



Mythical Horizons and Liminality

Discourses of Kosovo's Sovereignty

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Abstract

Despite the frequency of use amongst scholars of IR, myth remains largely a term of colloquiality. However, this paper aims to argue that as a distinct temporal and normative structure within discourse, it is a powerful tool for understanding the ways in which narratives give meaning to political phenomena, not just by describing how they are, but how they ought to be. To explain the function of myth, a case study of Kosovo has been conducted. Much scholarly debate on the nature of internationally contested states exists, but we will make the argument that Kosovo is best understood as a being in a state of liminality, due to the conflicting nature of its political structures and foreign intervention. By joining the theory discourse of Laclau and Mouffe, with insights from psychoanalysis we suggest a framework for analysing the distinct nature of political myths. The utopian horizons of myth spell out two antagonistic narratives of sovereignty in Kosovo: one of European integration and market liberalisation, and one of unification with Albania.

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Introduction

From understanding sovereignty through the story of Westphalia (Periimäe, 2010), to the idea of ‘ethnic war’ (Albertini, 2014), IR scholars frequently invoke myth to describe persisting and recurring ideas, concepts or understandings of the social world. Despite the frequency of use, ‘myth’ as a distinct theoretical concept, remains curiously underdeveloped, and its applications are disparate. More often than not, it is viewed as a historical inaccuracy, a false belief, or a form of narrative describing the genesis of a community (Müller, 2016: 107). In sub-fields of IR, though, especially European Studies, the concept has gained some traction. But by reviewing this literature, it becomes clear that the discussion of myth is primarily of philosophical nature and is rarely wedded to a distinct methodology (de Guevara, 2016). In short, there is a clear lack of consensus on what a myth is, and much less on how to study and apply it to international politics.

The main argument of this paper is that myth as a form of discursive narrative, structures the way that we understand political phenomena. It does so by constructing a fantasmatic horizon in relation to a primordial chaos. Between the two temporal points, there exists a state of suspension, upon which inscribes a certain form of knowledge of the world. In constructing this argument, we turn to poststructuralism, and especially the, in IR, rather unused discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2001). By uniting Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of discourse, with the concept of *liminality* as introduced by Victor Turner (1969) and among others, the work of scholars in Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA) we form a methodology for deconstructing and analysing the way in which political myths shape our perception of the world. In doing so, we not only expand theoretically the concept of myth, but also aim at showing the strength of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse and how it can contribute to IR.

In order to test this framework, we analyse the peculiar case of Kosovo status in the international system by asking two questions: 1) What are the myths in the discourse surrounding the questions of Kosovan sovereignty? and; 2) How do they each construct different understandings of sovereignty itself? These questions were conceived by retroductively researching the current situation in Kosovo, and especially the EU’s enlargement process and the integration of Kosovo through state-building, as well as the opposition to foreign rule, by primarily left-wing party Vetëvendosje (Albanian for ‘self-determination’).

Following the unilateral declaration of independence, Kosovo's status in the international system has been an outstanding question. While the EU has declared a position of 'status neutral' due to (Krasniqi, 2019) Serbia still views Kosovo as a *de jure* part of their sovereign territory and are engaged in an alleged diplomatic campaign of 'de-legitimisation' (Kurti, 2018). The issue of Kosovan sovereignty in relation to both Serbia, and the possible future accession to the EU, is further obscured by the infighting in the EU over visa liberalisation for Kosovo, as well as the resurfacing of political demands for unification with Albania. It is the undecidability of the status of Kosovo, which serves as the foundation for our analysis.

What follows is a literature review, divided into three main sections, each reviewing groups of literature relevant to answering the questions posed. In the first part, we will evaluate the current state of affairs in Kosovo and put it in relation to different understandings of sovereignty and statehood. While the field of IR classically ascribes to readings of statehood as being coupled with the exertion of power or international recognition (Krasner, 2001; Kurtulus, 2005), we will argue that the present state of Kosovo is best understood through the concept of liminality (Turner, 1969; Musliu, 2019). In the second part we will introduce the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffé (2001), which relies in part on the notion of fantasmatic logic. It is the idea of fantasmatic logic, which leads us into the scholarly work on the concept of myth. Especially Botticci (2007) and Kølvråa (2015; 2016) is of importance for our development of methodological categories. In particular their ideas of the constitutive power of a collective trauma is drawn upon and put in relation to the utopian horizon.

Once the theory has been revised, we will discuss the methodological foundations, as well as the method of analysing the data. The sources chosen are primarily EU and UN documentation, as well as online news sources and interviews. These have been analysed according to the framework developed in the literature review, as well as scholars utilising Laclau and Mouffé's theory of discourse analysis (Howarth & Griggs, 2012; Herschinger, 2012). Lastly, an analysis of the data is carried out. By identifying two distinct myths—the myth of sovereignty through integration into the EU and the myth of Albanian unification—we aim to show how the idea of sovereignty is discursively produced.

Literature Review

In aiming to explain how myth structures the discourse of sovereignty and state-building in liminal states, we must critically engage with and re-evaluate some core concepts to IR and geo-political theory. In the following section, we will start by engaging with the general debate on statehood and sovereignty, which despite being central to IR, has yet to be resolved. We will argue, that contrary to mainstream understandings, which tend to categorise contested states as either ‘de-facto’ (Caspersen & Stanfield, 2011) or ‘quasi’ (Kolstø, 2006), Kosovo is best understood through the conceptual prism of liminality. The second section will evaluate the very ontological nature from which we depart, by exploring the poststructural turn in IR. Particularly, the discourse theory developed by neo-Marxist scholars Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001). Finally, literature on the concept of myth will be reviewed and expanded upon.

The ‘State’ of Kosovo, Sovereignty and Liminality

Understanding the state-building process in Kosovo presents an interesting problem to IR, as it relates both to the question of statehood, sovereignty and, on a deeper level, identity. At the time of writing, more than a decade after the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), fully internationally recognised sovereignty is still elusive, and both internal and external borders are tenuous. Internal division in the EU has seen a failure to give a coherent endorsement to independence, describing Kosovo as enjoying ‘substantial autonomy’ and letting member states decide their own relations on the condition of ‘status neutral’ (Yannis, 2004: 74; Musliu & Orbie: 2014: 180). The decisive recognition of two thirds of the UN is equally far away, with Serbia engaged in what is perceived as a ‘de-legitimisation campaign’ (Kurti, 2018; EP, 2018), and both Russia and China able to use their veto in the Security Council to block any attempts at joining (Jackson, 2019: 12). The 2018 proposed border swap with Serbia, which was criticised both internationally as well as domestically, raised doubts about the stability of the post-Yugoslav borders and reignited the discussion about ethnic conflict which has spectrally haunted the Balkans since the 1990’s.

