

Parameters of a national biography

European Journal of
International Relations
2014, Vol. 20(1) 262–288
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DOI: 10.1177/1354066112445290
ejt.sagepub.com



Felix Berenskoetter

SOAS, University of London, UK

Abstract

This article is concerned with the ontology of political community, specifically the nation-state, as a bounded entity in time and space. Juxtaposed against the reading of it as an autonomous (realism) or permeated (liberalism) unit, or as constituted through Othering (social constructivism), the article conceptualizes the nation-state as a bounded community constituted by a biographical narrative which gives meaning to its collective spatio-temporal situatedness. Taking a phenomenological approach, the article offers a systematic discussion of the parameters of such a narrative. It highlights the relevance of an experienced space, giving meaning to the past, and an envisioned space, giving meaning to the future, delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively. In this reading, politics is found in the creative and contested attempts to link these dimensions to a coherent narrative on both the domestic and international level.

Keywords

community, constructivism, discourse, identity, ontology, state

Introduction

This article is concerned with the ontology of political communities as bounded entities in time and space. For most International Relations (IR) scholars, the dominant political entity is the state, understood as a legal-institutional configuration claiming sovereignty over a particular territorial space. Yet while it is taken for granted that this configuration also contains people, what constitutes their sense of community is rarely at the centre of attention. For some, these people merely form a dispassionate and pluralistic society held together by a social contract promising certain rights and physical security to its

Corresponding author:

Felix Berenskoetter, SOAS — Politics and International Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H 0XG, UK.
Email: fb12@soas.ac.uk

members. Others view the state as a hierarchically organized entity that divides people along the lines of socio-economic status and controls them through means of coercion. And yet, as Gianfranco Poggi puts it, 'there is something *gemeinschaftlich* about the modern state', recalling Max Weber's note that 'a mistake comes in ... when one speaks of the state alone and not the nation' (Poggi, 1978: 98–101). Thus, even Weber's widely adopted definition of the state as a community holding the monopoly over the legitimate use of force in a certain space cannot ignore the question how this community defines its existence.

This question matters to scholars of international politics. While some may see a world marked by loss of community and a celebration of individualism, references to collective identity and attempts to mobilize nationalist sentiments are prominent in political discourses and popular culture from America to Asia, from Europe to Africa. Indeed, national identity arguably still is 'the most important form of large-scale social and political identity' (Waever et al., 1993: 22) and a pertinent feature of state governance. The parameters constituting a sense of community underwrite the legal-institutional structures of the state and legitimize the actions taken by political leaders, allowing them to claim that they are pursuing the 'national interest' (Hopf, 2002; Weldes, 1999; Williams, 2005). Clarifying these parameters, then, is not only an exercise in ontology. It sheds light on the structures guiding — enabling and constraining — policymakers, thereby contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon and the direction of collective agency. Moreover, our understanding of the configuration of political units logically affects how we understand the composition of the international system. As Rodney Hall reminds us, 'a coherent theory of international politics must be predicated, in part, on an adequate theory of the nation-state' (Hall, 1999: 11).

And yet, there are few such theories. While most IR scholars recognize the need to open the black box of the state, few explore the configuration of the community underpinning it. To be sure, classical realists were concerned with understanding politics among nations (Carr, 1945; Deutsch, 1966; Morgenthau, 1960) and IR scholars issue periodical reminders that phenomena of nationalism remain worth studying (Buzan, 1991; Cederman, 1997; Hall, 1999; Hansen and Waever, 2002; Laitin, 2007; Waever et al., 1993). Still, it is common in the IR literature to collapse the nation into the state by conveniently assuming that the former is supervened by the latter. Work challenging this reading often moves too far in the other direction by emphasizing transnational communities and 'de-territorialized' networks which appear to be unbound in a globalized world. Crudely put, communities seem to either coincide with the borders of the Westphalian state, in which case their ontology is ignored, or they seem to ignore state borders, in which case they appear to have no boundaries at all.

Scholars of nationalism have, of course, long pointed to various factors constituting collective identity, oscillating between primordialism, which emphasizes intrinsic properties, and constructivism, which focuses on things that can be learned. The account offered here is situated at the constructivist end of the spectrum. It understands communities as products of political processes and carves out the parameters along which they form through a phenomenological reading of the concept of a biographical narrative. In some ways, this is a synthesizing exercise. The reading of the nation/state as a narrative is not uncommon in the constructivist literature and scholars have fruitfully explored

different aspects of it (Bially Mattern, 2005; Brandt, 2010; Cruz, 2000; Hansen, 2006; Hopf, 2002; Mälksoo, 2009; Ringmar, 1996; Steele, 2008; Weldes et al., 1999; Williams, 2005). The specific notion of the *biographical* narrative, however, has yet to be engaged in a comprehensive, systematic and theoretically deep manner. Drawing on Heidegger's fundamental ontology of being-in-the-world, this article offers such an engagement by conceptualizing the nation/state as an entity constituted through a narrative designating an experienced space (giving meaning to the past) intertwined with an envisioned space (giving meaning to the future) and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively. As such, it develops a framework for analysing the worldview that gives meaning to a community's spatio-temporal situatedness and structures its orientation in the world.

This contributes to the IR literature in two broad ways. First, following the call to endogenize corporate identity (Cedermann and Daase, 2003) and to bring society back into the constructivist study of international politics (Hopf, 2002), this article enhances our understanding of the 'private knowledge' constituting and delineating communities from the 'inside'. Rather than focusing on how collective identity is constituted in relation to external Others, it explores the phenomenon of subjective, or Self-organized, identity formation in time and space.¹ This not only offers an alternative starting point to the widespread assumption that communities form primarily through social differentiation, that is, on the back of an 'us versus them' logic. It also reconciles a postmodern view of communities as contingent and unfinished entities with the notion that they are nevertheless situated, ordered and bound (Albert et al., 2001). Building on this ontology, second, the article remakes the case for understanding international relations as a realm of reflexive communities constituted and guided by structures of meaning. Apart from further exposing the limitations of realist and liberal accounts, this approach contrasts recent suggestions that communities are formed through 'thoughtless' practices and their interactions driven by 'practical know-how' (Hopf, 2010; Pouliot, 2008). Similarly, the reading of the world as composed of multiple overlapping biographical narratives presented below complements the rather mechanical account of a world society defined through 'functional differentiation', that is, divided into sectors along specialized activities (Buzan and Albert, 2010; Helmig and Kessler, 2007).

The discussion is divided into three main parts. The first part reviews whether and how three prominent theoretical paradigms in IR — realism, liberalism and constructivism — conceptualize the state as a bounded community.² Taking up residence within the constructivist camp, the second part introduces the concept of a biographical narrative from a phenomenological angle and explores the temporal and the spatial dimensions of this narrative. The third part discusses the biographical narrative as a political project and probes the implications of this ontology for our understanding of international relations.

