the more uncomfortable I became.'

Here, the personal development and eventual turning point connects strongly with the basic contradictions of 'the gift' as simultaneously altruistic and self-interested, as well as being embedded in the messy, mundane worlds of power, patronage, and inequality (Stirrat and Henkel 1997).

For Maren (1997: 8), on the other hand, there was more of a sudden moment or epiphany one morning during a particularly difficult meeting in the NGO office:

'I was having so much fun running around starting food-for-work projects – water projects, agriculture projects, forestry projects – that I completely overlooked the most obvious problem: I knew nothing about agriculture, forestry, road building, well digging, dam building, or any of the projects I was approving.

But nobody seemed to care. ... When I slowed down for a moment to consider what was happening, it became clear: Aid distribution is just another big, private business that relies on government contracts (...). Since the securing of grant money is the primary goal, aid organizations rarely meet a development project they don't like. All of this came into focus one morning at an office meeting (...).'

Again, Maren is questioning his previous assumptions and knowledge. However, perhaps we can also recognise here that at the level of the text, this use of the epiphany is perhaps more of a stylistic device than an accurate representation of an autobiographical moment because it is difficult to believe that such insights could have been truly new to him.

Conclusion: Development Blockbusters as 'Gifts' of Professional Wisdom

The emergence of the popular blockbuster as a genre of writing about development is one that has so far received very little attention within development studies, but, as I have argued here, it demands closer analysis. In particular, these books help to shape the changing forms of commodified expert knowledge being produced in and about international development. Their personalised style and form, while persuasive, are also double-edged in that they may lead to a simplification of complex issues in the spirit of providing useable, iconoclastic diagnoses and prescriptions. The stylistic devices deployed in these texts – including confession and epiphany – also lend weight to arguments that Western development discourses carry some of the characteristics of secular religion, for example, focused on 'conversion' to capitalist development pathways, and the promise of a future 'consumption paradise' (Salemink 2004). Overall, the genre is characterised by a combination of personal wisdom and prescriptive development logic within a commercially packaged genre that fits comfortably within the process of commodified knowledge production among the increasingly commercialised priorities of modern publishing.

The personalised form of transmission of this expert knowledge, with its elements of memoir, helps to legitimise it even though there is an ambiguous power in personal narratives that makes their content vulnerable to the flaws of self-justification. This is reinforced by the disguised form of the memoir, rendering its power as a commodity less visible while simultaneously making the product more attractive to consumers. The story of an author's earlier professional life –

and the hard lessons and gritty insights that have supposedly emerged from it – underpins the narrative. By living the challenges involved in development work at first hand, and by making mistakes and experiencing epiphanies along the way, these professionals want readers to know that they have found out the hard way that long-cherished beliefs now need to be questioned. These authors have done things, made mistakes, learned lessons precisely so that the readers themselves do not have to.

In a convergence between the search by publishers for new products where development knowledge has been increasingly recognised as a commodity, and the need for development ideas and institutions to engage in a continuous process of renewal and adaptation, this new publishing niche promotes a form of professional expert knowledge that appears to serve the interests of both development agencies and commercial publishers. While development blockbusters present themselves as critiques of the mainstream, most nevertheless reinforce a pragmatic view of development ('whatever works', 'keep it simple', etc.) that also neatly resonates with current neoliberal orthodoxies. Like the development gift itself, these books may present their authors' experiences in personalised and humanistic terms, but their effects ultimately serve to underpin the increasingly technocratic logic of international aid relationships.

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Meaning-making in Climate (Video) Games: An Appraisal Framework
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Today, *Candy Crush Saga,* a simple match-three puzzle with few characters and a very limited narrative, is played by half a billion people, whereas massive multi-player games such as *Second Life* involving online role-playing can attract up to one million regular users. The latter does not just 'allow' the players to create their own stories: the game basically consists of these stories. Video games, and specifically online simulation games (i.e. virtual games) constitute the most recent realm of collective story-telling and meaning-making. According to Lemke (2006), 'affective elements of meaning-making are far more prominent' in *virtual* games due to their complex relationship with reality, virtual reality, and hyper-reality. Furthermore, they have been more commercially successful than films on a global scale for over a decade (Lemke 2004). It is no wonder, then, that virtual games are being taken up by states, corporations and NGOs alike, as a new medium through which opinions are transformed, behaviour is predicted and manipulated, data are collected, and so forth. This functional dimension aside, games provide common narratives about ongoing conflicts and dilemmas in the contemporary world, even on issues as complex as climate change. They provide various scenarios through which decision-making is simulated and the players learn through trial and error. This transformative side of video games is as under-researched as most of the potential ideological and political effects of virtual media (Lemke 2004). Our contribution aims to partially address this deficit with regard to climate simulation games (henceforth

climate games), and proposes ways of understanding and analysing them.

Why study Climate Games?

Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 176) argue that, in addressing complex issues such as climate change, 'it is not the climate phenomenon in itself that is important, but the way in which society makes sense of this phenomenon'. The socially constructed meanings attributed to climate change materialise in the virtual worlds of climate games. Their increasing number and diversity provide a potentially fertile ground to explore the socially constructed meanings of climate change reflected in and articulated by them. We aim to propose a method through which climate games can be analysed, and illustrate how this approach can be applied, based on our preliminary findings.

How can we study 'play'?

Play is an important component of every human life and every culture. Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1964[1938]) studied the relationship between 'play' and other concepts such as 'culture', 'decision-making' and 'language' in *Homo Ludens,* arguing that play not only precedes but also permeates all cultures and civilizations, continuously. He regarded play as a necessary condition of culture creation, without being 'born of scientific or logical thinking but [rather of] creative language' (ibid: 28). Secondly, Huizinga recognised that utility cannot be the aim of play: He highlighted its non-utilitarian, non-obligatory, unproductive and emancipatory nature. This position is in stark contrast to the concept of serious games (cf. Michael and Chen 2006) wherein playing has either an advertising goal or a learning function. So some of the questions that must be addressed about climate games pertain to their utility: Are climate games utilitarian in nature or sufficiently futile and enjoyable while generating new meanings?

If play is born of creative language, we should also relate language and play: In Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1976 [1953]) analogy between language and game, grammar would represent the rules of the game and a statement would be making a move. Wittgenstein's concept was, from its inception, about a plurality of language games: He is concerned with marking distinctions between a wide range of activities in which language users engage. We have found this relevant to our study, as players as much as the game developers have such a variety and plurality of reasons, ideological tendencies

and most importantly activities in their culture production practices. Furthermore, Jean-François Lyotard (1979) drew upon this concept of language games in his conception and rejection of metanarratives. Instead he argued for more modest and localised narratives that can dislocate the metanarrative by bringing into focus the singular event. This became important in our analysis as we have found climate games to be relatively nonlinear and heavily on the post-modern side with their plural storylines, interweaving scenarios and at times catastrophic surprises.

Finally, the interactive formation involved in the playing and production process brings the structure and agency problem back into the spotlight: As the player socialises into the game, the extent to which her formation as a political subject and as an agent changes, as does the possible outcomes of the simulation game. On the other hand, most decisions have an influence (and often an immediate one) while playing a game, which separate games from real-life decision-making. This is particularly important in the context of climate politics, as policy decisions often suffer from implementation deficits.

Based on these theoretical observations, we find the following research questions of critical interest for the study of climate games:

- How do the game narratives co-constitute climate discourses?

- What kind of subjectivities emerge when the game is played?

We infer that a problem as complex as climate change is structured into at least three layers, based on an earlier categorisation developed by Espen Aarseth (2003). The first layer highlights the relevant real-life structures: characteristics of the medium, and the subject positions of the game designers, producers and distributors. The second layer focuses on the content, and can be analysed using three logics[1] inherent in all climate games: The *logic of simplification* refers to the representation of real-world situations as constricted by the game medium. The *logic of problematisation* is the conception of the problem (of climate change) that is inherent in the game design. Finally, *goal attainment* refers to how the players can win the game and the strategies they can deploy to this end. When juxtaposed with the characteristics of the medium and the perceived subject positions of game-makers, this level of data allows us to analyse the structure of the game. The third layer consists of more specific details wherein symbols, trade-offs between political, economic and ecological necessities, scientific facts and uncertainties, and regional/international conflict and cooperation can be examined.

[1] We understand 'logic' as the basic unit of critical explanation, which refers to 'the purposes, rules and ontological presuppositions that render a practice or regime possible and intelligible' (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 15). In this context the logic of a practice describes, categorises, but also reveals the underlying conditions that make the practice possible and operational (also see Glynos and Howarth 2007, Chapter 4).

Changing Subjectivities

'Earth's future is in your hands! You are president of the European Nations and must tackle climate change from 2000 to 2100.'

Thus begins *the BBC Climate Challenge,* an online simulation game in which the gamer takes on the role of European President to reduce carbon emissions while achieving economic prosperity and staying popular enough to remain in office. Achieving this goal is possible, but it is made difficult by the rules and restrictions inherent in the game. *The BBC Climate Challenge* is just one of the games addressing the issue of climate change developed over the last decade, but there are as many as twenty such games of various difficulty levels available in 2015. A decade ago, studies pointed out that *'we actually know relatively little about the consequences of game play on the cognition of those who play them'* (Squire et al. 2005: 34). Today, both popular and academic sources attribute positive impact to games designed for learning purposes: they are said to improve learning skills, raise awareness and even contribute to the formulation of new solutions to global problems (e.g. McGonigal 2011). This raises questions about the content of these games. How is the problem of climate change constructed in simulation games? What meaning is attributed to the causes and consequences of climate change? And how do these games narrate potential solutions to/protection from the advancing effects of climate change?

The socially constructed meanings attributed to the climate phenomenon 'materialise' through narratives, visualisation and storylines in the virtual worlds of climate games. Based on our research questions, our foci are the co-constitution of the climate discourses in the game environment and of subjectivities of game players.