On the domestic level, the political arena is divided into four sectoral ‘pillars’, each appointed special mandate on certain matters. Due to aforementioned lack of internal coherence, the EULEX has been forced to halt its implementation, and instead adopt the

framework of its predecessor in the UNSC resolution 1244, with the UN still holding ultimate jurisdiction (Papadimitriou & Petrov: 2012: 754-55). The EU position of 'status neutral' not only serves as an institutional barrier, it also calls into question the authority and 'dual discourse' of the EU in Kosovo, as the latter ask themselves how one can 'govern without recognising' (Papadimitriou & Petrov, 2012: 759). Furthermore, NATO-deployed KFOR remains largely in charge of overall security, leaving little room for the local Kosovan government to enforce and exercise their sovereignty, including the managing of their borders.

What is being discussed, is what sovereignty and statehood, and in effect, the borders of Kosovo actually mean, ontically and ontologically. Mainstream debates have fundamentally been ascribing to an absolutist understanding, often combining elements of recognition in the international realm and a Weberian understanding of violence and the means to enforce territorial claims (Krasniqi, 2019: 299-300; Krasner, 2001: 2). These approaches are indebted to a Western understanding, not only of what makes up a sovereign state, but also what constitutes the rights of the state in the international realm. In what Piirimä calls the 'Westphalian myth', he argues that the warlike situation in which the Westphalian Peace Treaty took place, influenced the conception of the state itself (2010: 67-68). He goes on to show how Grotian and Lockesian understandings of statehood primarily rely on their ability to interact with the international system of states, often through means of war. Thus, the agency of states become paramount, something which reflects back on the precarious nature of Kosovo's statehood.

Absolutist understandings can be contrasted by a more gradual perspective, where one instead takes a quantitative approach, not necessarily viewing statehood as 'either or', but rather as a question of 'how much?' (Kurtulus, 2005). Kurtulus claims that fundamentally, the idea of absolute statehood, and the ensuing debates of its operationalisation stems from ontological confusion. Instead, he argues, there are different degrees of sovereignty derived from internal factors (relating to the absolutist's arguments) and international (judicial recognition) (Kurtulus, 2005: 68-70).

Yet, what these debates take for granted, is a Westphalian conceptualisation of statehood. One wherein a state is a single, pre-given entity, with more or less recognition in the international system and ability to defend its borders. Still, the multiple actors in Kosovo, who all fulfil some of the statehood requirements, without actually being Kosovan, brings up a question of deeper ontological nature. If Kosovo can be viewed, in the word of Bose, as a state of 'international design' (2005: 322), then by what logic is the design created, and how can we understand responses? Furthermore, the main issue in terms of Kosovan sovereignty, is not so

much the ability to enforce said sovereignty, but the question of how it is formulated (Kurti, 2018).

Todorova (2009) refers to the ‘in-betweenness’ of the Balkans. In a world which has largely been perceived as divided between East and West, the Balkans becomes a corridor, or cross-roads (Todorova, 2009: 31/57-59). We have made clear that Kosovo is politically divided, yet it is also culturally so. Ethnically Albanian and Muslim, yet it was a part of Tito’s socialist Yugoslavia, now a protectorate of the West, it is still oddly suspended between economic systems. As Yannis points out, the undecidability of Kosovo’s status led to a caution towards foreign investment and money lending, hampering the privatisation process, and thus effectively barring accession to the liberal world order (2004: 71-72). ‘Kosovo is a *liminal* category oscillating among its socialist and collectivist heritage on the one hand, and the promise for a democratic, liberal system on the other’ (Musliu, 2019: 559, my emphasis).

The concept of liminality, which Musliu mentions, was introduced into political science by the cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1969). It refers to the condition of an actor in a ritual process, wherein they are in between the pre-ritual stage and the accomplished, final stage of belonging to society. ‘Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony’ (Turner, 1969: 95). Much like the person committing to a ritual process, Kosovo is currently in between two stages of statehood: as independent from Serbia and entering into the international realm. Furthermore ‘The initiand, in a state of liminality, is sexless, ontologically in between all forms of being. [They] must submit to the authority of the “total community” [...] they must be a tabula rasa, upon which knowledge is inscribed.’ (Turner, 1969: 102-103).

There is a clear parallel between the ‘tabula rasa’ of the initiand, and Kosovo. The intervention of the Western liberal democracies came upon the condition that the subsequent state-building process was shaped in their likeness (Krasniqi, 2019: 303). In a hauntological fashion, the spectre of Kosovo’s Yugoslav past makes itself reminded in this process as they alienate themselves from anything vaguely socialist, so as to better fit into the promised liberal system (Musliu, 2019: 559). It is precisely the construction of Kosovo, the international state-building project, which sets Kosovo at odds with the essentialist Westphalian understanding of statehood as something natural and given.

The theoretical implications of identifying Kosovo as a liminal state, constitutes a major step away from ‘mainstream’ IR. We are fundamentally challenging the rigid categorisation of positivist IR- their fetishization of essentialist and binary opposition (Mälksoo, 2012: 484). Liminality presents not a third category, such as notions of ‘quasi-state’ (Kolstø, 2006) or ‘de

facto state' (Caspersen & Stanfield, 2011), but a mode of being on the 'threshold', de-linked from previous understandings of identity, and in the process of *becoming* (Turner, 1969: 94). This also means that the spatial aspects of statehood must be questioned. Not to say that there is no physical border between Kosovo and its neighbours, but that the enactment of these borders is no longer given due to a solely statist rationale. Due to the institutional division in the government of Kosovo, the Westphalian concept of territorial sovereignty as being sanctioned by the Hobbesian Leviathan, is *detrterritorialized* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The Deleuzian concept of de- and reterritorialization relates to state's behaviour of not only exerting political and social control outside of its borders, but also to directly influencing the discursive formations taking place. In a similar fashion, the split governance in Kosovo points towards a discursive struggle between different actors with different rationales of state-building.

Yet, could one not claim that everything is liminal? Are we not always in a state of becoming, if one rejects essentialism? Possibly, but it thus becomes the task of the scholar to analyse the momentarily fixed identity position of the subject as liminal, by understanding it as a subject position constituted by hegemonic discourses of sovereignty and statehood. Instead of viewing liminality as suspension between two essentialist identities, it is a momentary phase in the *articulation* of identity. We thus turn to poststructuralism, and the constitutive nature of discourse.

Discursivity and Sovereignty

Essential to IR and the notions of sovereignty and statehood, is the modern idea of territoriality as constitutive of a nation state and its identity (Goettlich, 2019: 203; see also Campbell, 1992; Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1994; Neumann, 1994). While liberal and realist theory in IR departs from a statist conception of the international system, Kosovo, as we have argued above, would not fit into such an analysis without a good deal of conceptual morphing. If we buy into the argument of Musliu (2019), that Kosovo's liminality constitutes a case of a post-modern, post-Westphalian political entity, then we must also turn from the mainstream understanding of identity as *a priori*. Conceptually, identity entered IR in the 90's constructivist turn, when scholars started paying attention to the socially constructed aspects of international politics (Hülse, 2006: 398). Der Derian and Shapiro (1989) and Campbell (1992), drawing on Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, introduced a more radical notion of constructivism which was indebted to the French poststructural movement.