Three images of the state in International Relations³

Realism: The autonomous state

The simplest and most pervasive image of a political entity found in the IR literature is the realist notion of the state as a territorial unit. It portrays states as solid, clearly delineated,

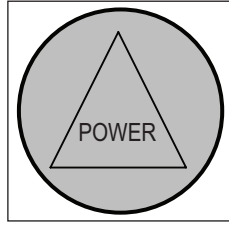


Figure 1. Realism: The autonomous state.

closed-off entities akin to billiard balls (see Figure 1). This atomistic ontology rests on the notion of the individual as an autonomous and independent being central to Western philosophy since Hobbes, which is projected onto the Westphalian state as a sovereign entity (Morgenthau, 1960: 312ff.; Waltz, 1979). Strictly speaking, it depicts states as legal entities, yet as autonomy is difficult to measure and never fully achieved, realists define sovereignty as ‘supreme power over a certain territory’ (Morgenthau, 1960: 312). This forges the link to the image of the state as a hierarchically organized power container, with power understood as control over material resources: the more powerful the state, the more autonomous or physically secure it is and, hence, the closer it comes to the Westphalian ideal. The realist conception of the border flows from this image. In the words of John Herz, the state is ‘an expanse of territory encircled for its identification and defence by a “hard shell” of fortifications’ (Herz, 1957: 474). Although the border is central to the billiard ball ontology, its purpose being to both delineate and protect the state as a particular territorial space, borders are not part of realist theorizing but are treated as quasi-natural. Whereas structural realists have tried to justify this ontology with the logic of international anarchy, traditionally realists have pointed to the constitutive force of nationalism, with Morgenthau calling ‘national character’ and ‘national morale’ core elements of the state (1960: 269f.). And even structural realists suggest that ‘the centripetal force of nationalism may itself explain why states can be thought of as units’ (Waltz, 1979: 174ff.; see also Gilpin, 1981: 14f.) and regard nationalism as a ‘second order force in international politics’ (Mearsheimer, 1990: 18ff.). Although this brings the community in through the backdoor of realist ontology, it does not get much attention for a simple reason: to sustain the billiard-ball image, community and state would have to be thought of as congruent, which is difficult to reconcile with a history of nationalist movements undermining rather than strengthening the territorial integrity of states (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996).

Liberalism: The permeated state

While the emphasis on autonomy is philosophically speaking a liberal trait, in IR scholarship, liberal approaches are associated with a more complex understanding of states’ internal composition. Acknowledging that interdependence is an inevitable feature of social life and a defining framework for the existence of states, liberals highlight political, commercial and other institutionalized linkages across state borders and their interaction with domestic structures. Consequently, states do not appear as closed units, but as open and multifaceted with

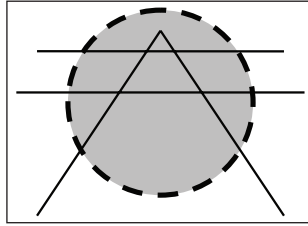


Figure 2. Liberalism: The permeated state.

permeable borders (see Figure 2). The problem is that this invitation to a more sophisticated reading of the spatial configuration of the state gradually increases its complexity and fragments its community until both disappear, or reappear on a global level. This ‘vanishing trick’ (Ringmar, 1996) occurs in three stages. The first, put forward by Robert Keohane (1984) and his followers, does not venture far from the realist image. Although it focuses on how states manage interdependence through international institutions and highlights the latter’s effect on state behaviour, the state remains a territorial entity with fixed, if permeable, borders. Indeed, its proponents acknowledge that ‘institutionalism adopt[s] almost all of the hard core of realism’ (Keohane and Martin, 2003: 73). The second approach takes a closer look at the actors, structures and processes existing inside the state. Although often this is limited to define states on the basis of their political system, leading to familiar binaries such as ‘liberal/democratic’ and ‘illiberal/non-democratic’, others emphasize different sectors or specifically discuss the role of political parties, business elites, interest groups or public opinion. While this offers an arguably more ‘accurate’ account of how states are composed, as Erik Ringmar (1996: 449) notes, a pluralist image makes it difficult to actually still find ‘a state’ that can be taken as an entity in international politics, that is, the state becomes a highly fractured and complex configuration which cannot be understood as a coherent unit anymore. This is exacerbated in the third version, commonly associated with globalization literature, which emphasizes transnational structures, actors and processes variably understood as either undermining or intertwined with ‘the state’ and creating a ‘borderless’ world. Its emphasis on the de-territorialization of political space through structures or networks above and beyond states makes the latter disappear or, at least, does not offer a rethinking of states and the communities underpinning them as bounded entities (Ferguson and Jones, 2002).

Constructivism: The cultured state

Constructivists open the door to an alternative reading of the state by highlighting its identity, or sense of Self.⁴ More precisely, assuming that there is no fixed or natural identity, they focus on the process of identity formation and the key insight from social psychology that identity has an ‘internal’ (or personal) and an ‘external’ (or social) dimension, as captured in George Herbert Mead’s distinction between ‘I’ and ‘Me’ (Mead, 1934). Grasping these two dimensions and the interplay between them is not easy. Much of the constructivist literature focuses on the ‘Me’ and leaves the ‘I’ undertheorized; that is, it focuses on how a sense of Self is defined in relation to other states in the international system with little consideration of internal sources of identity formation.⁵ One reason for

the popularity of the 'relational' perspective is that it avoids the risk of defining some sort of essence and, thus, satisfies the postmodern *Zeitgeist*. Moreover, constructivist writing remains under the influence of Durkheimian reasoning which assumes that all construction is social and, hence, that identity forms primarily through interaction with, or against, others.⁶ And because IR scholars tend to read 'social' as meaning 'international', they focus on how states are embedded in international normative structures and take on a particular role identity recognized by external others.⁷ This priority given to the formation of the 'Me' and the accompanying analytical bias towards socialization is useful for tracing the construction of *state* identity within international society. Yet it pushes the configuration of *national* identity, occurring in domestic society through internally shared structures of meaning, into the background.

Constructivist accounts of how states are constituted from the 'inside' emphasize culture in the form of domestically generated norms, ideas or knowledge. Yet then questions arise about *their* content and ability to function as boundaries: 'Ideas and knowledge about what?', 'Delineating communities how?' The difficulty of providing substantial answers is displayed throughout constructivist work. William Bloom uses identification theory to explain why and how the state can be read as an aggregate of people sharing a national identity, noting that such group identification occurs if individuals share 'the same environmental circumstances' and 'meaningful experience' (Bloom, 1990: 23–53). Unfortunately, Bloom does not unpack these pointers conceptually and instead suggests that the spatial boundaries of national identity coincide with legal state borders. Alexander Wendt in his discussion of the states' 'corporate identity' initially uses the metaphor of the body, yet then concedes that what really matters is (collective) consciousness, which he locates in society. He defines society as 'people with shared knowledge' which is 'private' and 'self-organizing' and, thus, separate from the knowledge shared with other states constituting those systems of enmity, rivalry or friendship. Unfortunately, Wendt does not say what this private knowledge is about. General claims about the importance of language, religion and ethnicity sit alongside vague references to collective memory, myths and traditions that allow society to 'acquire continuity through time' (Wendt, 1999: 209–225, 163). This vagueness allows Wendt to bypass the question of the boundaries of society's private knowledge, leaving it with the note that they do not necessarily coincide with the states' territorial borders and can be 'fuzzy' (Wendt, 1999: 212).⁸

Ole Waever discusses society as a unit separate from the state and stresses the need to find 'constellations of concepts that produce a nucleus of meaning from which much of a national discourse can be generated' (Waever, 2002: 24). While he does not offer a systematic reading of this constellation beyond a general overview of phenomena of nationalism and an emphasis on language, Waever usefully hints at how collective identity forms with reference to the past and the future (Waever, 1998: 90; 2002: 24). The most prominent line of argument throughout his work is that national identity is discursively and cognitively embedded in an evolving and history-laden idea of a region, a space beyond the state, in his case 'Europe' (see also Adler, 1997). To allow for this expansion, Waever et al. (1993: 39f.) declare society as an 'infinitely open' unit, which again comes at the expense of conceptualizing its boundaries. This is not uncommon to post-structuralist scholarship, which tends to prioritize critical deconstruction over understanding of constitutive structures of meaning. To be sure, the concern with exposing the political process of bordering has produced important studies of

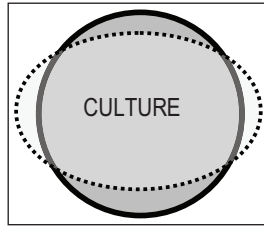


Figure 3. Constructivism: The cultured state.

how governments try to naturalize particular understandings of Self through practices of differentiation and discrimination vis-a-vis Others (Campbell, 1998; Hansen, 2006; Neumann, 1999; Shapiro and Alker, 1996; Weldes et al., 1999). Yet while these studies usefully unmask the political nature of collective identity formation through socio-spatial differentiation, the focus on the politics of negative identification, or techniques of ‘Othering’, makes for a rather one-dimensional account of the content of private knowledge, blending out more complex configurations discussed below.⁹