The former relates to a well-established observation in cultural studies: that cultural artefacts do not passively express or reflect social phenomena, but should be viewed *'as specific machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social phenomena'* (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007: 274). Making climate change the central issue of a game requires translation of the climate change phenomenon to the game medium. To capture the complex and multifaceted issue of climate change in the format of a game means determining the rules, defining the nature of conflict, and constructing quantifiable goals. The process of reproduction and transformation is based on explicit and implicit assumptions about the nature of the climate phenomenon and reflects those aspects which are perceived as essential. How climate change is problematised in games reflects common ideas and deep-rooted assumptions about its causes, consequences and dynamics. In other words, games co-constitute climate discourses.

The second co-constitution mentioned above is that of subjectivities. Various subjectivities are constructed in a game, as it *'creates cognitive and epistemological environments that position the player [in an environment of play] in meaningful ways'* (Flanegan 2009: 6). Subjectivities are constructed explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, the player takes up a certain position, aligning to a specific role and task. Implicitly, game play itself is part of the construction of subjectivities, as the structure of the game constrains the player's actions and confronts her with the results of her decisions. The decisions that can be taken by the player depend on the game's rules and the way it narrates (and simulates) 'reality'. Hence, the game allows certain ways of thinking but restricts others. Ian Bogost (2007: 57) refers to this phenomenon as *'meaning-making through the selective simulation of specific rules'*, wherein the game does not 'tell' a specific meaning to the players but *'rather [confronts] them with the results of their actions through the game rules,'* making them complicit in this reality.

Structuring 'Game Data'

Over recent decades, dozens of computer games that take climate change as their central theme have been developed. We focus on four games: *BBC Climate Challenge, Fate of the World, CEO$_2$* and *Clim'Way*. These games were selected because

- they take place in different settings (global, city, business), which facilitates meaningful analysis of the discursive construction of climate change in diverse virtual worlds;

- the game world is comprehensive and detailed, which is necessary to draw inferences about the discursive construction of climate change (all games allow at least a few hours of gameplay);

- the games have been developed by (a combination of) different actors (NGOs, science, businesses).

All four games are easily accessible. *BBC Climate Challenge*, *CEO$_2$* and *Clim'Way* can be played online whereas *Fate of the World* is available on DVD and can be ordered online. All games can be played in multiple languages.

While the phenomenon of climate change is the main component of all four games, they differ substantially in their co-constitution of the climate discourses. In *CEO$_2$,* the gamer takes the role of the CEO of a large company and is tasked with reducing CO2 emissions while keeping customers and investors happy. In *Clim'Way,* the gamer

must implement city-wide energy policies to address climate change. Besides the 'game module', *Clim'Way* also has a 'context module' where the player can learn more about the causes, consequences and responses to climate change. *BBC Climate Challenge* focuses on European politics and global negotiations (Table 1). Finally, in *Fate of the World,* (the follow-up to the *BBC Climate Challenge),* the gamer acts as President of the Global Environmental Organisation (GEO) and has to deal with the challenges that arise from a world torn by climate change. Depending on the chosen scenario, the gamer has 60 to 200 years to achieve particular goals such as keeping global temperature increase below 3°C, keeping the global human development index above 0.5, and ensuring that no species become extinct. Economic downturns, regional conflicts and natural disasters are recurrent challenges.

We approached our data as multi-modal texts, paying attention to the way in which the graphics, the music, the jargon, the decision-making options, and the narration operate interdependently to establish a semi-fictional narrative in the game. We structured the data into three layers, which we introduced in the previous section. The first layer highlights the relevant real-life structures such as the characteristics of the medium, and the subject positions of the game designers, producers and distributors. This includes the authority on which designers and produces rely, and the extent to which they claim scientific accuracy.

The second layer focused on the games' content, the logics of *simplification* (representation of real-world situations), *problematisation* (conception of climate change), and *goal attainment* (how players win). The logic of simplification reflects how the complexity of climate change in general and decision-making in particular have been constricted in the game. By translating the complexity of social and natural phenomena into game narratives, various ideological choices are made, which reflect the meaning given to these phenomena (e.g. the specific context, setting and actors). Each game also puts forward a conception of the climate crisis inherent in the game structure. The logic of problematisation focuses our attention on the causes and consequences of climate change, the inherent conflicts of interest, and the possible solutions as assumed by the game. Finally, each game sets a goal to be achieved by the gamer and certain strategies can be deployed to achieve this goal. Examining these goals and strategies uncovers the dominant meaning given to climate change, as opposed to others which cause the players to lose.

The third layer consists of a finer analysis. Next to the main logics described above, each game contains a combination of signs, symbols, visuals, graphs, etc. that co-constitute a certain discourse. This includes the specific trade-offs (e.g. between politics, economics and ecology), relations between scientific 'facts' and uncertainties, and regional/international conflict and cooperation that are inherent in the narratives. Table 1 shows how this framework is applied to *BBC Climate Challenge.*

Table 1. An overview of layers of meaning-making in the *BBC Climate Challenge*

Layers of meaning-making	Description	Example
Real-life structures	Characteristics of the medium, subject positions of the game designers and producers, authority on which designers and produces rely, claims of scientific accuracy, etc	**Medium:** The *BBC Climate Challenges* is a flash game that can be played on the BBC website. The game is freely available and is thus accessible to a broad audience. **Producer:** The BBC commissioned and funded the development of the game. **Developer:** The game was developed by Red Redemption (UK), in cooperation with Oxford University's Centre for the Environment. **Purpose:** On its website, the BBC explains that the aim of the Climate Challenge is to provide 'a good introductory route into climate change and some of the issues this creates for governments around the world'. The medium of a game was chosen as a fun and accessible way to communicate the challenges of climate change. The game is tailored to an educated audience of 'young professionals'. **Science:** The game is based on the A1B scenario of the IPCC, which, as is explained on the BBC website 'provides a good mid-line scenario for carbon dioxide output and economic growth, [and] leaves scope for the player to either improve or worsen emissions levels'. The science behind the game, and the choices made in developing the game, are discussed on the BBC website. The BBC explicitly states that the game 'should not be taken as a serious climate change prediction'.

Content of the game		
Logic of simplification (game-world)	Representation of real-world situations as constricted by the game medium	**Context:** The game focuses on decision-making on climate change at the European and international level. The timeframe for the game is 2000–2100. **Setting:** The game has two different settings. The majority of the game is played in the 'policy screen' where the player selects policies for the European nations. Five buildings represent the different policy areas: National (=EU), Trade, Industry, Local and Household. The policy screen also shows some people representing the voters. The other setting is an International Roundtable on climate change attended by delegates from North America, South America, Europe, North Asia, South Asia, Africa and the Pacific. **Actors:** The player takes on the role of President of the European Nations. No other (policy) actors at the European level are represented, except for the 'voters', whose approval rating is given for every policy decision. At the international level, actors are the delegates from seven other world regions, including the player as delegate for the European Nations.
Logic of problematisation (game structure/ rules of the game)	Conception of climate change, causes and consequences, trade-offs, conflicts of interest, possible solutions	The problem of climate change is represented as a policy problem which requires action at the European and international level. CO_2 emissions are a central metric in the game and are presented as the (only) cause of climate change. At the European level, the game displays clear trade-offs between (economic) development, public opinion and climate change. As the game tutorial explains, the player 'must choose policies for the European Nations that balance the need to lower carbon dioxide emission with [the] responsibility to maintain vital resources'. At the international level, the game draws attention to the global scale of the climate change issue, the need to set international reduction targets, and the different positions of and challenges facing world regions.
Logic of goal attainment (game play: 'how the player is able to interact with the game-world and how that game-world reacts to the choices the player makes')	The goal of the game and the strategies that players can deploy to win the game (as well as strategies that cause the player to lose)	**Goal:** To tackle climate change while staying popular enough with the voters to remain in office **Game play:** The game consists of ten turns, each representing a decade between 2000 and 2010. In each turn the player can select up to six 'policy cards' in one or more of the five sectors mentioned above. Each policy card has a positive or negative effect on the available resources (money, energy, food and water), the environment (represented as CO_2 emissions), and voters' approval rating. Playing certain cards unlocks further options (e.g. new technologies). At each turn, the player is confronted with the results of her policy choices. Every three turns, international negotiations of emission targets take place. The player, as the European Nations delegate, can encourage other delegates to set a target by opting to subsidise their green policies. Between turns, the player is also confronted with (catastrophic) events, reflecting the unpredictability of climate change. **Winning/losing:** The game ends after ten turns, when the player is presented with an evaluation showing the results of her policy choices on CO_2 emissions and resources, as well as a final voter approval rating. If the approval rating falls to zero during the game, the player is voted out of office and the game ends. The game can thus not be 'won' (the player can only do better or worse in terms of balancing action on climate change with resource needs and approval rating), but it can be lost when the president is voted out of office.
Details of the game	Visuals, symbols, signs, graphs, tables, music, etc.	The game takes place in a highly abstract environment, representing five European policy sectors and the population of Europe in one setting, and the delegates of seven regions of the world in another. Between turns, a newspaper is shown which provides feedback on progress and public opinion. The impact of the player's actions on resources and CO_2 emissions is reflected in graphs and tables, using scientific language. Most game graphics focus on Europe. (Particular symbols can be analysed in further detail.)

Sources:

- The BBC Climate Challenge:
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- Background info on the BBC website:
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/hottopics/climatechange/climate_challenge/aboutgame.shtml
- Interview with Gobion Rowlands, producer of the Climate Challenge:
  http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=12478
- Online directory of environmental games:
  http://ecoplayer.org/environmental-games/bbc-climate-challenge-climate-change-game

The next step in the analysis is to compare the different narratives emerging from this three-layered framework. For the purposes of this volume, we finish with the critical issue emerging from our approach and application of the framework.