The idea of the inside/outside dichotomy is fundamental to poststructuralism's understanding of what constitutes the political world and has its roots in semiotics. By treating the world as composed of *texts*, Der Derian and Shapiro allows for the implementation of semiotic analysis, by using Barthe's development of Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics (1989: xiii). Saussure argued that language is essentially a negative system of signifiers, in which meaning derives not from an essentialist understanding of what signifiers are, but what they are not. Meaning is thus created in the difference between signifiers, such as East/West, public/private, war/peace and so on. This is what lays as the foundation for Deleuze's (1994) claim that the foundation of all identity must be difference. Meaning is in its purest sense understanding an identity, and we must thus understand meaning as difference. Yet difference is always relational, in constant comparison to what it is not, and it is here one can aim critique at *exempli gratia* social constructivism's claim that identity is more or less fixed, once perceived.

If meaning is based in identity, and identity is non-essential, and understood as being composed of difference, how then to avoid understanding the world as nihilistic? Laclau and Mouffe (2001) would have us look towards a neo-Gramscian understanding of *hegemony*. They argue that identity is fixed by discursive struggle, or a 'process of articulation' (Stengel & Nabers, 2019: 254). It is important to stress that articulation here is not purely understood as linguistic or 'mental', but all social practices which contributes to our understanding of the political world (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107). During the process of articulation, signifiers are linked together in a discursive unity (a discourse) by excluding other signifiers, and thus momentarily meaning is being fixed. However, and this is where poststructuralism differs from social constructivism, this fixation is precarious and always threatened by its own exteriority. They formulate it thusly:

The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a society, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112, author's emphasis).

The nodal points are always related to an *empty signifier*, or a signifier which voids itself of meaning, and therefore becomes symbolically overdetermined by representing the entire discourse. The importance of the empty signifier is its ability through *fantasmatic logic* to ‘hold together different demands and identities by successfully drawing frontiers against and excluding others’ (Howarth, 2010: 320). We will return to the concept of fantasmatic logic, but briefly put, it is the promise of fulness towards which a subject strives. Just as articulation excludes by virtue of favouring some signifiers over others, the relation of nodal points to an empty signifier (in what Laclau and Mouffe call a *chain of equivalence*) creates a distinct boundary, or *antagonism*. It is the tension in the antagonism, which creates the *subject position*, that is, not a fully given subject, but a subject positioned in relation to other subjects and thus other discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107). Hegemony resides in the fixation of meaning, and thus the ability to construct a subject position.

We have now argued that meaning is fundamentally unstable, and dependent on the discursive creation of a hegemonic subject. If we accept this account of the discursivity of reality, it must thus also mean that the liminal state of Kosovo is contingent on a discourse of what a state is, and what falls outside it. In Laclau and Mouffe’s term, ‘sovereignty’, if viewed as an empty signifier, must be filled with a form of meaning, which dictates the subject position of Kosovo as identically betwixt the signifiers of state/non-state. Since the end of the Cold War, the hegemonic discourse on what a state is, is largely identified as Western neo-liberal democratic and Westphalian, as opposed to authoritarian and Communist (Musliu & Orbie, 2014: 181; Campbell, 1992: 236). By virtue of logic, the fact that hegemony means the arrest of meaning through antagonism, must also mean that there are constantly other discourses attempting to displace the current hegemonic one. What then dictates which discourse gains traction? In the last part we will turn to the concept of myth as a form of *fantasmatic logic*.

Chaos, Fantasy and Mythical Horizons

The rationale behind actors is in mainstream IR formulated as interest. Whether it be in terms of security and power or due to the norms of international society these interests are more or less given (Hoffman, 1986). This paper aims not to debunk the concept of interest, but rather to investigate the discursive nature of its production. In the previous section we outlined the productive aspects of discourse, but a question remains: why do some discourses appeal to actors more than others? That is, how are actors included as subjects *in* the discourse? Laclau

and Mouffe touch upon the idea of myth, but don't expand upon it much¹. In IR, myth is largely viewed in terms of meta-myths of the field itself, but rarely as a theoretical tool for understanding discourses in world politics (Piirimäe, 2010: 64). Instead, we briefly turn to the field of interpretive policy analysis (IPA), where the ontology of myth has received closer attention.

Yanow (1996) introduced a reflexivist analysis of policy analysis and has since been followed by many scholars of the argumentative/interpretive turn writing within the discipline of IPA, who echo her argument that we must shift focus unto 'problematisations' instead of 'problems' (Münch, 2016: 50). Something which has been of interest to almost all of these authors, is the notion of *myths* as something central to the way which actors make sense of the social world (Yanow, 1996; de Guevara, 2016: 17; Münch, 2016: 50). However, they differ in their interpretation of its conceptualisation, fundamentally on the immanence of discursive production of subjects. Hermeneutic-interpretive scholars like Yanow argues that it is the naturalising link between *verboten* goals (1996: 189-92), whereas a subgroup go even further to claim that myth can be used strategically by actors as 'prior to discourse' (Münch, 2016: 51).

Before we look at the very specific functions of myth, we have to elucidate the theoretical foundation of myth as understood in this paper. Myth derives from what Lacan termed *fantasy* (Lacan, [1949] 2001: 105). Lacanian Fantasy is a psychoanalytical concept, which has been introduced to the field of IR by the work of Stavrakakis (2004) and Howarth (2006; 2010). It refers to the idea of regaining the *jouissance* lost to the subject, as they start the process of identification (Stavrakakis, 2004: 73). Laclau uses the Lacanian concept of *fantasy* to show how hegemonic projects in their productivity of subjects must offer a fantasmatic promise of reaching their full identity, by the overcoming of an *Other* (Stengel & Nabers, 2019: 259). The Lacanian other resembles the discursive exteriority, which we discussed in the previous section. It is, in short, the constitutive outside which we perceive ourselves in relation to, by being all that we are not.

If Kosovo is being constituted as a state-building project in EU discourse, there must be the promise of *becoming a certain* state, which is the horizon for which Kosovo strives, and in doing so excludes other rationales of statehood. *Fantasy*, in other words, 'focus our attention on the enjoyment subjects procure from their identifications with certain signifiers and figures, and the way these identifications exclude other identifications and interests' (Howarth, 2010:

310). If *fantasy* is the broad concept of identical longing of actors, myth is the narrative which binds together these disparate signifiers, imbuing them with a temporal order, allowing actors to make sense of their longing and thus structure their action (Münch, 2016: 52-53; Žižek, 1993: 202).

Botticci's contribution to the literature on political myths is important. In her analysis of the collective identity of the EU, she argues that the trauma of WWII serves as a form of pre-communitarian 'chaos' and is the very starting point of the myth about Europeanness (Botticci, 2007: 121-122). By giving myth a foundational starting point, she argues that it '[places] events in a more or less coherent plot' (Botticci, 2007: 115). There is thus a clear temporal aspect to the myth, in the sense that for there to be a future horizon towards which the subject can strive, there has to be a past to relate to. Kølvråa applies the narrative theories of Ricoeur to the concept of myth and argues that in contrast to most understandings of myth as purely stories of genesis, the origin also spells out what the subject must become (2015: 75; 2016). 'It is in this sense that myth produces a paradigmatic image of community, an image of how it 'should be' – but is not yet. It is this element of incompleteness – of conclusion only yet to come – which drives the narrative forward from the origins to the present and beyond' (Kølvråa, 2015: 75-76). We thus understand myth neither exclusively as foundational nor eschatological, but as something that works on the moment suspended between the two. In our terminology, myth thus inscribes a normative meaning on the subjects as they are in a state of liminality.