The state as a biographical narrative

Staying within the constructivist frame, the following takes a closer look at the configuration of the ‘I’, that is, the structure of private knowledge delineating a community. To avoid the temptation of treating the boundaries of a community’s physical presence — which may or may not coincide with formal state borders — with the boundaries of its collective consciousness, this article adopts a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a branch of continental philosophy developed by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, which starts from the premise that one comes to know things, including the Self, through experience. In Husserl’s words, ‘the world is an experience which we live before it becomes an object which we know’ (cited in Odysseos, 2002: 376). Knowledge gained through experience is knowledge not in the sense of accumulated information but, rather, structures of meaning that lend significance to what Heidegger calls ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]). The approach adopted here builds on two further basic insights. First, it holds that the knowledge of being in the world is never complete. As Heidegger notes, ‘being’ takes place in a time-span between birth and death and so, because until it is dead there is always something the Self is not-yet, being is always incomplete (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 233, 236, 242f.). This incompleteness gives being-in-the-world an evolving character. It suggests that neither the Self nor the world are ever solidified but are constantly unfolding. Thus the ontological structure of the Self must be understood as a process of *coming into* being, a process whereby the Self comes to know itself by continuously disclosing the world and itself within it. Second, as indicated by the hyphens, being-in-the-world cannot be understood without grasping how *being* relates to *the world*. It holds that disclosure is not about gathering information from a pre-existing world located outside the Self but a creative process in which both world and Self are made (sense of) together. Put differently, ‘being’ and ‘the world’ are mutually constituted in a process of continuous unfolding which intertwines their existence in one structure of meaning (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 54, 110, 133).

A number of scholars using phenomenological reasoning have argued that the evolving ontological structure of being in the world is usefully captured through narrative (Carr, 1986; Ezzy, 1998; Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1984; Taylor, 1989; White, 1987; Whitebrook, 2001). As Hayden White notes, humans have a 'natural impulse to narrate', with the narrative as a 'meta code' arising between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience and bestow it with meaning (White, 1987: 1). Or, as Erik Ringmar points out, narratives have the advantage over other forms of representation, such as metaphors, in that they are not static but can 'deal with life as it unfolds over time' (Ringmar, 1996: 451). Ringmar also was one of the first IR scholars to suggest that just as individuals come into being through the stories told by and about them, so the state can be captured as a meaningful entity through narratives (Ringmar, 1996: 452). This stance has since been adopted by a number of constructivists (Bially Mattern, 2005; Brandt, 2010; Hansen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Waever, 2002; Welde et al., 1999).¹⁰ Amongst those closest to the reading presented here, Janice Bially Mattern suggests that the self-consciousness of states is based on a coherent narrative representation of the Self and the world, carried through stylized images drawn from the past and spatial metaphors (Bially Mattern, 2005: 129f., 194f.). In a similar vein, Brent Steele draws on Giddens' discussion of self-identity as based on 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' and adopts the notion of a biographical narrative, highlighting its emotional and moral components (Giddens, 1991: 53; Steele, 2008: 10f., 71f.).¹¹ These works offer important entry points, yet we still need to get a better sense of the existential parameters of a biographical narrative, of the worldly *Gestalt* this configuration takes.

To begin with, a biographical narrative is not a record of everything that ever happened to the Self, but highlights experiences that matter. What matters, and how, is not a given, of course. As H.H.E. Loofs (1974) points out, every biography is an abstraction and, as such, a piece of art. It is a simplified story that leaves out some things at the expense of others to carve out a distinct life path, which makes certain traits visible. As discussed below, this entails not only acts of selection but also creative acts of interpretation and fusion. The parameters along which this occurs emerge out of the purpose of the narrative: to provide the Self with knowledge about its place in 'the world', specifically to meaningfully situate the Self and delineate its existence in time and space, to provide us with a necessary sense of orientation about *where* we come from and *where* we are, or could be, going.

Before engaging these two dimensions, it must be noted that the existential relevance of such a narrative on the collective level can be accounted for without treating the community (the state) as if it was an individual (a person).¹² While only individuals have a brain and, thus, the capacity to reflect on their spatio-temporal situatedness and direction of movement, scholars have long argued that the human need for orientation is satisfied to an important degree on a societal level. Bloom (1990) draws on Freud, Mead and Erikson to argue that individuals feel the need to attach themselves to a broader collective; and from Horkheimer and Adorno's exploration of the dialectic of enlightenment to Benedict Anderson's discussion of the nation as an imagined community, scholars have pointed out how humans seek to inscribe themselves into larger, lasting spatio-temporal structures in an attempt to give meaning to their contingent existence. Anderson explicitly notes that a national biography is such a structure (Horkheimer and Adorno,

1988: 33, 50ff.; Anderson, 2006: 26, 172ff.). As understood here, then, the narrative functions as an ‘anxiety-controlling mechanism’ (Giddens, 1991) whose key purpose is to provide ontological security by meaningfully situating individuals in a community and, by extension, the world by defining the spatio-temporal parameters from and towards which they can act as a community. As such, a biographical narrative provides a ‘basic discourse’ (Hansen, 2006: 52) on a societal level and embeds individuals in a ‘national consciousness’ (Deutsch, 1966: 170ff.). Of course, the development and maintenance of such a narrative is not simply a mental exercise. Following Heidegger, the disclosure of the world and one’s place in it is not a process of gaining spiritual fulfilment through internal reflection but occurs through practical activity and associated experiences. That said, the ontological structure of a community is not sustained by acts *as such*, but through a narrative that renders acts meaningful in time and space.

Unfolding in time

To grasp the content of a biographical narrative, it is sensible first to trace how it situates the unfolding Self in time. The temporal dimension is the focus of Heidegger’s exploration of the ontological structure of being in his magnum opus *Being and Time* and has been emphasized by a number of scholars following the hermeneutic path. Via Paul Ricoeur, it is reflected in Ringmar’s observation that ‘when we wonder who we are ... we tell a story which locates us in the context of a past, a present and a future’ (Ringmar, 1996: 451). His suggestion that every nation ‘leave[s] its trace in time’ (Ringmar, 1996: 454) also underpins Anderson’s discussion of how imagined communities revolve around shared temporal orientations. Ernest Renan notes that what constitutes a nation is ‘to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again’ (Renan, 1882: 17), which resonates in Kenneth Boulding’s notion of a ‘national image’ which ‘extends through time backwards into a supposedly recorded or perhaps mythological past and forward into an imagined future’ (Boulding, 1959: 122). Let us unpack these observations by taking a closer look at how historical and future being-in-the-world is constituted.

The historical self: Creative memories

As experiences come to pass, a phenomenological approach logically holds that ‘history’ makes up a substantial part of a biographical narrative. Indeed, philosophers of Self have long emphasized that personal identity forms through reflection over past actions and experiences (Perry, 2008), and the view that ‘an understanding of the past ... tells us who we are’ (Lebow, 2006: 3) remains popular among scholars. In most accounts the connection between a sense of Self and experiences is established through memories. Memories serve as temporal orientation devices that make the past meaningful by providing a sense of where ‘we’ come from and what ‘we’ have been through. Whether understood as storage of facts or as a source of unsystematic sensations, they make experiences available for the biographical narrative. And scholars of memory have shown that viable representations of the past often occur on the collective level.¹³ It is not merely that language is a social construct, which necessarily inserts narratives about experiences into the social domain. In line with the earlier discussion, Maurice Halbwachs most famously argued

that individuals need the social context to remember and express experiences (Halbwachs, 1992 [1952]: 43). These representations form a society's collective memory, or what Halbwachs called 'social frameworks of memory', and thereby constitute 'mnemonic communities' (Zerubavel, 2003). This is echoed in the literature on nationalism, which has long held that national identity is formed through the mobilization of shared myths and memories, suggesting that 'history is ... the backbone of nationalism' (Carvalho and Gemenne, 2009: 1; see also Hutchinson and Smith, 1994).