Emergent issues

A central proposition in the field of game studies is the difference between narratives as expressed in traditional media and in games. Video games are inherently non-linear: On the one hand, they depend on decision-making; on the other, decisions have to pose real, plausible alternatives that are comprehensible to the players. It must be entirely reasonable for a player to make a decision one way in one game, and a different way in the next and reach different results. The ability of the player to take decisions and hence shape the story is critical. In climate games this results in overdetermination of agency and power: First, decidability and certainty are overstressed compared to any real-life situation. Climate change is not a phenomenon which is understood perfectly, and nor are the results of the possible decisions taken. Second, the decision-making processes are simplified, whereby the player's agency is overstressed: No leader on her own can effectively stop climate change in real life. Finally, the impact of decisions is overstressed: In games, (almost all) decisions make a difference. This characteristic of simulation games signals an important divergence between real-life politics and decision-making in games. The 'implementation deficit' that characterises real-life politics is practically absent in games, where the intended policy and the implementation of the policy fully correspond.

The assumption underlying this research is that it is important to understand the way societies make sense of the climate phenomenon. Games simplify, problematise and set a goal for the player; through these mechanisms, the (dominant) meanings attributed to the phenomenon of climate change materialise. However, games do not passively express or reflect phenomena, but actively produce, reproduce and transform. The methods proposed here aim to illuminate the co-constitutions of climate discourses (also see Mert 2013) and subjectivities of the player in climate games, and in doing so shed light on the meaning-making on climate change. The concluding question we would like to leave you with is *'how can we simultaneously remember/reflect on the fact that games (or fiction in general) are representations and not equals of real-life decision-making and yet study them?'*

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More Than a Single Story: Alternative Versions of Giving and Receiving Between Africa and Europe
Martina Kopf

I

In her famous TED Talk, 'The Danger of a Single Story', the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) reflects on the power of stories. 'Stories', as she says, 'can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.' (Adichie 2009: 00.17.48[1]) The difference between the two possibilities lies in the difference between what she calls a 'single story' and the creation of 'many stories'. While Adichie was growing up in a Nigerian middle-class household in the 1970s, her mother used to teach her modesty by reminding her of the poverty of the domestic worker, Fide, a young boy, whose family Adichie's mother supported with gifts. Once, Adichie remembers, she visited Fide's family and saw the beautiful handmade baskets his mother produced. Only then did it occur to her that there was more to know and to tell about him and his family than a single story of poverty. Later on, when Adichie was a student in the United States, she found herself confronted with versions of a single story of Africa as poor and backward that did the same to her as the single story of Fide had done to him (Adichie 2009: 00.02.58–00.04.12). 'So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become' (Adichie 2009: 00.09.26).

[1] Timcode of the movie.

II

In the 1920s and 1930s, Mabel Shaw, a member of the London Mission Society and founder of a prestigious girls' boarding school in colonial Zambia, published several accounts and stories portraying what was at that time an unconventional adventure in education. Within and against the imperialist and racist mentalities of the time, the missionaries tried to educate the girls in the spirit of a syncretistic Christian culture that acknowledged and incorporated Bemba values and cultural practices. It was a balancing act and not free from cultural bias (Kopf 2014; Morrow 1986). In one of Shaw's stories we find the following moment:

'Tomorrow was the first Sunday in a new month, and a Giving Day in the girls' Sunday School. Everyone came with something to give. Lots of girls came from the village, and all the very big people in Mama's Bible Class came, a hundred of them or more, all with a gift. [...] Tomorrow the giving was for little children in England who lived in the city of the king and who were sometimes cold and hungry. They had no shoes and stockings to wear on their feet, and that horrified African children, for all white people cover their legs and feet. Mary had nearly finished her vest. She thought of the little white baby who would some day wear it' (Shaw 1936: 125).

In 2012 the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH) produced a video entitled 'Africa for Norway'. It features a fictitious aid campaign in Africa for Norwegians suffering from the cold climate. With its ironic version of the pop song 'We are the world', produced by the USA for Africa project in 1985, the video parodies popular Western humanitarianism. Both texts – Shaw's story and the video – share the narrative of an act of charity between Africa and Europe that reverses the commonly associated roles of 'giving' and 'receiving'. While the early version refers to a real event, the more recent one takes the form of irony, of pure imagination.

III

I understand these two versions as two poles in a continuum of cultural representations of aid discourses floating between Africa and Europe from the colonial past to the present. The first one marks a point of entry, the integration of a local East African community into aid networks with the globalizing effect of linking the local to the 'distant other' through an act of charity. Curiously, at this historical point of entry in colonial Zambia, the roles of 'giving' and 'receiving' seem to have still been fluid, in the making. The second pole marks a kind of 'dead end' where the role of Africa and Africans as 'recipients'

has become completely determined in and through discourses of aid. In 2012, the reversal of giving and taking in an act of charity between Africa and Europe seems so removed from the factuality of global rules of exchange that in critical discourse it can be only thought of as a form of fiction, a joke. What lies in between these two versions – if we understand this 'in between' not so much as a temporal space, but as a symbolic space of shifting meanings and truths concerning both factual and symbolic dimensions of 'giving' and 'taking' between Africa and Europe?

IV

To explore the in between, I draw on an African version, the movie *Hyènes* (1992) by the Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety. *Hyènes* is an adaptation of the play *The Visit* by the Swiss writer and playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt, originally published under the title *Der Besuch der alten Dame* in 1956. Mambety transferred the plot from the fictitious Swiss village Güllen to the village of his birth, Colobane, and performed the play with locals, most of them without any formal training in acting. The movie tells the story of an aging woman of extreme wealth, Linguère Ramatou, who revisits her impoverished home village after years of absence. She is magnificently acted by Ami Diakhaté, a woman Mambety met at a market in Dakar, selling soup. The villagers put all their hope for a better life in her, and indeed, she offers them the phenomenal sum of one billion francs. Her gift, however, is tied to a condition. She demands the death of her former lover, Dramaan Drameh, a local shopkeeper. The two of them had a love affair when they were both young and poor. When Ramatou fell pregnant, her lover abandoned her in order to avoid a disadvantageous marriage. He denied paternity, and when she brought the case to court, he bribed two men to testify against her. Their false testimony led to her expulsion from the village community and forced her to leave.

V

Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit* is a satire about the excesses of capitalist economics. Claire Zachanassian – the old lady in the play – moves between ridicule and epic grandeur. Her wealth is unapologetic. Through her, global capital enters the deprived Swiss village. She brings the promise of economic progress, mobility, education. She distributes money and gifts among the villagers and consumes one husband after the other in the glamorous way of a Hollywood movie star. In Dürrenmatt's play, Claire Zachanassian is accompanied by

a phalanx of reporters who report on every step she makes. Her gift to the village is made into an international media event.

The old lady in Mambety's movie is a figure beyond ridicule. Mambety's direction and Diakhaté's performance give her a rough and at times tender dignity. Unlike Dürrenmatt's billionaire, she enters the scene without husbands and reporters. Instead, she is accompanied by female servants, laden with jewellery and luxurious fabric. She is not ridiculous; she brings forth the ridicule and makes it visible. One after the other, the village authorities – who, at first, vehemently refuse her offer – turn against their former friend and equal Draman Drameh. In the end he is sacrificed in an informal trial that is camouflaged as a vote on the gift.

In Dürrenmatt's play, the vote is covered by a news reporter whom its actual meaning escapes. In *Hyènes* there are no reporters following Linguère Ramatou. What happens in Colobane is not brought to the attention of an international public.

Ramatou, representing power and wealth through her servants, announces the gift and its price. *(Still image © trigon-film.org)*

VI

In February 2014, I showed the movie in a film series called 'My favorite movie', organized by a neighbourhood initiative in Duisburg. We announced it as a special evening about African cinema. One of the guests, who was introduced to me as a local councillor, immediately engaged me in a conversation about the failure of development assistance in Africa. I do not exactly remember the content of his criticism. I remember the words 'scandal' and 'down there'. Africa, the things that happen 'down there', a scandal. I did not agree. I did not contradict. He seemed to assume that I knew what he was talking about.

VII

Mambety uses fiction and intertextuality in a way that forbids the spectator to mentally store what she sees in terms of the usual Africa stereotypes. He subverts the rules and expectations of cultural production and international critique and reception of African art, which commonly values cultural artefacts from the continent in terms of their 'authenticity' – itself a highly fictitious category. Is this truly an African story? A true African story? Mambety instead *takes* – quite self-assuredly – cultural material from Europe which was internationally commodified through Bernhard Wicki's movie *The Visit* (1964), starring Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Quinn in the roles of the old lady and the shopkeeper, and returns it to local and global audiences in a deeply transformed manner. He thus reverses from the outset the rules of giving and taking which commonly govern the reception of African art. While they consume a story of poverty and corruption set in the West African Sahel, the viewers are obliged to think of it in a different way; to distill a truth from it which moves beyond the local and the immediacy of the real. Set in Senegal, it is not an African story. In the words of the filmmaker, it 'tells a human story to the whole world' (Ukadike 1998: 144).

VIII

What does *Hyènes* tell us about the material and the symbolic dimensions of giving and taking between Africa and Europe? The movie builds in elements which loosely link the narrative to geopolitical issues in contemporary global relations. The villagers repeatedly refer to Ramatou as 'rich as the World Bank', and in a Kafkaesque scene in a church, Dramaan watches a news report of mothers with starving babies of the kind that were broadcast around the globe during the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s. In an interview given at the Southern African Film Festival 1993, where his film had been a big success, the filmmaker declared:

  'You know the hyena is a terrible animal. He is able to follow a lion, a sick lion during all seasons. And during the lion's last days it comes down and jumps on him and eats him, eats the lion peacefully. That is the life of the World Bank. They know we are sick and poor and we have some dignity. But they can wait, wait for the last days when you say OK, I know my dignity is meat. I want to survive. Please take my dignity and kill me with your money' (Rawlins 1993).
In the same interview, Mambety declares that the 'World Bank is only a picture'.