Political myth carries weight for IR purposes in several ways, but most importantly as a means of naturalising the chains of equivalence, introducing an affective dimension and thus helping us to understand how actors relate to discourses (Solomon, 2011: 912). Antic *exempli gratia* analyses how Serbian discourse portrays itself as historically a bulwark of European civilisation, and in modern time a defender of Balkan values and integrity from US imperialism (Antic, 2005: 194-96). Goetze, by analysing journal articles and newspapers, claims that the myth of 'warlords' helps structure a narrative in which the West must intervene in failing states, thus shaping the policy definition of R2P (2016). Furthermore, Kaczmarek, by interviewing UN officials, concludes that the international community, which is so often referred to in IR discourse, is less a concrete object, and instead a myth of how we structure the international and what this entails for state building (2016). Thus, Kaczmarek shows that the international is on one hand a discourse which constitutes an inside/outside distinction (what falls inside of the international society, and what is outside and alien), but also how there is a specific narrative to how such a society must act in *exempli gratia* state-building projects.

All of the examples referred to above, show examples of what Münch calls ‘exclusion of alternatives’ (2016: 56). When Milošević in 1989 revoked Kosovo’s autonomous status, he drew upon the aforementioned myth of Serbian regional hegemony, and invoked the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, which effectively naturalised the idea of in a single stroke re-annexing a region populated by another ethnicity (Antic, 2005: 190-91). Myth works through fantasmatic logic to explain ‘why certain political projects are supported whereas others are not’ (Dany & Freistein, 2016: 234). If we accept the claim that the performativity of foreign policy is a way for actors to engage with the discursive reality of the international, mythography could prove a powerful tool for analysing exactly how certain rationales of sovereignty are portrayed, through the articulations of political entities. We will now turn our attention to the ways in which these political demands are articulated.

Methodology and Data

The following section is divided into two sections. The first one is slightly more theoretical, as we consider the question of methodology relating to the ontological and epistemological nature of the literature on political myth. We will turn to, among others, Howarth and Griggs (2012) and their discussion of retrodution and Foucauldian problematisation. Secondly, we will discuss the chosen form of method, and critically consider the chosen data.

Methodology and Problematisation

In trying to understand how myth organises the ways in which we perceive political subjectivity and agency, we depart from the mainstream understanding of subjectivity as something essentialist and pre-determined. As shown by among others Musliu (2019) and Krasniqi (2014 & 2019), the liminality of Kosovo’s political agency makes room for a different interpretation of statehood and sovereignty as something that is discursively articulated. As we have seen from engaging with the work of both scholars belonging the interpretive branch of policy analysis (Howarth, 2006 & 2010) as well as Laclau and Mouffè (2001), actions cannot be separated from the discursivity which produces them. For that reason, I argue that we have to understand the discourse that constitutes the agency underlying the becoming of Kosovo’s statehood. In doing so, we are posing some rather radical questions, and followingly, the

assumptions must be made clear, to avoid the common criticism of being ‘bad science’, often directed at discourse analysis (Milliken, 1999: 227).

Howarth and Griggs (2012) propose five methodological deliberations, upon which the researcher must reflect, when conducting interpretive policy analysis. First comes the Foucauldian *problematization*, where we seek to understand a particular phenomenon. This relates to our research question and the political phenomenon which is being investigated. However, a political problem is rarely given in a single field but is constituted by various intermeshed discourses (Howarth & Griggs, 2012: 326). By drawing on Heidegger, Foucault defines problematization as ‘a movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also, how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization’ (Foucault 1984: 118-19). In our case, the issue of Kosovan state-building is related to several problematisations, governed by a diverse set of logics. Secondly, drawing on Peirce, we assume a retroductive (or abductive) methodological stance, where we have observed an ‘anomalous phenomenon’, our explanandum, and aim at uncovering a set of putative explanans (Howarth & Griggs, 2012: 324; Milliken, 1999: 234). For us, the explanans are the mythical nodes which structures the policy discourse of Kosovo and secondly, EU’s enlargement agenda. Thirdly, these explanans do not form causal and universal laws as in positivist understandings of the world but are structured by an internal logic. With this, it is important to reiterate that we as mythographers are not looking for any essentialist truth, but analysing the discursive patterns, or in the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, chains of equivalence. Fourthly, these logics are identified as political, social and fantasmatic. As we have seen through our prior engagement with literature (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Howarth, 2010; Dany & Freistein, 2016), myth works primarily within the latter form of logic. Finally, the task of considering the abovementioned points, cannot be done objectively, but is intrinsically linked to the researcher itself, and are ‘internal components of the explanatory endeavour’ (Howarth & Griggs, 2012: 325). The very act of inquiring into a political phenomenon, will inevitably see us partake in, and reproduce certain discourses, and as such, the self-awareness of the researcher is paramount. We will return to the last point in the section on methods and data.

An important question considering the abovementioned methodological deliberations, concerns the question of whether the research done is qualitative or quantitative. While it is rather clear that we are firmly within a post-positivist methodology, why have we chosen a qualitative approach, instead of perhaps a quantitative analysis, or a mixed one? The answer to this, relates to both the choice of theory, and the sets of data available. The aim is to understand

how myth, as discursive nodes, structure a discourse and creates a certain political subject, which means that we must *interpret* the myths, not count their frequency in a discourse. In other words, we are not mapping how often a certain mythical structure is appearing, but their narratives and their ‘meaning making in context’ (Jacobs & Tschötschel, 2019: 471). Furthermore, this is essentially a theory expanding project, in the sense that the aim is to investigate under-used and under-developed concepts, such as ‘myth’ and ‘liminality’ in IR theory. With that said, applying theory in a more or less novel way, will certainly produce novel data, and in its interpretation a qualitative methodology suits this research better, due to its explanatory ability (Flick, 2009: 25). These methodological concerns all impact the way in which the data is viewed and analysed. The next part will discuss the method for data collection, as well as consider the importance of the particular sets of data chosen.

Methods of Mythography and Data Collection

In the process of uncovering and analysing mythical narratives in the discourse of political actors, we have to first flesh out what we aim to measure. In this paper we will not aim at understanding the *a priori* rational motives behind what the interviewees say, but instead see them as engaged in *practices*. Practices, according to Foucault, are places where words and actions interrelate- it is in the intersection where articulation is happening (Bacchi & Bonham, 2016: 114-15). These articulations never happen out of context, and in our framework, the context has a distinct temporal aspect. Therefore, the analytical framework will be divided into three temporal categories: The *primordial chaos*, the *state of liminality* and lastly the *mythical horizon*. Each category theoretically correspond to what has been discussed in the literature review.