To say that a community's historical sense of Self is given meaning through collective memory raises the difficult question how experiences and memories relate. On the one hand, it is important to maintain that 'it is ... experience, in all its emotional complexity, that serves as the key reference point' (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 17). It is difficult to fully identify with a particular memory without the corresponding experience. And yet, collective memories are social constructs whose function is to make sense of the historical evolution of society as a whole. Just as collective memory is not simply the sum of individual memories, neither does it have to be linked to an experience made directly by every member of the community. After all, most national biographies have a foundational myth about the 'birth' of the community without any living member having a personal experience of that event. Instead, they learn about it 'second hand' and come to appropriate the corresponding memory. In this process, the life story of particular individuals or groups may be considered exemplary and serve as a reference point, with their words and deeds 'looked upon as part of a wider oral biography, or as a sort of sophisticated mnemotechnical device' (Loofs, 1974: 10).

An experience that leaves an imprint in the biographical narrative is termed here a significant experience, or an *Erlebnis*. The latter is a German term which, as Gadamer (2004 [1975]: 53f.) points out, comes out of the biographical literature and stands for a vivid experience that was 'lived' and becomes part of one's life story. An *Erlebnis* turns the past into a significant place by leaving an emotional impression on the Self. It is an extraordinary experience which intrudes into the meaning structure the Self has disclosed and allows for, indeed requires, the (re)configuration of being-in-the-world. That said, not all significant experiences are represented in the narrative. Memory is both selective and creative, which means that any narrative will feature 'usable pasts' (Anderson, 2006) or 'chosen traumas/glories' (Kinvall, 2004). Others may be deliberately downplayed or left out altogether; indeed, scholars have long pointed out that the process of remembering is intertwined with, even requires, forgetting (Assmann, 1999: 30; Ricoeur, 2004: 412–456). While, strictly speaking, significant experiences cannot be forgotten, they can be left unarticulated either because it is difficult to represent them in narrative form or because it is inopportune to highlight them. Those blocked memories, or unarticulated experiences, still matter for the historical sense of Self and are only seemingly absent from the narrative: they are present as silences. Indeed, one could say silences are an integral part of a biographical narrative (Fivush, 2010).

Significant experiences and corresponding memories do not have to be negative. Narratives can be, and often are, full of nostalgia with references to a past remembered as a 'golden age' and stories about 'the good old days' (Zerubavel, 2003: 17). Yet since Freud emphasized the relevance of trauma, scholars tend to agree that experiences of violence, suffering and loss leave the deepest mark in a biographical narrative.¹⁴

Arguably, war most radically and profoundly interferes in the lives of people and is the most significant collective *Erlebnis*. This is not to suggest that war creates a trauma trap from which there is no escape. As scholars examining the effects of trauma have pointed out, significant experiences not only ‘break’ ground but also provide opportunities for ‘(re)making’ ground. Every life story contains a number of lessons emerging out of a significant experience and providing normative guidance. And experiences do not speak for themselves. They are ambiguous, and so the marks they leave and the lessons they generate are not predetermined. While it seems sensible to assume that experiences can be more or less ‘adequately represented’ depending on ‘the fit with the individuals’ emotional reality’ (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 17), no natural meaning structure grows out of them. Instead, meaning must be projected into them. Whereas for some this raises the tricky question to what extent memories can be invented, where facts end and fantasy begins (Ricoeur, 2004: 5–55), the point here is that significant experiences are a constant source of creativity and present both a challenge and an opportunity to, as Hannah Arendt put it, ‘think experience’ (Althaus, 2001).¹⁵

The future self: Creative visions

For ‘thinking experience’ the past is not enough. While memory provides a source of meaning and creative guidance, this source is tapped not only to organize the present but with an eye towards the future. For instance, where the past becomes a site of negative identification, an experience one wants to escape from, it tends to fuel a desire to create a future condition free of traumatic experiences. This can be witnessed in Europe, where a sense of community has formed around the commitment to build a united and peaceful continent in opposition to its divisive and conflict-ridden history, or so the story goes, drawing simultaneously on a negative memory and a positive goal (Waever, 1998). Biographical narratives, then, are not only backward- but also forward-looking and entail images of future Selves.

Indeed, if we follow Heidegger, the orientation towards the future and the desire to understand ‘it’ is the most significant element of (coming into) being in the world (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: §65, 327ff.).¹⁶ After all, if the uncertain future is the source of anxiety, any attempt to control this anxiety must involve trying to fill that void with meaning. Thus, the logical consequence of conceiving of the Self as unfolding is that it cares not only about what (it) *has been* but, and even more so, about what (it) *can be*. In Heidegger’s words, being is always ‘possible-being’, that is, the Self unfolds into what it considers possible, what it and its world might become. Importantly, this possibility is not contingent, as the Self is able to reflect on and formulate its possibilities by making designs of a future being-in-the-world which then delineate its room for manoeuvre (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 145). Adopting this insight, we can say that humans entertain visions of the future in an attempt to make the unknowable knowable, or at least meaningful; they serve as crucial orientation devices stimulating and organizing hopes, aspirations and expectations. Hence Oscar Wilde’s memorable phrase that ‘a map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth even glancing at’ (in Sargent, 2005: 4). As with memories, humans become attached to — identify with — visions and integrate them into their biographical narrative.

As the literature on utopias shows, visions often find expression in narrative form on a collective level. Communities always had their prophets whose visions of social order captured their imagination and served as guidelines for behaviour, with secular and religious storytellers often competing in providing such visions (Gunnell, 1987). Despite the scepticism with which the term is often treated, utopias, or visions of better worlds delineating desirable futures,¹⁷ pervade all facets of social life and are found in the arts and in scholarship, in popular culture and political discourse (Claeys, 2010; Coverly, 2010; Ruesen et al., 2005). Visions underpin all planning and investment processes and, in formulating possibilities of being, raise expectations that this or that may/could happen, that being-in-the-world could turn out one way or another. Importantly, they do not have to be progressive, or even positive, but can also picture an undesirable world, a dystopia, which delineates a possible unpleasant future for the Self (Gordin et al., 2010; Vieira, 2010: 15–18). Although it is safe to assume that few societies would choose to orient their temporal existence towards a dark future and enjoy entertaining an image of being in a worse world (compared to the existing one), dystopias can be used as warnings. By offering an image of ‘what could happen if’, they narrate a being-in-the-world which should be averted. As such, a dystopia can be used in tandem with a utopia to reinforce the desirability of, and encourage investment in, the latter. And as with popular visions of nuclear winter during the Cold War or more recent scenarios of environmental collapse or large-scale terror attacks, dystopias are not mental images confined to the private sphere but formulated and held on the collective level, that is, shared within particular communities and motivating collective action.¹⁸

Here emerges the question why and how particular visions are accepted as possible futures and integrated into a society’s biographical narrative. Part of the answer has to do with the authority of those formulating the vision. Leaving this aside for now, utopias and dystopias able to capture the imagination can be said to have three basic features.

First, they must be connected to existing understandings of being in the world. As scholars of utopia have noted, visions must resonate with past and present experience to be considered realistic, that is, they must connect to the familiar to gain a sense of robustness (Alexander, 2001). This does not mean that visions are replicas of what is already known. Rather, second, visions must leave enough room to keep the promise of becoming something one is not already, that is, they must have a creative element which enables the Self to unfold into the ‘not-yet’. This creative quality not only allows visions to guide the Self into further disclosing the world, it also allows making something new. Visions always contain both robust and creative elements, but the emphasis may vary, giving it either a more conservative or a more innovative character. In either case, third, visions must be simple. In contrast to the detailed and finished character of blueprints, they must be sufficiently vague both to allow a large number of individuals to adopt it and to leave room for integrating new experiences and representations. In that sense, both utopias and dystopias have an air of naivety that can accommodate diverse and dynamic meanings in the creative process of unfolding (Berenskoetter, 2011: 657–662).