IX

Its apparently clear political message notwithstanding, the movie opposes simplified and simplifying interpretations of the kind 'Africa is being sold out to the World Bank'. It distinguishes itself from the mainstream of critical discourses on donor-recipient relations by shifting the attention from the material to the symbolic. What is at the heart of *Hyènes* – and what makes the film so complex – are the stories that connect to the gift, the struggles to gain power over the story, the power to interpret. With Ramatou, two conflicting narratives are inscribed into the story: a trauma narrative and a narrative of power and excess. The dual aspect is symbolically represented in Ramatou's artificial limbs made of pure gold. Her golden arm and leg represent trauma and loss, on the one side, and power and wealth, on the other.

Dramaan pays his last visit to his former golden limbed lover. *(Still image © trigon-film.org)*

The trauma narrative is tied to the past, to a female voice speaking from a subaltern position, whose truth had remained unacknowledged within the patriarchal norms of the community and its legal institutions. This narrative comes to a close when Draman Drameh, knowing about his imminent death, eventually acknowledges his responsibility and asks Ramatou for the name and the fate of their daughter. Only then do we learn that the daughter, born into destitution, did not survive her first year. The narrative of power and excess centres around the gift and the way it gradually determines the lives of the villagers.

X

Two pivotal moments: The first is the scene in which Ramatou returns to Colobane. The whole village has assembled for a ceremonial reception. The mayor has prepared a speech,

a distorted version of the past, creating a fiction of Ramatou as a dear member of the community remembered for her generosity and wit. This version is cut short by Ramatou, who interrupts the mayor and confronts the villagers with the truth. In the second scene Dramaan faces his trial in front of the community, which has again assembled to put Ramatou's gift to the vote. Without announcing it, they thus put Dramaan's life to a vote. Mambety moves this last scene to an open landscape with a rock formation that forms a huge natural amphitheatre. He thus abandons both literally and symbolically the realist mode of representation. Moving the scene from the village grounds to the vast and timeless space of the open land, the narrative leaves behind the grounds of the real and enters the language of ritual and myth.

Through their vote the villagers accept the gift and a distorted version of truth as truth. *(Still image © trigon-film.org)*

Read under the aspect of trauma the film tells a story that was not integrated into history or into any official narratives, but was negated in the versions of the past the villagers told to each other. The suppressed story returns with Ramatou, while the act of suppression, the act of creating an incomplete story, returns with the villagers' vote. The trauma narrative thus reinforces the complex interplay of fiction and truth that unfolds around the gift, the mechanism of how one is turned into the other in order to conceal, elude and suppress what might be too problematic to remember.

Mambety translates the climax of the drama into an archaic scene, an archaic fear: the transformation of a collective in and through the conscious exclusion and sacrifice of one of its members. The violent act, however, is only the expression *and* the result of another process, which happens at the level of the plot and at the discursive level: the transformation of a community through its collective acceptance of a fiction as truth. The fiction they create is that they did not accept the gift for the sake of money, but for the sake of justice.

A stereotype. The problem with stereotypes, Adichie said, 'is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story' (Adichie 2009: 00.13.16). As spectators, we witness the birth of a single story hitherto tied to the acceptance of the gift. The narration of the vote dissolves visually into a scene evoking modernity: A bulldozer digs over the red soil. Behind, in the distance, the skyline of Senegal's capital Dakar comes into view.

XI

The first time I saw the movie I was still a student. It made a strong impression on me. Years after, I still remembered the images of the actors in the open landscape and the intense atmosphere of the trial. There are movies you forget once you have seen them. There are others that stay with you, become part of your imaginary. I have shown the movie several times in classes on post-colonial literature. It has been interesting to observe again and again the same effect. Towards the end of the movie a concentrated silence. You feel something happen when Dramaan is eventually sacrificed. You feel a change go through the audience. An experience.

XII

Watching the movie *Hyènes* feels like leaving behind the narrowness of the single story, leaving also the dead end of critical debates on representations of Africa in discourses on aid and humanitarianism behind and entering a third space, a space beyond discourse and counter-discourse. It allows you to stop and think. Differently. Mambety's version signified and continues to signify a dual rupture. First, it represents a rupture with the mainstream of medial discourses which invented Africa during the Ethiopian food crisis of the 1980s as a continent of poverty and hunger, linking a whole continent to a single image, a single story. Second, it breaks with the realist mode of narration that is characteristic of the bulk of critical and creative responses to the 'Africa as a place of poverty and hunger' narrative. In fact, Mambety was one of the many African artists, writers and filmmakers who took up discourses of aid, reformulated and reimagined them, turned them upside down, and returned them to national and international audiences in a new or different shape. Examples are Aminata Sow-Fall's novel *The Beggars' Strike* (1980), put on screen by Oumar Sissoko under the title *Battu* (2000), the movie *Guelwaar* (1992) by Ousmane Sembène, and the novel *Gifts* (1993), Nuruddin Farah's famous literary response to Marcel Mauss' essay *The Gift*.

From the 1970s onwards, African writers and filmmakers have subverted dominant perceptions of 'giving' and 'receiving' in their works. Many of them share the motive of a conscious refusal of the (European) gift, an act of protest against a powerful donor. Mambety, however, does not tell a story of refusing, but of accepting a problematic gift. With Dürrenmatt, he tells a story of a collective agreement made while accepting the gift: the agreement to hitherto accept a distorted version of history as truth.

XIII

After the screening in Duisburg, the local politician tells me the movie had left him unimpressed. He had expected to see a documentary, something informative about people's lives in Africa. He could not take the movie, the way the villagers performed, seriously. In his view, it was too artificial. Another member of the audience, one with a keen interest in cinema, was impressed: Not only had it been the best adaptation of the classic drama he had ever seen, but the film had also made him realize that Dürrenmatt had written a truly African story.

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Fictionalizing the Facts: Torture and Identity in Zero Dark Thirty
Gabi Schlag

Helicopter hovering above Abbottabad at 1AM (is a rare event).
@reallyvirtual, Sohaib Althar at twitter, 1 May 2011

Ammar: Your friend is an animal, please help me!
Maya: You can help yourself by being truthful.
Dialogue from *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012

Fact and fiction in the war on terror

The true story of how Osama bin Laden was found, killed and buried is still being written (Mahler 2015).[1] Deconstructing the official narrative of a decade-long manhunt, Seymour Hersh (2015) has recently claimed that the 'modus operandi of US policy' remains 'high-level lying'. Referring to a retired US intelligence officer and other unnamed sources, Hersh argues that the central information about bin Laden's hideaway was revealed by a ‚walk-in' (and not through the decade-long intelligence-gathering by CIA officers) and turned out to be a safe house maintained by the Pakistani intelligence service. Accordingly, he wrote that Pakistani officials were informed about the military operation and that a cover-up story of bin Laden's death in a drone strike had already been invented and was supposed to go public a week after the operation actually took place. Even more, Hersh claimed that the dead body of bin Laden was not given a proper Islamic burial at sea, as President Obama claimed, but body parts were thrown out of the helicopter by members of the SEAL team that night.

As Hersh's widely acknowledged but extensively criticized article makes clear, there remain many contested, even unknown facts in the story of how bin Laden was found, killed and buried. Journalists like Hersh with a decade-long history of uncovering lies and deconstructing myths aim to tell the truth based on well-researched facts. However, as Jonathan Mahler (2015) writes in his story about Hersh's article, '[r]eporters don't just find facts; they look for narratives. And an appealing narrative can exert a powerful gravitational pull that winds up bending facts in its direction'. Narratives, though, are commonly relegated to fiction, hence to novelists and film directors. The most 'powerful gravitational pull' was certainly exercised by the film *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), directed by Kathryn Bigelow and written by Mark Boal. Bearing these official, journalistic and fictional accounts in mind, the story of bin Laden's death is still 'floating somewhere between fact and mythology' (Mahler 2015).

In recent decades, students of International Relations (IR) have paid more and more attention to the cultural production and representation of international politics, including films, documentaries, photos, cartoons and paintings (Kirkpatrick 2015; Hansen 2014; Bleiker 2015). Still and moving images are often used in the classroom in order to exemplify theoretical approaches or to illustrate policies (Spencer and Engert 2009). Images are also conceptualized as powerful re-/presentations of politics, co-constituting our common knowledge of decisive historical events (van Munster and Sylvest 2015). Often we think we know something because we have seen it. Images, however, are not plain depictions of an uncontested reality. It is often uncritically assumed that documentary genres possess strong claims of truthfulness and trustworthiness, while fiction is regarded as an exemplary narrative and creative medium. A closer look reveals that both documentary and fictional genres have much in common as powerful sources in the production of meaning and knowledge. This is particularly true of political events, where the distinction between fact and fiction often blurs.

Understanding the discursive power of films and movies implies that film-making should be conceptualized as a highly politicized endeavor. Many films document and criticize social and political realities; they construct powerful narratives and re-/presentations that people see, recognize and acknowledge. This statement is even more true when war and violence are depicted. Reconsidering the war on terror, this paper addresses the question of how the hunt for and death of Osama bin Laden were visually constructed and narrated in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*. While Bigelow's film received wide critical acclaim, it was also criticized for its claims to depict authoritative truth and its alleged justification of torture. The public discourse in the US illustrates that such films are

[1] For the most prominent accounts by journalists, see Schmidle (2011), Bowden (2012b), Bergen (2012); for an eye-witness account, see Bissonette (2012); for interviews and documentaries, see CBS News (2012), HBO (2013), Fox News (2014).

consequential re-/presentations of politics for different, yet ambivalent reasons: First, the depiction of torture and its alleged effectiveness might enhance the erosion of international norms as laid out in the anti-torture conventions while making the moral ambiguity of such practices visible and criticizable. Second, *Zero Dark Thirty* might restore a collective identity in difference to the 'Islamist Other' while unveiling the naiveté of an uncontested positive self-image of the US. Thus, contextualizing and reading a film like *Zero Dark Thirty* reminds us that it is never easy and simple to understand polyphonic narratives; rather, it calls for prudent interpretations.