(Figure 1)

Each of the two myths will be divided into these categories, for sake of clarity. With that said, the data analysed will not always follow a temporal order. Hence, a document from 2019 might tell us as much about the stage of primordial chaos, as an article from 1999. We are not attempting to understand the sentiment of a given period of time, but instead how the aggregate articulations form a discourse. That means that in each temporal category, the nodal points and antagonisms that produces a subject position, will be outlined. After the temporal outline has been conducted, we will compare the two myths side by side, so as to further analyse how they each lend different meanings to the idea of 'sovereignty'.

The above approach is inspired largely by Herschinger's (2012) analysis of UN discourse of Othering in relation to international terrorism and drugs. She correctly observes that 'the notion [of discursive hegemony] has rarely been used, and no efforts have been made to theorise strategy and apply it in concrete analyses' (Herschinger, 2012: 75). She proceeds with her operationalisation in a deductive-inductive manner, resembling that of Pierce, as argued in the previous section. What this means, is that the categories above have been constructed both by considering the literature reviewed on myth and discourse analysis, as much as by actually studying the data collected. The same logic decided the choice of myths to analyse.

In terms of data collection, the question which begs immediate answering is how we have decided on what to collect and analyse. To this there are two considerations. First, researchers engaging in discourse analysis, treat their basic ontological unit as a text-something to be read and interpreted (Der Derian, 1989: 6). This means that almost everything can be treated as data as long as they are contextualised properly, and put in relation to other articulations, at the discretion of the analyst's intuition (Howarth & Griggs, 2012: 335). Secondly, there is the issue of available data in Kosovo. The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while still active, is not updated regularly, and only presents a summary of their official foreign policy. This means that when *exempli gratia* gathering data around border policies or other international matters, one has to rely on a variety of texts, news-paper articles and UN/EU documentation. Many documents produced by Kosovan institutions have a streamlined language, which very much emulates the one found in official documents in the EU and UN. But this is not necessarily to our disadvantage, as it still allows for the analysis of articulations, and the nodal points of their discourse is often easily spelled out in their headings. In other words, simply by looking at the table of contents of a development report, it becomes clear which themes are privileged.

Furthermore, despite being the single biggest party in Kosovo, Vetëvendosje, which is the main promulgator of the unification myth, has virtually no press-material available in English. Additionally, their webpage only has material available in Albanian. Therefore, the analysis relies to a major extent on articles found online, as well as interviews with their leader and former PM of Kosovo, Albin Kurti. Besides articles, the constitution of Kosovo, as well as Vetëvendosje's manifesto has been analysed. Originally, fieldwork was planned to take place in Kosovo. The trip was made to Pristina but was cancelled due to the outbreak of Covid-19, hence the reliance on secondary sources. However, as we are studying political articulations, and not conducting a study of language, I would argue that the effect of this on the analysis itself will be limited.

To reiterate for the sake of clarity: the fundamental object of analysis, is articulations, which will be put in temporal relation to each other. This creates nodal points, a form of privileged signifiers which when linked together creates a chain of equivalence. These chains of equivalence are what fundamentally shapes our perception of the world. By placing sovereignty in the context of 'economic development', 'privatisation' and 'European values' it creates a certain form of understanding of the very word 'sovereignty'. Conversely, by instead relating it to 'ethnic struggle' and 'foreign meddling', it creates a different type of subject. How this shaping of the understanding of states and sovereignty takes place, is what we will now investigate in the analysis.

Analysis

The following analysis will be divided into two parts: 1) the mythographic part, which will see us outline the two competing myths, the inherent antagonisms and their nodal points and; 2) which will see us make a comparison of the two narratives and analyse what it tells us of the state-building process. The first part will be relatively descriptive in nature, as it primarily serves to break down the empirical material and arrange it according to the previously mentioned discursive categories.

It is important to reiterate, that while a methodological choice was made to separate the two myths for sake of clarity, discursively they intervene in each other's narratives. That is, while the EU puts a focus on market integration in technical terms, whereas local narratives favour symbolism and 'popular' (in the Laclauian sense) articulations, they still relate to a

fantasmatic horizon of *becoming* a state. Due to the hegemonic nature of the discursive formation of the Western nation state, as previously discussed, the various state-building discourses in Kosovo will inevitably share nodal points, and they will not always differ markedly. However, the chain of equivalence will be different, depending on the fixity of moments, that is, the meaning assigned to nodal points in relation to each other. What we aim to do is not to deconstruct the grand narrative of the Western nation state, as that has been done skilfully and more in-depth by others, but instead understand how political myths naturalise the different articulations of *how* the liminal becomes fixed.

The myth of European Sovereignty and Market Integration

The myth of a European state prevails as a fantasmatic horizon and a theme repeated throughout nearly all EU and UN reports analysed for this paper. Although accession technically is a matter of fulfilling requirements decided by the member states of the EU, there is still a heavy emphasis on ‘fulfilling the European perspective’, which, as we shall see, connotes more than simple membership in an international organisation. We will now go through the data analysed, in the three different categories mentioned in the methods section.

The Yugoslav War as Primordial Chaos

As suggested by Zupančič and Pejič, it was the Kosovan student protests of 1981 where the first signs of Yugoslav instability presented itself initially, putting Kosovo squarely and symbolically at the very centre of the conflict (2018: 41). In international discourse Kosovo turns out to be an empty signifier in the sense that it empties itself and becomes overdetermined with the absolute conflict itself. This is the starting point of primordial chaos. As stated in the Rambouillet Accords (UN, 1999), the ongoing conflict in Kosovo undermines the entire precondition for democracy and sustainability, and thus becomes a contrast to the stable and peaceful European state. However, as suggested by former US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, the Accords were less of a diplomatic move to reach a peaceful solution, as much as an attempt at constructing a legitimate *casus belli* (The Guardian, 2009). The inability of the Albanians in Kosovo to protect themselves against Yugoslav aggression required NATO to step in, and with any hope of reaching a peaceful accord, violence became the only viable option. Despite the Western Balkans geographically and historically being a part of Europe, something which has been agreed upon and stated in the subsequent Thessaloniki Summit (2003), the ongoing conflict was seen as so untenable and at odds with European and Western

ideas of stability and democracy, that an unprecedented international, military response was necessitated.

There is here an antagonism between the European values, highly enshrined in the idea of democratic and liberal peace reached through the collective trauma of WWII (Kølvraa, 2016) and the adolescent post-communist states of the Western Balkans, who are in the midst of their own constitutive trauma. The liminality of the Balkans is at odds with the unitary subject position of a liberal European state, and it must be resolved. It is, of course, also important to note here the historical context; this takes place less than a decade after the end of the Cold War—the ultimate ideological show-down between Capitalism and Communism. The fact that Yugoslavia was the sole communist state, which had relatively close economic ties with the EEC since the 1970's until the breakout of the conflict (EEC, 1990), further enhances Tudorova's (2001) argument that the Balkans was at once inside and outside of Europe. The primordial chaos then lies in the fact that such an ideologically deviant state as Yugoslavia could exist in the collective space of liberal European states. The outbreak of violence so close to the EU's borders posed a challenge to both the liberal idea of human rights, as well as the economic stability of the region.