In sum, a narrative of being in time intertwines the historical Self and the future Self. The ambiguity of significant experiences has it that what is remembered and what meaning is extracted from the past emerges only in the process of sorting future possibilities of being, in formulating visions of what being-in-the-world could look like. Conversely,

'how we remember shapes what we can imagine as possible' (Cruz, 2000: 311). This connection between past and future used to be understood among historians, as Koselleck points out, when *Geschichte* was a narrative which 'indicated that covert connection of the bygone with the future whose relationship can only be perceived when one has learned to construct history from modalities of memory and hope' (Koselleck, 2004 [1979]: 258). The link between history and hope also indicates that the existentialist perspective given by the narrative is not a presentist one. It may be told in the present, yet by treating past and future as meaningful sources for orientation, their representations are not merely functions of locating being in the 'now'. Memories and visions are integral to a narrative that looks backward *and* forward and, thus, seeks to locate the Self in the past *and* the future, thereby lending the historical/future Self ontological status.

Unfolding in space

Memories and visions are not free-floating but refer to particular spaces and places, and discussing this spatial dimension will help to conceptualize the boundaries of a biographical narrative. IR scholars have been slow in offering a spatial understanding of state identity which differs from realist ontology. They are in good company. While few would disagree that 'spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche' (Taylor, 1989: 28; see also Bollnow, 1963; Simmel, 1922), apart from noting borders as markers of exclusion and differentiation, the role of space has long been neglected by social theorists and philosophers of Self. As one observer notes, the 'exclusive focus on the *who*-question ("who am I?") has often made [them] forget the correlate *where*-question. All the answers given to the first question describe a [Self] which is essentially nowhere' (Manoussakis, 2007: 674). To be sure, for scholars of geography, the insight that conceptions of national identity are intertwined with the space inhabited is no news. Indeed, the rise of geography as an academic discipline in late 19th century Europe was intimately tied to processes of state and national identity formation. As David Hooson points out, geographers had a 'felt desire, or duty, to help define and give flesh to the emerging national identity of their country and its place in the world' (Hooson, 1994: 6; see also Black, 1997). And yet, exceptions aside, IR scholars have grown complacent in either accepting that territorial borders are the primary spatial parameters of collective identity or suggesting that space and place have lost their importance in an increasingly interconnected world (Giddens, 1991: 16f.).

Another look at Heidegger's *Being and Time* helps to retrieve the spatial dimension along phenomenological lines (see also Agnew, 2007: 144). Heidegger's concern with how a sense of being-there (*Da-sein*) is generated by gaining a sense of being *in* the world makes space and place central to his ontological exploration (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: §23, §24; Malpas, 2006). As he puts it, 'the ontologically properly understood "subject", the *Dasein*, is in an original sense [*in einem ursprünglichen Sinn*] spatial' (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 111). Importantly, this is not an invitation to regress into environmental determinism, that is, an account in which Self-understanding is formed by the space one inhabits. As noted earlier, being and the world are mutually constituted. The phenomenological approach rejects the Cartesian notion of space as a *res extensa* external to and independent from the human whose constitutive force can be measured

objectively. Heidegger gives the example that 'being-in-the-world' cannot be understood as analogous to our understanding of 'water in the glass' or 'dress in the closet' as this would assume that one can exist prior to and independent from the other (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 54). Instead, being and the world are inseparable and unfold/gain meaning together. Heidegger also stresses that the Self does not simply dream up its world. Rather, in the process of disclosure, we encounter a dynamic and living mass providing stimulus and opportunities for the creation of meaning structures. As indicated by the terminology of the surrounding space (*Umraum*) or environment (*Umfeld/Umwelt*), the disclosed world turns into a space 'around' or 'close to' the Self, with closeness not understood in terms of physical proximity but in terms of knowledge and evaluation (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 63, 66, 102f.). And because knowing the Self is interwoven with knowing the world, the Self cannot choose whether or not to relate to the world it has disclosed. It may reflect and decide over how to connect and organize its *Umwelt*, but it cannot simply choose to withdraw from the world it has become a part of (and vice versa). Loosely following Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1963), a student of Heidegger, this spatial dimension of being-in-the-world can be conceptualized through the key features of centre, order and horizon.

First, the very notion of the surrounding space suggests that there must be a place from which orientation occurs. This place can be understood as the centre, not in the geographical/metric sense but, rather, as that particular place from which the Self unfolds, where most experiences were made and which it knows best. It is a place characterized by great familiarity and to which the Self feels a strong emotional connection and which has 'a character of trustworthiness' (Bollnow, 1963: 55ff.). This place which grounds the narrative and from/towards which the story unfolds is not simply a mental construct but tied to experiences associated with a particular territory, landscape or city. It is reflected in the observation that states 'take place' (Bishai, 2004: ch. 3), that communities claim legal statehood not just anywhere but in a particular territorial location which means something to them and which centres their national biography in both past and future even if they do not fully inhabit it. The relevance of such a place is evident in Heidegger's emphasis on the notion of dwelling, generally associated with living in the specific place that is 'home' (Bollnow, 1963: 148; Malpas, 2006: 74ff.). For Gaston Bachelard, the notion of the home contains 'one of the greatest powers of integration' without which a human would be a dispersed being. He links the home to the soul as the place of emotional being where the world reverberates, the site of an 'inner light' where intimate meanings are created and where worlds are inaugurated (Bachelard, 1994: 7, 10). It functions not only as a sort of anchor which provides a sense of cognitive and emotional grounding, even permanence, but also as a place of creativity which takes new shapes as the Self discloses the world, echoed in Iris Marion Young's description of the home as 'the site of the construction and reconstruction of the Self' (Young, 2001: 286; see also Bollnow, 1963: 132; Kinnvall, 2004: 747). In short, whether grasped in terms of home, or soul, the centre is that place through which communities organize their unfolding, which features prominently in the biographical narrative and which stimulates a feeling of being 'at home'.

Second, gaining orientation in space is a process of creating order (Bollnow, 1963: 36), which ties in with the notions of utopias as visions of good order and of dystopias as

visions of bad order, or disorder. The argument that the Self is formed through identification with an order is well established in social theory and has been central to Western thought since Plato (Strong, 1992: 8). Perhaps just as long-standing is the debate whether order rests on norms or values (Joas, 2000). This distinction, frequently brushed over by IR scholars, is important because it is about what makes a space qualitatively significant. Orders are often understood as normative-cognitive devices that structure being in the world according to a logic of appropriateness. This emphasis on norms is heavily influenced by social contract thinking and suggests that orientation is gained by an understanding of what is the 'right' thing to do. Yet ordering space occurs not only on a normative-cognitive but also on an emotional plane (Bollnow, 1963; Unger, 1990). Whereas norms can be neutral and do not necessarily inscribe a space with structures of meaning to which the Self is emotionally attached, values guide orientation through moral judgements and an understanding of the 'good' (Joas, 2000: 21). Values organize space by designating sites which matter. As Heidegger puts it, a meaningful space is one in which things 'have their place' and where their distance is not measured in physical proximity but according to the value to being (Heidegger, 2001/1953 [1927]: 63, 66, 102f.). This is captured in the suggestion that "value-ceiving" (*Wertnehmen*) always precedes "perceiving" (*Wahrnehmen*)' (Scheler, cited in Joas, 2000: 88) and also underpins Taylor's notion of value-orientation as a process of Self-positioning in a moral space, that is, 'a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary' (Taylor, 1989: 28).