Contextualizing *Zero Dark Thirty*: Filming the war on terror

Zero Dark Thirty is an action thriller directed by the Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow and written by Mark Boal. It was released in the US in mid-December 2012 and dramatizes the decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden by the US intelligence services. In the real world, bin Laden was found and killed in his hideaway in Pakistan in early May 2011. That day, President Barack Obama declared to the public: 'Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, [...] on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al-Qaeda's terror, justice has been done' (Obama 2011).

Finding Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind behind the terror attacks of September 11, played an important role in the US discourse on the war on terror. He personified the 'Other' and symbolized the enemy the US was fighting against in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq (Jeffords and Al-Sumait 2015). Finding bin Laden was a top priority for the Bush as well as the Obama administration. *Zero Dark Thirty* fictionalizes this story based on real CIA documents made available to Bigelow and Boal. However, both emphasized that the movie is not a documentary.

The question whether Bigelow and Boal had unauthorized access to classified documents and files was the subject of an official investigation with two final reports.[2] The cooperation between the CIA, Bigelow and Boal had already started in 2010 when they were preparing for a film called *Tora Bora* about bin Laden's supposed hideaway in Afghanistan (Leopold and Henderson 2015). Regarding the making of *Zero Dark Thirty*, documents made public via the Freedom of Information Act confirm that 'the C.I.A. eagerly cooperated with the filmmakers, arranging for the writer and director to meet with numerous analysts and officers who were identified as being involved in the hunt for bin Laden' (Mahler 2015) and

thus 'won unprecedented access to secret details about the bin Laden operation, and how they got agency officers and officials to review and critique the ZDT script' (Leopold and Henderson 2015). One central, yet controversial narrative that the torturing of detainees revealed the decisive information for finding bin Laden was dismissed as 'grossly inaccurate and misleading' by Senators Diane Feinstein (Democrat), Carl Levin (Democrat), and John McCain (Republican) in an open letter to the CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment (Feinstein 2012).

Fact or fiction? That remains the basic question for *Zero Dark Thirty*. As Mahler aptly writes: 'There are different ways to control a narrative. There's the old-fashioned way: Classify documents that you don't want seen [...]. But there's also the more modern, social-media-savvy approach: Tell the story you want them to believe. Silence is one way to keep a secret. Talking is another. And they are not mutually exclusive.' For many critics, the making of *Zero Dark Thirty* exactly presented this modern approach. Some critics have called the film a (highly problematic) form of 'embedded filmmaking' (Maass 2013) while academics read *Zero Dark Thirty* as an expression of a new genre called 'Dark Americana' (Jones and Smith 2015).

Reading *Zero Dark Thirty*

The film begins with a black screen and the announcement that '[t]he following motion picture is based on firsthand accounts of actual events'. Then the date 'September 11, 2001' appears and original voices of September 11 witnesses and victims calling 911 are heard while the screen remains black. Already, this opening scene sets a very strong affective frame with its aesthetic absence of documentary images but audio-visual presence of dramatic voices. The audience certainly recalls individual and collective memories of 9/11, an event which is invoked as the origin of the following story.

The most prominent scene is a sequence at the beginning where CIA officer Dan interrogates the detainee Ammar under torture. Maya, the leading character of the film, witnesses this scene and supports the interrogation by handing over a jug of water to Dan. First, Ammar is chained to the ceiling, then waterboarded on the floor but does not reveal any useful information. Dan concludes the scene by saying 'When you lie to me, I hurt you. [...] In the end, everybody breaks. It's biology'.

Several scenes later, we see Ammar, now released from his isolation room, sitting together with Dan and Maya, eating and drinking. He is talking freely about the Saudi group and a man known to be Osama bin Laden's favored courier, Abu Ahmed. As the story continues, we witness Maya's hunt for Abu Ahmed in

[2] CIA Office of Inspector General report: 'Alleged Disclosure of Classified Information by Former D/CIA', March 2014; and CIA Office of Inspector General report: 'Potential Ethics Violations Involving Film Producers', September 2013; see Leopold and Henderson 2015.

order to find the hideaway of the al-Qaeda leader. The turning point of the story certainly is the terrorist attack at the Marriot Hotel in Islamabad, where Maya and a CIA colleague named Jessica are first-hand witnesses. After that, Jessica follows her own lead on bin Laden and gets killed by a suicide bomber. Maya is troubled and disturbed by her death, making the hunt for bin Laden increasingly an issue of revenge and retribution. Nearly at the end of the film, we witness a long scene at a compound in Abbottabad, shot in the dark as well as with night vision devices, where bin Laden is killed. His body is brought by the Navy Seal team to the camp where Maya now confirms his identity.

Visualizing practices of torture

After the attacks on September 11, the Bush administration decided to treat the incident as an 'act of war', classifying terrorists as detainees outside the protection of the Geneva Convention. The CIA established black site prisons overseas, outside US territory, and set up the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in 2002. The Office of Legal Council at the Department of Justice gave legal advice to the CIA, a collection of seminal documents which later became known as the 'torture memos'. Special interrogation techniques, as they were called by the CIA's Detention and Interrogation Program, were used on over 30 detainees but produced different 'outcomes': seven detainees revealed no intelligence information, some provided accurate information before they were tortured, and multiple detainees fabricated information.[3]

Bearing these facts in mind, the fictional account of torture's indirect effectiveness – in the end, Ammar 'breaks' and reveals important information to Dan and Maya – is a myth but also a suggestive narrative. In her critique of the film, Jane Mayer (2012) asked in *The New Yorker*: 'Can torture really be turned into morally neutral entertainment?' Mayer argues that Bigelow fails to show that torture doesn't work. Remember, CIA agent Dan says that everybody breaks in the end. While top politicians denied that ‚special interrogation techniques' had been used to obtain the decisive intelligence information which led to bin Laden's compound, some critics accused Bigelow of suggesting exactly this relationship of cause and effect. Bigelow replied to her critics that the real scandal does not refer to the depiction of waterboarding in *Zero Dark Thirty*, but to the actual torturing of detainees in black sites legalized by the US administration for years (Bigelow 2013). The torture scene illustrates how the distinction between fact and fiction becomes blurred, producing a powerful reality of its own (for *24*, see van Veeren 2009: 369). While, on the face of it, the ‚torture is effective' narrative might enhance the

[3] A report by the CIA Committee (2012) on the interrogation program was declassified in December 2014 (Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program).

erosion of international norms as laid out in the anti-torture conventions, making the moral ambiguity of such practices visible and thus criticizable is important, too. As a fictional account, *Zero Dark Thirty* is evidence of torture, even making it physically perceptible with the aesthetics of a shaking (hand) camera perspective of close-ups. It does not conceal that torturing is a shady and brutal business.

Reconfiguring the self and the other

As the war on terror itself has often been justified with plain enemy constructs, vividly expressed by President George W. Bush (Merskin 2004), depictions of the 'Other' are also telling in understanding the imagined 'Self'. The dichotomy between good vs. evil is often deconstructed in Dark Americana, a genre which developed rapidly after 9/11. As Jones and Smith (2015: 3) write, it 'recognizes a world of moral ambiguity and emotional complexity', often inhabited by flawed and pathological characters. One could see Maya as a sacrificed hero, a female reincarnation of *24*'s Jack Bauer (van Veeren 2009), but her manic and clinical behavior also scares us. CIA officer Dan and the CIA staff at the embassy in Islamabad, as well as in Washington, are mostly superficial characters. What might strike viewers as a surprise, then, is that the enemy, hence the threatening terrorist, is visually flawed. Ammar, the main terrorist character shown, is a detainee and a victim rather than a real threat. Only in one scene, when CIA officer Jessica is killed, do we see the face of a suicide bomber, a poor and ordinary man shouting 'Allah Akbar' before he activates the detonator. Thus, the enemy remains a highly ambivalent figure: on the one hand, bin Laden symbolizes the mastermind of the terror network but is not actually represented – only at the end can we take a quick glance at his dead body. On the other hand, the film might suggest that the enemy resides within 'ourselves' (US society and politics), indicating that 'we' have become as violent and inhumane as the 'Other'.

Remember, the film ends with Maya alone, weeping in the cabin of an aircraft leaving Afghanistan. Perhaps she is mourning the lost lives whose voices we heard in the opening scene of the film - or Maya is realizing the loss of a nation's confidence in its own humanity.

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Narrating War: Human Deformation in The Hurt Locker
Frank Gadinger

*'The rush of battle is often a potent and
lethal addiction, for war is a drug'.
(Chris Hedges,
Opening Quote from The Hurt Locker)*

The narrative durability of the war on terror

The war on terror is not over. It is still one of the most powerful political narratives in the 21st century. While the war on terror's rhetoric of revenge was omnipresent during the Bush administration and visible for the public through media coverage on Afghanistan and Iraq, the narrative has transformed under President Barack Obama towards a highly technological endeavour of hidden operations by special forces, military drones, and global surveillance efforts (Scahill 2013). In other words, the simple plot of an antagonistic constellation between good and evil, which stabilized the collective crisis and trauma in the aftermath of 9/11, has changed into an amorphous narrative of multiple stories of patriotism, frustration, normalization, and paranoia. Moreover, the narrative has reached a global scope and is used as a pattern of justification by politicians to legitimize completely different political measures, including data retention and restrictions of civil liberties. From a narratological perspective, the war on terror is a prime example of a highly successful narrative comparable to the cold war and the free market's invisible hand.