After the NATO bombing campaign, a quadruple political structure was put in place in Kosovo, consisting of the four pillars which was discussed in the literature review. So far, the effort was largely spearheaded by NATO and UNMIK, yet an incident involving the death of a Kosovo Serb boy in 2004 saw an outbreak of violence and retaliation between Albanians and Serbs. Kofi Annan called for an investigation lead by Norwegian ambassador Kai Eide. The Eide-report firmly sets out by declaring the violence not a problem of inter-ethnic origins but rooted in a 'serious lack of economic opportunities and an absence of a clear political perspective' (Eide, 2004: 3). He furthermore suggests that UNMIK reduce its presence in favour of a more consolidated Pillar IV (or EU) presence (Eide, 2014: 22-23). In terms of articulation, this is a clear suggestion that the politico-economic-military division has failed in presenting a clear common goal for settling the Kosovo issue. This became the first step towards the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan in 2007, which was to be the primary framework for the future constitution (EC, 2009). Point 1.4 of the plan specifically reads: 'Kosovo shall have an open market economy with free competition' (Ahtisaari Plan, 2007). However, it is interesting to note that Eide specifically states that:

'While privatization is widely considered as the centrepiece of the UNMIK economic policy, it still remains only a part of economic development and certainly is not a panacea. It will not produce positive

changes in the short term [...] However, privatization has become a *symbolic issue* and a sign of *unfulfilled promises* by UNMIK. The privatization process should move forward effectively without delay' (Eide, 2004: 18, my emphasis).

Liberalisation and privatisation have become privileged nodal points in the tempo-discursive space of primordial chaos. 'Stability', 'peace' and 'development' are in this case all floating signifiers, tied together in a chain of equivalence, and opposed to the chaos and violence associated with the collapse of Yugoslavia, and subordinated to the master signifier of liberal democracy. It is, in simplified terms, economic logic that will be the way towards civilisation. We have aimed to show how the fundamentally unstable discursive space of the primordial chaos has been articulated historically, and the next step is to investigate how the contemporary position of Kosovo becomes liminal.

Liminality and the Growth towards Europe

At this point, Kosovo, as part of the 'bloody' Balkans, has been constituted as something outside of the European community, but still poses the prospect of becoming European by conforming to the community's shared values. The next step in the mythographic study, is to gauge how the liminal subject position is constituted, so that it can be filled with the meaning offered by the mythical horizon. As Kølvråa (2015) suggests, the true essence of myth lies between the past (chaos) and the future (utopia), and it is the suspension, or liminality between them where myth works. Especially two areas have been focused on: the failure to privatise the market, and the pending visa status of Kosovo.

Several documents pertaining especially to Kosovo's road towards inclusion in the family of European states, build upon the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, which saw the EU dedicate themselves to enlargement towards South-Eastern Europe. The 2005 report *A European Future for Kosovo* states that 'The European perspective of the Western Balkans [...] is also open to Kosovo. Under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, Kosovo needs to overcome its isolation and participate in the region's progress towards Europe.' (EC, 2005: 2). It goes on to state that the UN is on the verge of a conclusion of Kosovo's status, and that the European Commission will primarily dedicate itself towards stimulating economic growth by amongst other things helping '*privatise socially owned*

enterprises so that assets can be put swiftly into productive use socially owned enterprises so that assets can be put swiftly into productive use' (EC, 2005: 5, author's emphasis). An apparent issue blocking the effective settling of the status issue, is the remnants of socialism embodied in the public ownership of enterprises, which stands opposed to the natural growth of the private sector. As we shall see later, this is a recurring issue in developmental reports from the EC and the EU and echoes Musliu's (2019) argument of the odd suspension between economic systems, which according to her constitutes the liminal subject position of Kosovo.

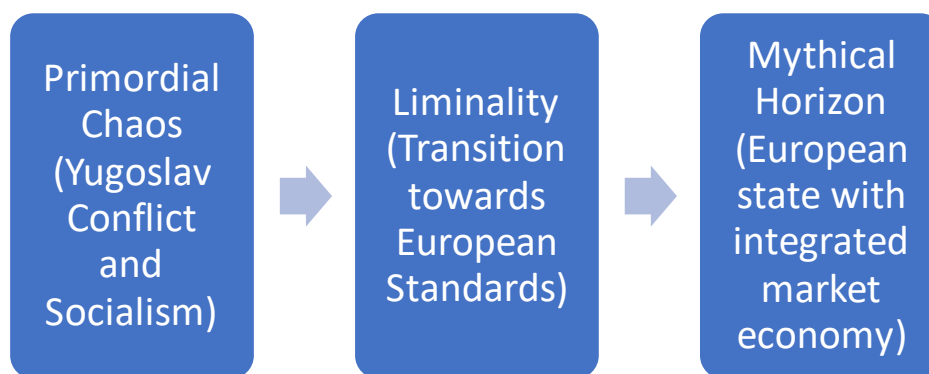
After the UDI, and the transferral of primary mandate of supervision from UNMIK to EULEX, the EU continued to accentuate their continued support for an integration process, chiefly focusing on the economic aspects of the country's development. In a sequel to the abovementioned document, the issue of visa liberalisation was raised, as a positive future mechanism associated with the adoption of EU legislation (EC, 2009: 5). In relation to the rest of the Western Balkans, it was pointed out that Kosovo still did not fully enjoy the merits of free movement across borders, as their neighbour does. Visa liberalisation has been raised several times in subsequent development reports, relating to Kosovo's legislative integration into the EU, and has been one of the key political goals (EC, 2016; 2018; 2019). In 2016, the European Commission acknowledged that all technical aspects on Kosovo's side had been met, and that they had presented a formal application to the Parliament and Council. However, visa liberalisation has yet failed to materialise.

There is a peculiarity here. As High Representative Mogherini stated in a 2018 press-release: 'The Western Balkans are part of Europe: we share the same history, the same geography, the same cultural heritage and the same opportunities and challenges today and in the future' (EC, 2018). In the same press release, the enlargement process is described as purely 'merit based', while simultaneously declaring that no further enlargement would be possibly under the auspices of the current mandate (EC, 2018).

Despite posing free movement as a human right and in the interest of all the players in the enlargement game (EC, 2018), Kosovo is suspended between being a natural part of Europe, in the words of Mogherini, as well as not having fulfilled all the requirements. At the time of writing, the EU still has not granted Kosovan citizens visa free travel in the Schengen Area, despite rising levels of internal criticism in the EU (New Europe, 2020). Taken together with the previous paragraph on the failure to align oneself with the European privatisation policy, this points to a failure of providing a coherent basis for identity for Kosovo. It is on one hand failing at market liberalisation, while on the other hand fulfilling all of the technical

requirements demanded for acquiring visa liberalisation. It is both culturally, historically and *geographically* a part of Europe, yet the borders are being re-entrenched politically.