Finally, we arrive at the question of how to conceptualize the boundaries of this knowledge. Spatial orientation always involves some sort of boundary, or border (Simmel, 1922: 465f.), and Bollnow points out that space contains both gradual transitions and sharp borders, which allows the world to be ordered through clearly delineated and recognizable features and, at the same time, to be infinite and open for exploration and discovery. Adopting this duality, one could argue that sharp borders come in the form of cognitive or regulative railings that help the Self to navigate the everyday. Yet, as discussed earlier, an unfolding Self ventures on a path that comes from and leads to places/spaces which are neither fixed nor clearly defined, they are being disclosed. Thus, as Anderson puts it, imagined communities have 'elastic boundaries' (Anderson, 2006). These boundaries, or existential borders, which delineate the realm of an unfolding existence, are transitional markers best conceptualized as horizons (Bollnow, 1963: 74–80; Gadamer, 2004 [1975]). As a line that can never be reached, or surpassed, the horizon has the peculiar character of defining the limits of seeing/knowing the world, yet simultaneously invites exploration and allows the Self to shift these limits. To borrow Koselleck's definition, the horizon is 'that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen' (Koselleck, 2004 [1979]: 260f.). Importantly, it is not delineating space *against* something, or someone, but is marking the realm of the familiar and the possible. As such, the horizon is not simply a boundary of limitation and constraint, but one that holds the possibility to explore and open new perspectives by making new experiences. In other words, it is a boundary that both fixes and fosters spatial imagination and invites the Self to devise a project that has no definite ending. It expands and contracts with our experiences and what we take from them, constituting a sense of being in the world through either a 'wide' or a 'narrow' horizon (Bollnow, 1963: 74-80).

Situating the self in the experienced/envisioned space

It is not too difficult to see how the spatial parameters join up with the temporal dimension, that is, how spatial orientation is infused with a sense of being in time. In the narrative framework, the centre is not necessarily in the present but can be located in the past, the birthplace or a nostalgic memory, or in the future, a place to be built or the vision of 'returning home'. Reading the past through a spatial lens reminds us that experiences are made in particular places. Put differently, spaces gain meaning and come to matter because we associate significant experiences with them. And so it can be said that being-in-the-world is partly constituted through a narrative which situates the Self in a 'space of experience', or an *experienced space* (Koselleck, 2004 [1979]: 260). Taking into account the earlier point on the link between experience and memory, one could also speak of a 'memory space' (Assmann, 1999). In either terminology, it is that part of the biographical narrative that provides the Self with a particular 'topography of the past' (Zerubavel, 2003), a sort of map that shows the spaces and places the Self has come to know, which orders the world by inscribing particular spaces with a 'history', thereby making them meaningful. Correspondingly, it can be said that historical being in the world is delineated through a *horizon of experience* (Koselleck, 2004 [1979]: 260).

That visions of the future are also embedded in a spatial imaginariy is already implied in the terminology of *utopia*, a wordplay designating a place that is both good and nowhere (Vieira, 2010). Correspondingly, the spatial component has always been part of utopian thinking, from Plato envisioning his models of social order in cities and More describing an island similar to the size of the British Isles, to the liberated spaces envisioned by anti-colonial movements or advocates of a united Europe. While visions of a 'good order' may seem abstract and applicable everywhere, they are not space-less but tied to a particular place which we can imagine ourselves living in. Thus, we can say that utopias/dystopias situate us in an *envisioned space*. More specifically, they turn our future into meaningful spaces/places which we want to be in (utopias) and which we want to avoid (dystopias). Put differently, visions allow communities to think about transforming the familiar space or protecting it from what they consider negative changes. Each scenario entails a design of what being-in-the-world might be and enables the formulation of expectations. Thus, by sketching the space to unfold into, visions of the future generate expectations of what is possible, delineating a future being-in-the-world through horizons of expectations or, as they delineate possibilities of becoming, through *horizons of possibility*.

Drawing the various threads together, then, we can conceptualize being-in-the-world as a narrative told from a particular place which turns past and future into meaningfully ordered spaces/places delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively (see Figure 4). This conception suggests that 'being' is spatially bound by horizons which (most likely) exceed Westphalian borders without claiming, or being able to claim, the globe, thus presenting an ontological configuration that fits neither realist nor cosmopolitan lenses. Instead, it invites a re-engagement with work that deals with political formations beyond the Westphalian configuration and conceives of states situated in a surrounding space. Such an ontology is found in explorations of imperial configurations, or the frontier as that boundary delineating the known world, where new experiences are

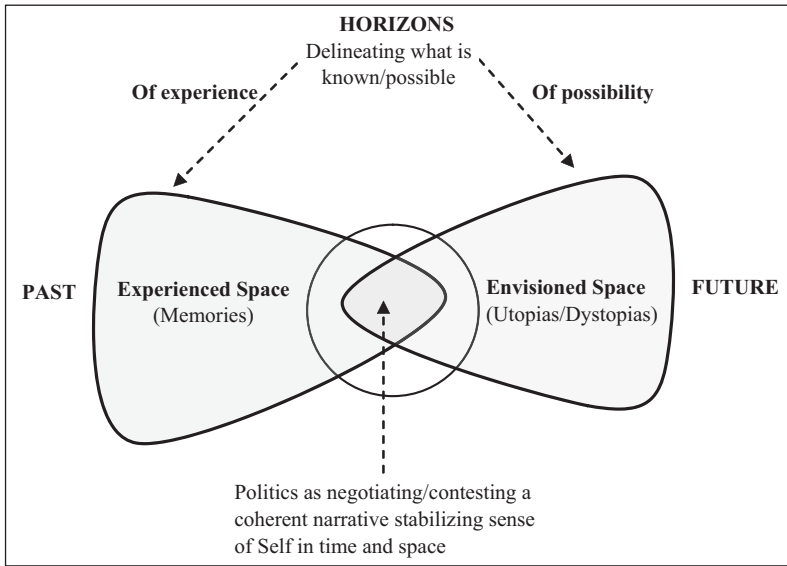


Figure 4. Parameters of a national biography.

made. While the concepts of *Lebensraum* and *Grossraum* are contaminated by histories of violence, notions like Carl Schmitt's *Raumsinn*, or sense of space, still usefully capture 'the image which men have made for themselves of their habitat' (Aron, 1966: 207). The view that the existence of communities is bound up with their environment was also popular during the Cold War and underpins Harold and Margaret Sprout's discussion of the 'man–milieu relationship'. Although in their account 'man' and 'milieu' are still ontologically separate, the conceptualization of the milieu as a psychological image comes close to the notion of the experienced space (Sprout and Sprout, 1965: 28f., 47ff.). More recently, the phenomenon of communities unfolding within a broader experienced/envisioned space has been explored in post-colonial relations (Brysk et al., 2002), as well as work on civilizations (Jackson, 2006; Katzenstein, 2009) and regionalism (Hurrell, 1995). Europe has been a particularly fruitful terrain here, with Adler's description of how collective identity forms in 'cognitive regions' (Adler, 1997) and Waever's aforementioned work representing some insightful scholarship on how past and future conceptions of 'Europe' are integrated into the meaning structures of nation-states (see also Hansen and Waever, 2002; Mälksoo, 2009; Marcussen et al., 1999).

The biographical narrative as a political project

Understanding how communities situate themselves in time and space is not merely an exercise in lifeworld ontology. The formulation and maintenance of the narrative is a political process. As Weber noted, 'in so far as there is ... a common object lying behind the ambiguous term "nation", it is located in the field of politics' (Weber, 1948: 25). This becomes apparent once we consider that a biographical narrative does not just delineate horizons of experiences and of expectations; it also fuses them.¹⁹ As indicated earlier,

any future design of being-in-the-world takes shape through creative engagement with the experienced space. This engagement stitches past and future worlds together in a narrative that constitutes spatio-temporal being in the world as a coherent whole. For a narrative to 'work', that is, to satisfy the need for stable orientation across time and space, it must connect past, present and future Self (or Selves) and generate 'a feeling of biographical continuity' (Giddens, 1991: 53).