Its durability lies in the innovative narrative configuration afforded by even seemingly contradictory causalities. That is, the success of a persistent narrative can be explained by whether people actually believe it rather than simply relying on the validity of empirical evidence. It is fair to say that so far political scientists have not been well-equipped enough to study processes of narrative transformation in political discourse. They prefer to study political elites' speech acts as a primary source of knowledge and follow a narrow understanding of the political arena. In doing so, scholars ignore that most people gain their knowledge through secondary representations of popular culture in films, series, novels, cartoons, paintings and all forms of cultural representations in everyday life (Neumann and Nexon 2006: 10–17). International Relations (IR) scholars have recently begun to more actively consider the production and representation of international politics (Shapiro 2009; Weber 2006). Now scholars have begun to put more emphasis on films and series as a didactic instrument to explain theoretical premises on images as specific carriers of meaning in discourse (Heck and Schlag 2013) and documentary films as powerful forms of critical intervention in discourse (van Munster and Sylvest 2015). As Gabi Schlag rightly argues in her contribution in this dialogue, 'it is often uncritically assumed that documentary genres possess strong claims of truthfulness and trustworthiness, while fiction is regarded as an exemplary narrative and creative medium', which is misleading as both genres operate with narrative elements and destabilize the distinction between fact and fiction. The narrative analysis of films, as done in cultural and film studies (e.g. Bronfen 2012), remains a blind spot in current research and unveils the methodological challenge of studying political storytelling as a cultural practice in everyday life.

The relevance of Hollywood films for the study of legitimizing discourses

As I argue in this essay, Hollywood films are a major part of public discourse and present an exemplary site of cultural meaning production and historical self-reflection. To make this argument stronger, the analysis of popular films is even more relevant compared to documentary films such as *Citizenfour*. While documentary films are accepted as critical interventions under hegemonic conditions and are therefore easier to decode, Hollywood films are optimal objects of investigation when used to explore the underlying narrative patterns of political storytelling. They are therefore an unexplored methodological entry point to studying changing narrative configurations in political discourse. War films in particular activate emotions and affect audiences by allowing

one to imagine the experience of war, which can seem rather abstract for ordinary citizens. Films activate emotions and enable collective remembering. Cinema is a privileged site of meaning production and collective memory, in which historical experiences are imagined and, in the case of war military conflicts, are recoded through cinematographic tools. The major advantage for using Hollywood films is that most of them cannot be characterized as clear propaganda or explicitly anti-war. The recent controversial debate in the U.S. on the highly successful film *American Sniper* by Clint Eastwood is telling (Ito 2015). Different actors in political parties, media and prominent figures struggled with the message of the film and thereby showed how legitimizing discourses are contested. Films and series around the war on terror such as *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Homeland,* and *American Sniper* can be used by political actors to either justify or criticize political realities. Through the use of visual narratives, they come to represent the contested nature of producing legitimacy in democracies through cultural practices of storytelling.

Is *The Hurt Locker* propaganda or anti-war?

The Oscar-winning film *The Hurt Locker* by director Kathryn Bigelow is the focus of the following narrative analysis. The film debuted in 2008 during a period of collective war-weariness in the U.S. and the power transition in the White House from Bush to Obama. While the film was criticized for being silent on the depoliticizing effects of the war on terror, I will show the opposite. *The Hurt Locker* shows the normalization of the war on terror as a highly technical endeavour involving special forces operating in a completely different world. War becomes a routine job and can become as addictive as a drug. The narrative of professionalization and dehumanization can be either interpreted as a critique of the heroically patriotic narrative prevalent after 9/11 or a as cynical reading of the war on terror as a technological project that makes its legitimization easier for the public.

The film is based on a script by journalist Mark Boal, who worked as a reporter within an explosive ordnance disposal team in Iraq and used this opportunity to describe his experience. The film benefits from this rich experience by presenting a 'realistic' story of a military squad. Three characters are at the core of the story's focus: Jeremy Renner as Sergeant James who represents the fearless leader, Anthony Mackie as the cautious and security-oriented Sergeant Sanborn, and Brian Geraghty as the young and overstrained Specialist Eldridge. The war in Iraq as a topic in itself is never discussed in any scene of the film. The narrative form of the film is unusual for the

genre as there is no typical tension-filled climax ending in a showdown. Instead, the spectator continuously experiences these men's everyday job, which consists of disposing bombs in risky situations. This repetition forces the audience to experience war as routine, albeit always under conditions of extreme danger. By showing the repetitive procedures of the military staff, the film becomes similar to a documentary. These activities include the barricading of roads, the evacuation of people from a building, the disposal of bombs, and protecting each other from sniper fire. This analysis aims to analyse the film in its narrative form and visual language by studying some scenes in-depth while contextualizing the film in its historical background.

Experiencing the war zone

The opening scene directly leads the spectator into the chaotic life of military operations in an urban terrain. The camera perspective shows the dusty streets of a city that has obviously been devastated by war. The spectator takes on the view of a small remote-controlled robot, which slowly drives across the screen to investigate a potential target of danger, and is introduced to the atmosphere of technological warfare. The camera is hectic and oscillates between the team, whose protagonists make jokes to cover up the nervous and paranoid atmosphere, and the restricted view of the robot. This technique seeks to provoke nervousness among spectator while inviting them to imagine themselves in the role of the robot. In the scene, the robot picks up the dangerous object, seeks to return, but experiences a technical issue, resulting in the bomb disposal ultimately failing. The role distribution among military personnel and the local population becomes clear from the camera perspective of the robot. The eye of the camera points to men above the rooftops, a suspicious trader with a mobile phone, and children in a devastated environment. The elite corps acts like a foreign body in a surreal environment. It is neither clear for the military protagonists nor the audience if the surrounding local citizens are simply praying or actually responsible for the danger at hand. It is in these moments that the film resembles *The Battle of Algiers* by Gilles Pontecorvo, in which urban warfare between the French army and the Algerian National Liberation Movement (FLN) is shown and the protagonists of the latter enjoy the constant protection of the local population.

For Sergeant Matt Thompson, played by actor Guy Pearce, the challenge is now clear. He accepts responsibility. The audience witnesses the full preparation for an operation in all its intricacies before the disposal action. It culminates in a shared feeling of stress and a threat between the actors and the audience.

Thompson's colleagues help him to put on a bomb suit that resembles an astronaut suit. The spectator notices that these men have done this before and therefore act in routines. As such, putting on a helmet seems to be a ritual. Sanborn and Eldridge secure the danger zone. They act under extreme stress by observing the chaotic environment and talk to their sergeant. Thompson walks slowly and breathes heavily while informing others of what he can see. The scene evokes memories of an astronaut walking on the moon and not that of urban warfare in Baghdad. Sanborn and Eldridge notice a suspicious person with a mobile phone tool far too late, the bomb explodes, and Thompson is launched in the air. The slow motion of the scene triggers a shocking moment in which Thompson attempts to flee from the explosion. In a 20-second scene, which is actually much shorter than one thinks, an apocalyptic atmosphere of hopelessness emerges. For Caetlin Benson-Allot (2010: 43), this is the narrative message of the title of the film:

'This is the hurt locker, the temporal and physical space of peril and pain that the film understands as beyond any sectarian frame. The scene's mournful, displaced lyricism defamilarizes and depoliticizes its subject there are no (living) voices, eyes or subjective perspectives inside the hurt locker, only and always death.'

The war zone and the permanent feeling of threat *(still image from 'The Hurt Locker', courtesy of Voltage Pictures)*

The dramatic opening scene demonstrates that it is less about plot as narration in a conventional sense, and more about the kinetic dimension, the choreography of men and machine, and the bodily experience of war. The idea that Guy Pearce, the most famous actor in film, is killed in the opening scene – he is then substituted by the main figure James – shows an explicit break with genre expectations and contradicts the typical introduction of a figure audiences can immediately identify with.

War and the Everyday: Professionalization and Dehumanization

In the opening scene and in many other scenes from the film, two of the filmmakers' objectives become clear: First, there is no clear battleground, i.e. no trenches, but rather only the permanent feeling of threat. War is always there, but is not directly visible. In every scene, the U.S. army is a foreign body in a different world, always perceived as an occupying force and strange invaders. There is never a common feeling of trust, even in harmless situations of everyday life such as buying a DVD at a market. The developing friendship between Sergeant James and an Iraqi child seems to be an exception, but it also ends in disappointment. Here, the narrative of a mystified, threatening Middle East and evil jihadists (Boggs and Pollard 2006), as seen in series such as *24* and *Homeland*, plays at least a minor role.

The latent atmosphere of hostility is also caused by the permanent problem of communication. Every situation requires translators, and it is never clear whether the communication at hand is successfully working. Harmless, routine moments such as traffic checks become potentially dangerous situations because of mere language issues. The result is the increasing perception of threatening soldiers among the local population, preventing the establishment of trust. This routinized, permanent state of emergency leads to psychological problems among many soldiers. One example is Specialist Eldridge who seeks to spark a conversation with his superior while trying to masquerade his fear with humour. His friend Sanborn counts down his last days of his deployment in Iraq and attempts to reduce risk through considered action. He will survive. Yet, his risk aversion comes into conflict with his superior Sergeant James, who never shows fear and always accepts every dangerous challenge. The underlying tension between Sanborn and James results in a scene in which James defuses a bomb in a car while faced with extreme risk. Unlike the other men in his group, he does not leave. He emotionlessly searches until he has found the bomb. While Sanborn cannot understand this extremely fearless behaviour and even slaps his superior in the face, the commanding Colonel Reed is impressed and pays his respect directly after James defuses the bomb (Boal 2009: 46–7):

James: Hello, sir.

Colonel Reed (to James, pointing): You the guy in the flaming car? Sergeant James?

James: Yes, Sir.

Colonel Reed: Well, that's just hot shit. You're a wild man, you know that?

[The Colonel spins his head around to an aide]

Colonel Reed: He's a wild man, you know that? (back to James) Let me shake your hand.