One concerned with a more actor-based conception of discourse, could observe here a rupture in the EU's articulations, which would undermine the argument of the paper. However, it is precisely this which constitutes the liminality of Kosovo's current subject position; an undecidability of political status in the field of discursivity. It is from this position of liminality, that the fantasmatic horizon promises a fulfilment in terms of identity, which leads us to the next part.



(Figure 2) The structure of the European myth

Europe and Stability as a Mythical Horizon

As we have seen, Kosovo has emerged from an original position of chaos, to become a liminal subject suspended between planned and market economy, as well as inside and outside of Europe in terms of borders. The unresolved nature of visa liberalisation begs the question of what potential inclusion in the EU has to offer. Until now the discourse of enlargement has mainly been articulated in functionalist terms, as a set of demands which has to be met for Kosovo to truly become European. In none of the developmental reports released between 2016 and 2019, is 'sovereignty' mentioned. Instead, the recurring themes of economic growth and development, as well as democratic institution building are repeated (EC, 2016; 2018; 2019). However, in the Sofia Declaration of 2018, regarding the situation in the Western Balkans, there is a shift in focus to themes of 'the primacy of democracy and the rule of law, especially the fight against corruption and organised crime, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and rights of persons belonging to minorities' (Sofia Declaration, 2018). This is again

cast as being integral to the ‘European perspective’ which is promotes good neighbourly relations (EC, 2018a).

However, due to the 100% import tariff which Kosovo imposed on Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina in 2018, the ‘overall domestic political context proved challenging’ (EC, 2019). This is an antagonism to the communal space of the EU, where rule of law and internal harmony prevails. This is emphasised by the president of the EC, Jean-Claude Juncker: ‘if this dispute between Serbia and Kosovo is not resolved there will be no chance whatsoever for Serbia and Kosovo to become members of the EU. We do not want to import instability in the Union, we want to export stability’ (European Western Balkans, 2019). The articulation of the ‘Union’ as a distinct space where stability is preserved, is echoed by French president Macron, in his decision to block North Macedonia and Albania from entering into membership talks due to a failure to implement democracy and fight corruption (The Guardian, 2019).

By articulating the EU as a distinct space (governed by the ‘European perspective’) where stability and liberal democracy governs, it also presents itself as a promise of exactly this. Should the countries of the Western Balkans, and by extension Kosovo, fulfil the demands placed on them, they will enter into a state of stability. By logic of exclusion, anything outside of the discursive space of EU/Europe, will be unstable. However, the resolving of the antagonism will itself also resolve the liminal state which Kosovo find itself in. It is important to note that this is still a mythical *horizon*, something for which the states of the Western Balkans must strive. Before the European ‘family’ can invite new members, the promised stability must be guaranteed (EC, 2018a).

While the nodal points in the discourse of growth was related mostly to the development of a stable market economy, which through its functionality would integrate Kosovo into the European community, the horizon of the myth is one of strong ‘fellowship’, ‘shared values’ and ruled by a logic of ‘normativity’. Sovereignty is achieved through community membership, meaning the ultimately, the myth of the European state promises to solve the very issue of sovereignty itself. Where there is a discourse, there is also room for a counter-discourse, which conversely calls for counter-myth to present another solution to the outstanding question of sovereignty.

The Myth of Sovereignty Through Unification With Albania

The continued use of the Albanian national flag over the EU-appointed Kosovan flag by, amongst other, Vetëvendosje leader Albin Kurti, has been an issue of contention in regional

co-operation. This articulation of 'ethno-nationalism' signals a myth of ethnic origins, which poses a challenge of hegemony to the myth of the European state and articulates another logic of sovereignty. The subsequent section will follow the same structure as the previous part, before entering into a comparison of the two myths.

The Other and Primordial Chaos

While it is by no means a mistake to locate the Yugoslav conflict in the categorical stage of 'primordial chaos', it would nevertheless be erroneous to suggest that this is the origin of the Albanian myth in Kosovo. Ever since the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Kosovo has existed in various forms under the rule of other nations, most prominently Serbs or Ottomans, and most recently socialist Yugoslavia. The question of sovereignty has rarely been discussed historically, outside of ethnical state-building projects, such as the League of Prizren of 1878 or the London Conference in 1913 (Jelevich, 1999). In both examples, an Albanian state was the topic of discussion, and was mediated by international actors. There was, however, never any concrete measures towards granting Kosovo Albanians a state of their own, only to rearrange existing border configurations (Janssens, 2015: 52)

During the KLA's armed struggle in 1998-99, commander Sylejman Selimi stated that:

There is de facto Albanian nation. The tragedy is that European powers after World War I decided to divide that nation between several Balkan states. We are now fighting to unify the nation, to liberate all Albanians, including those in Macedonia, Montenegro, and other parts of Serbia. We are not just a liberation army for Kosovo. (Phillips, 2012: 69)

There is thus a perception of failed international mediation, leading up to the Yugoslav conflict. The lack of a cohesive geographical space for Albanians in the Balkans, means that there is a constant external threat, against which they have identified themselves first and foremost as ethnically Albanian, before citizens of a specific state. During the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the dominant Other against which there was an antagonistic frontier, was Serbia. In the Gazimestan Speech in 1989, which saw Kosovo stripped of its relative autonomy, Milošević stood beneath a sign reading '1389' and '1989' symbolising the 600 years that had passed since the Battle of Kosovo (Appleby, 2000: 70). This Serb aggression in the name of reclaiming the heartland, is what still haunts Serbia-Kosovo relations. As Albin Kurti puts it in an interview given shortly after being elected Prime Minister: '[...] I am first citizen of republic. Only when Belgrade comes into this political, and geopolitical, equation, I re-become Albanian, to

successfully resist different hegemonic aspirations that they have' (Kurti, 2018). This is echoing a similar statement, made in 2007 while under house arrest for political activities, where he remarks that the Albanian identity comes from the years of persecution by Serbs, and Milošević in particular (New York Times, 2007).

The antagonism differs thus from the one in the European myth, where the main ideological Other was the spectre of communism. Herein, we instead see the antagonism being between Kosovo Albanians, who are forced to assume their ethnical identity in the face of external aggression. The salience of Lacan's mirror phase-analogy is remarkable. Kurti become Albanian only when faced with the 'hegemonic aspirations' of the Other (Belgrade). Similarly, Kosovan freedom is articulated in the continued use of the Albanian flag by, amongst others, supporters of Vetëvendosje. On the polemic surrounding the decision to meet foreign dignitaries with the Albanian flag instead of the EU appointed Kosovo flag, Kurti states that the latter was 'imposed' on Kosovo, and that the Albanian eagle is a 'symbol of resistance' which dates back to the struggle of Skanderbeg (Kurti, 2018). In this sense, the use of the Albanian flag is an articulation of both Albanian ethnicity against Serb aggression, as well as equivalent to the historical struggle for independence from external domination. It is from this history of antagonism towards both the Serbs and the meddling of the West, that Kosovo's current liminality stems.