To be sure, coherence, or felt continuity, does not mean linearity. There can be various plotlines taking the shape of progressive, declinist or zigzag movements, of ladders, circles or rhymes (Zerubavel, 2003: ch. 1). Moreover, because biographical narratives evolve as the world is disclosed and new experiences are made, a coherent narrative may, and often does, include moments of change. Significant experiences do not necessarily leave a lasting rupture in the narrative if the storyteller is able to make good sense of them and adjust the story accordingly. Indeed, the ability to do so is crucial. As Giddens notes, the biography 'must continually integrate events ... and sort them into the ongoing story about the self', making the narrative 'something that has to be worked at, and calls for creative input' (Giddens, 1991: 54, 76). Thus, a coherent narrative can include all sorts of change as long as a sensible link from 'before' to 'after' is maintained.²⁰ Correspondingly, formulating and maintaining a coherent biographical narrative — giving meaning to significant experiences and formulating believable visions and fusing corresponding horizons into a compelling life course — is more than tying together some loose ends. It is a construct which involves mental pasting, editing and bridging (Zerubavel, 2003: 40) and, as such, requires agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Such biographical work is a creative and 'artful' process (Ezzy, 1998: 246) and in the case of devising a biography for an entire community, a political project.

The political potency of a national biography lies in its function to provide a community with a basic discourse, or master narrative, which guides and legitimizes courses of action and provides ontological security.²¹ Of course, not all action is guided, or made meaningful, by one single narrative. A master narrative is sufficiently vague to exist alongside more specific, derivative narratives that can be either layered or interwoven, and that can be strategically employed without hurting the coherence of the basic discourse. Maintaining such a narrative, or network of narratives, is a form of governance. While some suggest that governments can control a national narrative (Brandt, 2010), the process of formulating it and the infrastructure carrying it is quite complex. It requires both: (i) agents who can claim expertise and legitimacy in carving out authentic memories and visions and possess the creative skill to fuse them and (ii) agents who adopt and carry the narrative along, and who possess the resources to affirm it with tangible practices. The ability to successfully participate in the formulation and dissemination of a national narrative depends in part on the position in the structural-institutional configuration of the state (Tilly, 1994; Wight, 2004).²² Institutions not only render some voices and their representations to be dominant, silencing others; they also lend the narrative a material infrastructure that can sustain it across generations.

That said, because formulating the narrative is an interpretive act, it is principally open to contestation. Societies and their experiences are never homogenous and always hold potential for alternative, even competing accounts of its past and future. And all

biographical narratives, no matter how coherently constructed, contain tensions and contradictions (Ezzy, 1998: 247).²³ Political agents will try to hide them through skilful rhetoric and silences, yet tensions can always be pointed out and exploited by others and may trigger debates over adequate representations and storylines. At the same time, there is the demand not to let the debate reach a stage where it unsettles a stable sense of being in the world. The ability to successfully cater to this demand and close the debate, to steer 'the social production of autism' (Laffey and Weldes, 2004) and conclusively define the limits of what is 'known' and what is deemed 'possible', is a considerable source of power.²⁴ Who has the authority to create a hegemonic master narrative and how/under what conditions alternative narratives emerge, capable of challenging and replacing, or significantly altering, the master narrative are important questions for analysts.

Relevance for International Relations

How is this framework useful for scholars of international politics? To begin with, it sheds light on the complexity of so-called nation-building projects: the relevance of discursive templates employed and the challenges involved, what it takes for such a project to succeed and why it might fail. Thus, the framework also helps to explain processes of political change. If governments sustain their legitimacy in part by providing and representing an authentic national biography for their society, then challenging their rule requires the formulation and dissemination of an alternative narrative that resonates with a large section of that society. For instance, Barack Obama's successful challenge to George W. Bush in the 2008 US Presidential elections would be explained in part by his ability to offer a more appealing narrative of America in the world. Similarly, it would suggest that the emergence of alternative national narratives played an important role in mobilizing and guiding large-scale protest movements such as those witnessed in Iran, Tunisia or Egypt in recent years.

Furthermore, in giving us a better understanding of the parameters salient for a community's ontological security, or 'societal security' to use Waever's term, the framework also helps to evaluate what constitutes a threat to being-in-the-world. That is, it directs our attention to how orientation and a stable sense of being-in-the-world is lost, whether through the inability to integrate significant experiences into a coherent story, or a profound mismatch between a biographical narrative and action. Accordingly, scholars can use this framework to assess the strategies employed by communities and their representatives to defend or regain their ontological security.

More generally, recognizing the content and salience of a national biography improves our understanding of the perceptions influencing foreign policy both in terms of specific decisions and general attitudes (see Weldes, 1999). A phenomenological grasp of an actor's spatio-temporal orientation allows analysts to reconstruct the perspective from which it engages the world and, thus, helps 'to find out what is on that slate that decision makers are bringing with them into their interaction with external Others' (Hopf, 2002: 290). Complementing the usual constructivist emphasis on norm-guided behaviour, the emphasis on situatedness and boundedness expects a state to behave differently towards spaces/places which are part of its biographical narrative than towards those which lack this connection. This does not discard the relevance of norms but, rather, suggests that they matter more in spaces that fall within horizons of experience and possibility. Highlighting these

biases also gives new relevance to Arnold Wolfer's observation that states hold 'milieu goals' aimed at shaping conditions beyond their Westphalian borders (Wolfer, 1962: 73ff.). Importantly, while 'shaping' is a conspicuously vague term and can take various forms, it does not require physical control. Identifying with a wider experienced/envisioned space may explain territorial claims, yet it does not automatically lead to an aggressive foreign policy. Indeed, the lesson might be never to set foot in this space again.

Notwithstanding this article's emphasis on Self-organized identity, the framework should also be of value to scholars focusing on the relational ('Self-Other') aspect of collective identity formation. Constitutive narratives often draw on themes formulated elsewhere, either in support or in juxtaposition, which suggests that Self-organized and Other-directed identity formation processes do not occur independently. The Other might well be part of the attempt to make one's spatio-temporal situatedness meaningful, either as a theme in the narrative or as an influence in formulating the same. The perspectivist approach developed here would suggest, however, that some Others are closer, or more relevant, to the Self than others. It also raises the question to what extent two communities which reinforce each other's narratives can still be regarded as separate entities. This invites the reconceptualization of the inside-outside distinction by suggesting that the status of 'insider' (outsider) is held by actors who (do not) share the experienced space and, thus, who (do not) understand how particular communities draw their horizons and identifying relevant silences. Actors who are external in the legal sense yet who establish a long-term presence through migration or occupation, for instance, become part of the experienced space and, thus, of the biographical narrative of the community they have entered. Thus, they cease to be external in the phenomenological sense and, to greater or lesser degree, gain insider status.²⁵

Finally, a key question for IR scholars is how this ontology of the 'parts' affects the conceptualization of the 'whole', that is, of the international. Clearly, the picture of multiple experienced/envisioned spaces will not resemble a Westphalian map. So if the world is inhabited by a plurality of actors guided by narratives of being-in-the-world, how does this structure international relations? Put differently, if nations/states are incomplete beings inhabiting largely idiosyncratic 'worlds', what are the consequences for conceptualizing 'world' politics?

One way of approaching this question is to ask how the phenomenological reading of the 'unit' informs our understanding of the 'inter' and the nature its political dynamics. Following Friedrich Kratochwil, the 'inter' marks the place, or space, where 'agents come into contact with each other and realize that the outcome of the encounter is dependent on whether we are able to orient our actions meaningfully towards each other' (Kratochwil, 2007: 500). As Kratochwil points out, this space is not an empty, or neutral, ground, a *tabula rasa* where detached agents meet in a first encounter. Rather, as the above has tried to show, agents come to the encounter as situated beings, with a stock of private knowledge providing a stable sense of Self in time and space and with the objective of keeping their narrative going. If the 'inter' is a space of overlapping horizons of experience/possibility, it does not necessarily refer to a space situated in-between actors in the geographical or legal sense. For instance, while for EU member states negotiating new financial regulations the place of encounter may well be a concrete 'in-between', a building in Brussels, the phenomenological 'inter' guiding and affecting the negotiations

is the overlapping experienced and envisioned space of 'Europe' and the various places from which the actors view and order this milieu. Consequently, negotiations do not proceed, let alone succeed, on the basis of some set of universal rules, or norms, 'by retreating to some abstract neutral ground that is beyond time and located "nowhere"' but require 'historical and sympathetic reflection' (Kratochwil, 2007: 508). In other words, participants have to take each other's biographical narratives into account.