James: Thank you, Sir.

Colonel Reed: How many bombs have you disarmed, Sergeant?

James: I'm not quite sure.

Colonel Reed: Sergeant, I asked you a question.

James: One hundred and seventy three. Counting today, Sir.

Colonel Reed: One hundred and seventy three? That must be a record. So tell me, what's the best way to go about disarming one of these things?

James: The way you don't die.

Colonel Reed: Good one. Spoken like a wild man. That's good.

War as a job between professionalization and human deformation *(still image from 'The Hurt Locker', courtesy of Voltage Pictures)*

For Colonel Reed, Sergeant James is a true war hero ('a wild man'). He wants to talk with him and congratulate him; the conversation, however, does not go as planned. Reed expects James to identify himself with the role of a hero, but his answers are robotic as he states the exact number of bombs

he has successfully defused. He acts like a machine and is not able to fulfil the expected role. His answer to the question of the secret of his successful strategy ('the way you don't die') underlines his technical and unemotional understanding of his job. Finally, Reed cannot understand James's motivation and hides his lack of understanding through empty filler phrases (spoken like a wild man). The figure of James demonstrates the specialization and dehumanization of war. James is a highly professionalized expert who is not an idealist and knows what needs to be done in every situation. Yet he struggles with psychological and emotional deficits. He is not able to lead the team in a social sense and is a loner who has a box under his bed with all disarmed detonators alongside his wedding ring. James is totally blunt concerning the real dangers of war without seeing any higher sense. He is absolutely pragmatic and does not fit into the role of a hero. For James, war is a drug, as the starting quote of the film provocatively states. He never uses patriotic rhetoric and cannot explain why he is doing this job. In one of the last scenes of the film, Sanborn and James talk about their job after having survived a suicide bombing (Boal 2009: 109–10):

[James drives. Sanborn is in the passenger seat covered in grime and dust]

James: You alright?

Sanborn: No man. I hate this place.

[James passes Sanborn some Gatorade]

James: Have a hit.

[Sanborn drinks, grateful, and puts the Gatorade down. Then he looks at James]

Sanborn: I'm not ready to die, James.

James: You're not going to die out here, bro.

[Sanborn shakes his head. Unconsciously, his fingers touch his neck, finding the exposed area above the collar of his body armor]

Sanborn: Another two inches. Shrapnel goes zing – slices my throat. I bleed out like a pig in the sand. Nobody will give a shit. I mean my parents, they care, but they don't count. Who else? [beat] I don't even have a son.

James: You're going to have plenty of time for that.

Sanborn: No man, I'm done. [beat] I want a son. I want a little boy, Will.

[A long beat]

Sanborn: I mean, how do you do it? Take the risk?

James: I don't know. I guess I don't think about it.

Sanborn: But you know what I'm talking about, right? Every time we go out, you throw the dice. You recognize that, right?

James: Yeah. I do. But I don't know why. Do you know why – I am the way I am?

[Sanborn thinks on this. After a beat]

Sanborn: No, I don't.

[They exchange a long look. Brothers at last]

As a reflective individual, the situation leads to a moment of catharsis for Sanborn. He recognizes that his life could end at any moment, and nobody, with the exception of his parents, would mourn for him. Sanborn has a quiet, emotional outburst and wrestles with his life as a waste of time. He has neither a spouse nor children. And he recognizes that he is not yet ready to die. He asks James, who is married and father of a son, how he is able to manage this situation every day. But James cannot explain why he does what he does and only says that he does not think about it and does not know how he has become the man he is. In the next scene, the film makes a radical cut: The spectator sees James at home cleaning the roof gutter. Next, he stands beside his wife in the kitchen. While his wife is cooking, he talks about bombs. Through a few dialogues it becomes clear that James is a foreign body in his former world of home. He does not know which package of cereal he should buy at the supermarket. He lovingly explains to his son that are only a few things in life are really important. For him, though, only one thing plays an important role. James attempts to explain his behaviour, at least to his son, which shows the ambivalence of the heroic narrative.

When James disembarks from an airplane in the final scene of the film, and in the next scene is wearing bomb suit while

disarming a bomb, we see a man who is so good at doing what he does and is not interested in doing anything else (Lueken 2009). War has made him a specialist. Although he does indeed have emotions and a conscience, he lacks other skills necessary to foster his technical capacities. War produces protagonists and forces them into a self-destructing logic of action. His family and the normal life are foreign to him, and this leads James to go in for the next deployment. A deathly spiral is triggered, making a return to normal life less likely.

Concluding remarks: human deformation in war

The most confusing aspect of watching *The Hurt Locker* is the lack of simplistic thought patterns offered to the audience: patriotic gestures, clear moral messages, and stereotypical role figurations are explicitly avoided. The film could be one of the only war films from the U.S. in which the spectator does not see the iconographic image of the waving Stars and Stripes. Instead, the audience experiences the everyday life of a bomb disposal squad in Iraq. It is about the routines of specialists doing their job in a permanent state of emergency. While the men are constantly confronted with deadly risks, they are simultaneously addicted to the adrenalin kick during bomb disposals. Such a story neither fits the patriotic narrative nor the collective doubt on the sense of war. Morality has not disappeared, but it is not transported in a clear message. Kathryn Bigelow (2008) explains this narrative point of view after being asked if her film is an anti-war or action-based. She answers that this genre label gives her stomach pains. In such films, brave soldiers say that they hate the war and the men responsible of it. Instead, she wants to show the daily horror of war and the impossibility of ordinary soldiers to act in these situations.

The Hurt Locker is disturbing for audiences because it lets the spectator experience the violence of war through the everyday. In doing so, the film evokes the narrative of being trapped inside the logic of war. Experiences of war become understandable for ordinary citizens. Of course, the metaphorical ambivalence of war as a drug can be interpreted as being silent on the depoliticizing effects of the war on terror. It also runs the risk of becoming a blueprint for justifications by the Obama administration in leading a secret war around the world. Otherwise, the film can be read as a powerful narrative showing how humans fall apart under the ritual of war. Finally, the film demonstrates the complex narrative reconfiguration of the war on terror and marks a break in the political discourse between a classic war on the battleground and a highly technical endeavour of robots, drones, and surveillance.

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The Islamic State's Struggle for Legitimacy – Facts, Myths and Narratives
Axel Heck

The Islamic State as a Matter of Fact

On the face of it, the Islamic State (IS) entered the international stage as a terror organization which has since transformed itself into a self-proclaimed Caliphate (Atwan 2015; Hashim 2014). Representatives pride themselves on the violation of fundamental humanitarian norms, and due to the circulation of gruesome kill videos, IS executioners have obviously earned a dubious cult status among disoriented people in Western countries who feel so attracted that thousands have left their homes to fight for IS or to commit terror attacks in Europe (Klausen 2015; Winter 2015). Nevertheless, in many videos and official documents, the Islamic State justifies its actions and tries to legitimize its power and authority. One of the most striking attempts to claim political legitimacy was the *Vice News* documentary film produced in 2014. The Islamic State granted safe conduct to the Palestinian *Vice News* reporter Medyan Dairieh, who traveled through conquered areas for several weeks in summer 2014 and produced a widely acclaimed documentary film. Since then, the film has had more than 10 million views on *YouTube* and is one of the most popular *Vice News* documentaries ever. The film has been critically discussed in media all over the world. The documentary is remarkable because it creates a story about the Islamic State in which facts and myths are mixed up into an inextricable narrative about violence and atrocities on the one hand and the legitimacy claims of a totalitarian political system on the other.

In this chapter, I will reconstruct how the Islamic State attempts to legitimize its power to an international audience. Although the Islamic State has entered the world stage as an actor which terrorizes civilians and rejects international laws, it nevertheless articulates specific legitimacy claims towards the international community. As reliable information about the Islamic State is rare, I have analyzed the Vice News documentary using a video content analytical method, drawing on Weber's theory of legitimate authority.

Screenshot 'The Islamic State' (2014), dir. Medyan Dairieh, *Vice News,* accessed 16 June 2016.

Weber's Three Types of Legitimate Authority

Legitimacy is often called the 'right to rule' or the 'right to govern' (Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Keohane 2011; Gilley 2013). Max Weber argued that the decisive factor for legitimate authority is the 'will to obey', understood as internal motivation for subordination of the command receivers (Weber et al. 1978). Every political entity needs legitimacy, which means formal and/or informal recognition practiced by a specific group of people. With regard to the legitimacy of political power, Max Weber has famously stated that legitimate authority emerges not only from 'material' or 'rational' considerations, but from the individual and collective belief in the rightfulness of the authority. Weber developed three pure types of legitimate authority: legal authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority (Weber et al. 1978). Every legitimate form of political power is based on people's belief in at least on one of these ideal types.

Legal authority rests on people's belief in 'the legality of a codified order'. Weber links legal authority to 'rational grounds' based on the 'belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands' (Weber et al. 1978: 215). Weber explicitly writes that 'legal authority extends to the persons exercising

the authority of office under it by virtue of the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of the office' (Weber et al. 1978: 216). With regard to the video content analysis, possible indicators for 'legal authority' are the existence of bureaucratic structures, legal institutions, enforceable laws and accepted norms (Weber et al. 1978). Traditional authority rests on the belief in 'the virtue of the sanctity of age-old rules and norms' (Weber et al. 1978: 226). Weber lays out several sub-dimensions of traditional authority but most important is the fact that traditional authority rests on personal loyalty and not on official duty (Weber et al. 1978: 227). Hence, in contrast to legal authority, the belief in traditional authority is not bound to official bureaucratic institutions or codified laws. Traditional authority stems from the stability of the order over time and generations. Possible indicators for traditional authority are the invocation of historical narratives and 'myths' about the cultural heritage, ancestry and genealogy of the leaders. In contrast to legal and traditional authority, charismatic authority refers to the extraordinary devotion to the holiness or heroic power of a person (Weber et al. 1978: 241). Belief in charismatic authority cannot be enforced by external pressure; it has to be understood as voluntary admiration of the leader. Weber writes that charismatic authority rests on categories such as divine origin, supernatural power or an exceptional reputation in specific fields such as hunting or military operations (heroes in war) (Weber et al. 1978: 242).