The reading put forward here suggests, then, that world politics is not simply about drawing, respecting or contesting demarcations of sovereignty — although this is important — but about negotiating and investing in a shared experienced/envisioned space. The last century has produced significant experiences for many communities whose spaces and horizons now overlap, and the many 'inters' formed this way can be sites of both creation and contestation. Analysing how these overlapping national biographies structure cooperation and conflict is an important task that will enrich studies of international enmity, rivalry and friendship.²⁶

Conclusion

This article adopted a phenomenological approach to explore how humans organize their sense of being-in-the-world to substantiate the concept of a biographical narrative as a constitutive force providing a community with a collective identity from the 'inside'. Towards this aim, it offered a systematic exploration of the private knowledge enabling meaningful orientation in time and space. The article first discussed the temporal dimension, emphasizing the role of experiences/memories (situating the historical Self) and visions (situating the future Self) as creative sources for orientation. Subsequently, it conceptualized the spatial embeddedness of being-in-the-world through the taxonomy of centre, order and horizon, noting in particular the unique features of horizons as boundaries that both limit and invite new possibilities of being. Against this backdrop, the article suggests that a biographical narrative provides communities with a sense of being in the world by situating them in an experienced space and an envisioned space, ordered from a particular place and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively.

This framework advances our understanding of the parameters of ontological security and is an invitation for IR scholars to take perspective more seriously. While it affirms Sergej Prozorov's recent reminder that subjectivity is formed in time *and* space, it offers an alternative to his insistence that defining the Self is predicated on identifying alternative ways of being, that is, caught in a 'deadlock of spatiotemporal othering' (Prozorov, 2011: 1293). Instead, the article suggests that scholars wishing to study Self–Other dynamics need to first grasp the biographical narratives salient for a particular community to understand how it perceives and evaluates the world and others within it. The conceptualization of boundaries as horizons separating the known from the unknown is a crucial step in this regard. It relieves us from understanding boundary-drawing necessarily as a practice of 'Othering' and, instead, asks to distinguish the spaces/places to which the Self feels emotionally connected from those it feels indifferent about. Others can be situated on either side.

While this framework can be applied to all kinds of communities, the aim here was to encourage IR scholars to pay attention to how nations/states define their existential boundaries in ways that differ starkly from both realist and cosmopolitan imaginaries.

The salient points of spatio-temporal orientation contained in biographical narratives are not visible on a Westphalian map and exceed the legal borders of the state without being global in orientation. Of course, understanding the phenomenological milieu of a national biography is not easy. To grasp how political agents construct and administer such narratives and thereby define the limits of what is known and what is deemed possible requires considerable hermeneutical skills, an understanding of the politics of time (Hutchings, 2008) combined with an investigation of what John Agnew (2007) calls the ‘geography of knowledge’. And the task does not stop there. In addition to improving our understanding of the — literally — worldviews influencing foreign policy and the nature of the ‘inter’, the framework also points to the ethical task for both scholars and practitioners of figuring out how communities can stabilize their respective sense of being-in-the-world without violence.

Acknowledgements

Previous versions of this article were presented at the 2007 BISA conference in Cambridge, the 2008 ISA Conference in San Francisco, workshops at Dartmouth College (November 2008) and the Open University (May 2009), at the 2010 ECPR IR Conference in Stockholm and the 2011 ISA Conference in Montreal. For insightful comments and questions the author would like to thank participants on those occasions, in particular Kim Hutchings, Ned Lebow, Rob Walker, Ben O’Loughlin, Alister Miskimmon, Felix Ciuta, and Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, as well as two anonymous reviewers for EJIR.

Notes

1. For the difference between ‘Other-oriented’ and ‘Self-organized’ approaches to identity formation in IR scholarship, see Rumelili (2007: ch. 2).
2. This article mostly uses the term community, though it sometimes refers to ‘society’ or ‘nation’, both understood in the *Gemeinschaft* sense.
3. For a comprehensive discussion, see Hobson (2000).
4. For a critique of identity as a concept, see Brubaker and Cooper (2000); I agree with most of their points, but still consider the concept useful as an analytical eye-opener (Berenskoetter, 2010).
5. This is already visible in Mead (1934), whose ‘I’ is a pre-reflexive state of being driven by intuition and instinct.
6. See, for instance, Neumann (1999), Mitzen (2006), Hansen (2006) and Berenskoetter (2010).
7. Hopf (2002) calls this ‘systemic constructivism’.
8. These shortcomings remain in later works (Wendt, 2004), where he also acknowledges the lack of a theory of collective consciousness as a core problem of his theory (Wendt, 2006).
9. As Mercer (1995) points out, the focus on collective identity formation through negative Othering also is compatible with realist ontology. For sophisticated discussions, see Hansen (2006), Rumelili (2007) and Prozorov (2011). Ted Hopf’s (2002) rich empirical analysis of social-cognitive structures within Russian society has two shortcomings: in his determination to present an ‘inductive recovery of identity’, he rejects any kind of ‘pretheorization’ and does not offer a conceptual framework for capturing constitutive narratives. At the same time, Hopf accepts the relational framework — ‘the logic of Self and Other’ — to structure his analysis, limiting its interpretive scope. For accounts of the Self as multifaceted, fragmented and diffused, see Odysseos (2002); Lebow (2012).
10. Even Wendt (2004, 2006) endorses it eventually.

11. Most of these works use 'nation' and 'state' interchangeably. From a phenomenological perspective, this is not surprising: when individuals or groups identify with narratives of 'America', 'China', 'Scotland' or 'Palestine', they refer to something that entails (an image of) both and cannot be reduced to either.
12. On this issue, see the debate in *Review of International Studies* 30(2): 255–316 (2003).
13. See Irwin-Zarecka (1994), Fentress and Wickham (1992), Assmann (1999), Zerubavel (2003), Lebow (2006) and Bell (2006).
14. See Caruth (1996), Bell (2003, 2006), Alexander (2004) and Kinvall (2004).
15. See also Assmann (1999: 372ff.). On the creative use of historical analogies and 'lessons' by policymakers, see Jervis (1976), May and Neustadt (1986) and Khong (1992).
16. On this point and for a more detailed discussion on the role of the future in identity formation, see Berenskoetter (2011).
17. As understood here, utopias do not necessarily picture a *perfect* (being in the) world but merely a *better* one (Sargent, 2005).
18. On how visions influence decision-making, see Carr (2001 [1946]), Boyle (2004) and Williams (2005).
19. On the notion of fusing horizons, see Gadamer (2004 [1975]).
20. On the plot as the organizing theme, see Ricoeur (1984).
21. Given the emphasis on meaningful knowledge, one could also speak of epistemological security.
22. Deutsch (1966: 101f.) speaks of a 'leading social group'.
23. For an exploration of the illusion of consistent and unitary identities, see Lebow (2012).
24. It is a combination of the power to set agendas and to define normality, what Steven Lukes termed the second and third faces of power (Lukes, 2005). See Fivush (2010) on how silence in biographical narratives is not necessarily a symptom of an oppressed voice.
25. This has been discussed with regard to diasporas; see Adamson and Demetriou (2007).
26. See, for instance, Bially Mattern (2005), Mitzen (2006), Berenskoetter (2007), Steele (2008) and Hansen-Magnusson and Wiener (2010).

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Author biography

Felix Berenskoetter is Lecturer in International Relations at SOAS, University of London, UK. Felix has published articles in various journals and is co-editor of *Power in World Politics* (Routledge, 2007). He is currently chair of the Theory Section of the International Studies Association.