In reality, all three types of legitimate authority are often linked together. In this chapter, Weber's ideal types serve as a category system in order to reconstruct systematically the legitimacy claims articulated in the documentary.

Narratives of Law and Order

Most fundamentally, the legal authority rests on the belief that Sharia is the only valid and acceptable order under which Muslims can live, and that it has to be 'established by weapons' if necessary (The Islamic State 2014: 00.00.14[1]). The claim that Sharia is the only accepted order is repeated several times throughout the film. The Islamic State's press officer, Abu Mosa, talks about the consequences of Sharia for people living in the Islamic State. He admits that the rules are hard and that punishment, for example for theft, is tough: 'and that's cutting off hands' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.27.40). In the next sequence, the film shows how a crucified body of a man is exhibited in public, with a crowd of people gathering around and taking photos. The narrator says that the man had been accused of murder. In terms of legitimacy, the rules of IS do not correspond in any way with international norms.

[1] Timecode of the movie.

But in the film's sequences about IS's law enforcement system, it seems as if the strict rules are largely accepted by the people.

Another sequence of the film focuses particularly on the law system of the Islamic State and its judicative administration. Dairieh visits the Sharia Court in Raqqa City, where he interviews people who are taking their complaints to court. A man called Haidara, who is introduced as a clerk for judge Abu Al-Baraa, explains that the Sharia Court is authorized to handle all sorts of violations of Sharia and that there is a specialized judge for every aspect, such as alcohol or adultery, 'who uses his judicial knowledge to come to a verdict based on God's Sharia' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.29.24). When asked if the trials meet international standards, the clerk answers in the negative. 'We aim to satisfy God, that's why we don't care about international standards' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.29.44). The film shows that even non-Muslims such as Christians have rights in the Islamic State. Either they convert to Islam or they have to 'pay a non-Muslim tax, according to the Quran' as Judge Abu Abdula explains (The Islamic State 2014: 00.30.41).

In daily life, Sharia law is enforced by the Hisbah, the religious police of the Islamic State. The Hisbah patrol the streets and ensure that civilians comply with the religious rules. The film shows how the Hisbah order the removal of a poster with 'Western content'. In another sequence they tell a pedestrian that his wife is not veiled properly and that he should deal with it. Dairieh accompanies the Hisbah and shows how they carry out checks on market stalls, shops and the quality of meat and ensure that trading processes comply with Sharia law.

In another sequence, the Hisbah are approached by a group of people who complain about the imprisoning of a neighbor who has done 'nothing wrong', they say. The Hisbah officer explains that 'you can go to the office of the magistrate and you make a claim there'. But the men insist that their voices are not being heard: that's why the Hisbah officer should deliver the message. But he explains that their voices will be heard. 'If you are oppressed by one of our men you can go and make a claim there [at the court, AH]' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.23.48).

The film includes interviews with prisoners to determine how far the belief in the legitimacy of the legal order of Sharia goes. However, Dairieh explains that it's hard to know if the prisoners are able to speak openly under the watchful eyes of the prison guards. Some of them have been accused of possessing alcohol or taking drugs and although they will be flogged, they declare that they accept the punishment and Sharia law, because it's 'the law of God' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.25.23), as one old man says.

Based on the sequences described above, it should be clear that the Islamic State used the documentary film to create a narrative which can be easily associated with Weber's 'legal authority'. According to the documentary film, the Islamic State rests on a legal structure and rules which are accepted by society and authorities alike. Furthermore, the government has the actual power to enforce the law through the Hisbah and the Sharia Court, which are for their part bound to observe the legal obligations of the state.

Another narrative pretending people's belief in the legal authority is created in sequences in which the Islamic State presents itself as a political entity, founded by the Caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. It seems that the people living within the Islamic State fully endorse the Caliphate and voluntarily pledge allegiance to Al-Baghdadi. Most important in this regard is a sequence which shows how the establishment of the Caliphate is celebrated in Raqqa. Dairieh films the gathering of a large crowd of young and old men at a public place in Raqqa. The group is addressed by a speaker who calls on the families of Raqqa to support the Caliphate (Islamic State 2014: 00.15.30). After several speeches about the greatness of Al-Baghdadi and vilifications of the West, people are urged to pledge allegiance to the 'Prince of the Faithful Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi'. In order to symbolically accomplish the founding of the Islamic State as the Caliphate, the speaker shouts 'The Caliphate' and the crowd responds 'Established' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.17.35).

At first glance, this sequence bolsters the narrative of legal authority and the belief of the people in the legitimacy of the Islamic State. Showing the 'founding act' of the Islamic State in Raqqa reiterates constitutional practices known from many other political systems as well. But while in democracies, for example, people remain sovereign, the Islamic State makes it clear that the one and only sovereign is the Caliph Al-Baghdadi. The 'founding act' sequence creates a narrative about the masses' belief in the legitimacy of the political order and the loyalty to leader Al-Baghdadi, but it reveals at the same time the totalitarian ideology on which the Caliphate is based.

Myths of Anti-imperialism

Another remarkable part of the film is dedicated to the question of territoriality. The borders between Iraq and Syria were defined in the Sykes-Picot agreement which dates back to the year 1916. Sykes-Picot was a secret agreement between Britain and France (Russia and Italy joined a few years later) about the spheres of influence in the Middle East for the time after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Since then, Sykes-Picot has become a symbol of

Western imperialism and interference into Middle Eastern affairs. The documentary shows how fighters and ordinary people from the Islamic State are crossing the borders between Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State claims that it has nullified the Sykes-Picot agreement and de facto suspended the validity of the borders between Iraq and Syria, which were drawn by 'Western imperialism'. The suspension of Sykes-Picot is not only a statement by which the Islamic State claims 'legal authority' over its territorial heritage. With the proclamation of the Caliphate and territorial enlargement across the borders of Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State is invoking 'traditional authority' as well. In terms of traditional authority, the Caliphate has restored the historical Sunni territory which claims to have its roots in the Ottoman Empire. What seems interesting here is the mobilization of 'history' and 'tradition' to create a cultural-historic myth and to legitimize a territorial claim vis-à-vis an international audience.

One of the most important sequences of the documentary is about the devotion with which Al-Baghdadi preaches to a community in the Al-Fordos Mosque in Raqqa. Al-Baghdadi is introduced as a 'descendant of Hussein and the tribe of the Prophet' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.07.07). Those attending the service tell Dairieh in interviews that they have sworn to listen to and obey the Caliph. 'We wish to become part of him as his soldiers' (The Islamic State 2014: 00.07.57). A young man says that he is here to pledge allegiance to the Caliph; the same claim is made by an 11 year old boy, who says he comes from outside Aleppo. In the following scene, the documentary shows images of a car and tank parade and people waving the black flag of the Caliphate.

The recurring images of people waving flags in the street, pledging allegiance to the Caliphate and celebrating its establishment, are particular indicators for 'charismatic authority'. This legitimacy claim is supported by several sequences.

During the film, the fighters of the Islamic State are engaged in a bloody military campaign with the Syrian Army for control of Raqqa. In interview sequences, IS fighters pray for military success 'if that is God's will'. Finally, the film explains that IS fighters have defeated the 17th Division of the Syrian Army and shows the mutilated corpses of victims. Military good fortune and success are essential elements of charismatic authority as they bolster the belief in the leaders' holiness and exceptionalism.

The film contains several sequences in which converts declare their admiration for the Islamic State and Al-Baghdadi. The fight against 'infidels' and the establishment of a Caliphate seem to attract people in many countries and even non-Muslims come to the Islamic State and voluntarily decide to live under Sharia rules. Here, the Islamic State creates a legitimacy claim which directly refers to 'charismatic authority' as well, because it suggests that living in the Islamic State is so desirable that even Western and non-Muslims feel attracted.

In sum, the most obvious attempt to claim legitimacy refers to legal authority. It is striking how IS tries to create a narrative that the Caliphate is a state in which law and order are effectively enforced by a capable administration. Elements of charismatic and traditional authority bolster the narrative of a legitimate leadership.

Totalitarianism and the Islamic State

Needless to say, the *Vice News* documentary has become part of the Islamic State's propaganda machine and it is unlikely that the film shows anything that IS is not comfortable with. Beside the legitimacy claims inherent in the documentary, the film reveals elements of a totalitarian ideology as well. In one of the most disturbing sequences, the film shows at length how children are religiously indoctrinated and encouraged to fight and kill 'infidels' and 'apostates'. The film suggests that the Islamic State is already educating and training the next generation of jihadist fighters and martyrs who have been indoctrinated by the IS ideology. According to Hannah Arendt, totalitarian movements are 'mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals (…) their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted unconditional and unalterable loyalty of the individual member' (Arendt 1979: 323). As Arendt continues, 'it [the totalitarian movement] follows from the claim of their ideologies that their organization will encompass, in due course, the entire human race' (Arendt 1979: 323). Throughout the film, several claims are made which exactly fit the theoretical assumption about totalitarian movements made by Arendt from her work on Stalinism and Nazism. Furthermore, Arendt points out that the loyalty necessary for the success of a totalitarian movement can be expected from people who have no other social ties to family, friends, comrades or even mere acquaintants, and thus derive their sense of having a place in the world only from their belonging to a movement and membership of the party or organization (Arendt 1979: 324). People such as Abu Mosa, who openly declares that his family is far less important than his mission for the Caliphate, or the fanatical preacher from Belgium, are examples of 'atomized' characters who have found their personal fulfilment by becoming part of the totalitarian movement that is the Islamic State.

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