Liminality and Independence from Independence

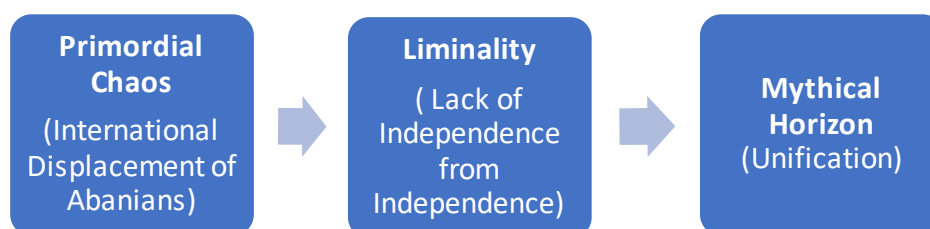
Despite the UDI being found judicially legitimate by the ICJ in 2010, the status of Kosovo remains outstanding. As outlined in the literature review, this is largely due to the institutional mechanisms of international law, as well as the EU's position of 'status neutral'. Kosovo's sovereignty is suspended between independence from Serbia, and their inability to either join the EU, or enter into a confederation with Albania. The latter is stated in Kosovo's constitution, article 1.3, which reads: 'The Republic of Kosovo shall have no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State' (Constitution of Kosovo, 2020). In contrast, article 1.1 states that: 'The Republic of Kosovo is an independent, sovereign, democratic, unique and indivisible state' (Constitution of Kosovo, 2020).

It is the discrepancy between articles 1.1 and 1.3, that Kurti criticises when he claims that Kosovo is 'not independent from independence' (Kurti, 2018). 'Full independence', he claims, is the ability of a state to join a federation, such as the proposed one with Albania, but also the EU (Kurti, 2018). This lack of independence is also pointed out in the political program

of Vetëvendosje, especially articles 4-6 which attacks the international presence as ‘disdain for the country’s sovereignty’ and further claims that ‘There can be no republic if there is a ruler of the republic’ (Vetëvendosje Manifesto, 2020). Internationally levied sovereignty thus presents itself as being at odds with the will of the people, from which Vetëvendosje conceives democracy.

To return briefly to the aforementioned flag of Kosovo, it holds another symbolic meaning, beyond representing the imposition of the Other. Leading up to the UDI, the Kosovo Unity Team, a group of five tasked with negotiating the republic’s status, announced a competition to design the flag. There is thus a semblance of democracy at play (albeit with a distinct market logic to it), but the conditions for the competition is what is of interest. It clearly states that the design may include neither eagle, nor exclusively the colours black and red (Kosovo Unity Team, 2007). The cultural-symbolic order enforced by the West, exemplified in the neutral EU flag, suggests a form of sterilisation of Kosovan history, as it neither represents the Albanian people, their culture nor their history. In addition, the flag can also not be a red, white and blue tricolour, as the Serbian flag (Kosovo Unity Team, 2007). In effect, the symbol of Kosovo itself becomes suspended between the two previous constitutive entities, just as the republic itself is trapped in its own independence.

With the failure of the EU to deliver on its promise of visa liberalisation as previously mentioned—what Kurti brands a campaign against Kosovo’s recognition (European Western Balkans, 2020)—the way forward is less than clear. Perhaps it is for this reason, that Vetëvendosje’s discourse of unification becomes increasingly politicised, with both President Thaci and former Foreign Minister Pacolli opening up for integration of common policies with Albania (Balkan Insight, 2019a). The following section will outline this political approximation as the fantasmatic horizon which closes the circle of the Unification myth.



(Figure 3) The structure of the unification myth

The Myth of Unification

Independence, particularly in the discourse of Vetëvendosje, signifies the democratic choice of the people to enter into foreign relations with other states, of their own volition. Although it is primarily articulated as a question of possible unification with Albania, and increasingly so in functional terms, it becomes a demand for true sovereignty through the agency granted by the very process of unification. In 2019, Vetëvendosje submitted a request to open a party filial in Albania in order to ‘raise awareness about national unification and integration of Albania, and Albanians into Euro-Atlantic structures’ (Balkan Insight, 2019b). This was followed by a meeting between deputies of Kosovo and Albania, wherein the need for increased cooperation was stressed: ‘The borders between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania should not exist at all, they should be removed immediately and our countries should enjoy unrestricted freedom of movement and unhindered ability to deepen economic cooperation’ (European Western Balkans, 2019b).

The increased politicisation of the integration with Albania must be viewed in the light of another case of border correction, wherein there was a proposal to ‘border-swap’ the Serb majority lands of Northern Kosovo, for the ethnically Albanian Presevo Valley in South-Western Serbia. However, despite high-level engagement from international diplomats, the negotiations continuously break down, most recently due to new charges of war crimes levelled at Thaci, as he prepared for talks in Brussels (Euronews, 2020). The fabled sovereignty, held in reserve for when Kosovo and Serbia have eased tensions, is thus once again blocked by the meddling of foreign powers.

According to a poll conducted in 2010, which measured support for the creation of a Greater Albanian state, 62% in Albania, 81% in Kosovo, and 51.9% in Northern Macedonia, were in favour of such a project (Balkan Insight, 2010). Unification, as opposed to an internationally brokered land swap which is internally criticised, is framed as a question of the bottom-up will of the people (EP, 2018; Kurti, 2018). But as much as being a nostalgic view on belonging, there is also a functionalist rationale behind it. In an argument mirroring the economic rationale imposed by the West, Vetëvendosje suggests that the integration of Kosovan and Albanian power-sectors would be beneficial for both countries (Vetëvendosje Manifesto, 2010). This is in line with the aforementioned statement made on deepening the economic integration between both states, which includes ‘the ongoing process of unifying our embassies, developing a fully integrated diplomacy and create a common foreign policy

platform' (European Western Balkans, 2019b). In essence, the politicisation of the unification, is cast in the light of the democratic demands of Albanians, ultimately suggesting that the people have not only a right to decide the fate of Kosovo but are likewise capable of economic rationality.

Comparing the myths

When referring to the myth of the European state, it is a narrative that is promulgated particularly in relation to the process of Kosovo's bid to eventual accession to the EU (EC, 2005; 2009; 2019). It is one of a stable state which has embraced the 'European Perspective' (EC, 2005; 2009) of democracy and market liberalism (the latter even enshrined in article 7.1 of Kosovo's constitution), in favour of its 'bloody' and 'barbaric' socialist past (Zupančič & Pejić, 2018: 34; Musliu & Orbie, 2014: 188). The empty signifier of 'sovereignty', in this instance, is not just shaped by the nodal points in the chain of equivalence, but also naturalised by the existence of a narrative of transition, from 'barbarism' to a fully integrated market economy, in the EU. There exists, in this transition, an antagonistic frontier, but one which is inextricably associated with the primordial chaos (Kølvraa, 2015) of the 1990's. The conflicts, which only ended due to the intervention of the international (Western) society, arose largely due to the lack of a natural cohesion between groups, as the totalitarian ideology of communism had subverted any such bonds.

After the fall of communism, the only way forward to stability and civilisation, is through the building of a liberal state, securely integrated into the common market of the EU. The total omission of any alternatives in the state-building reports from the EU, helps emphasise this point. The Eide-report even acknowledged that privatisation would fail to bring about any direct, short-term economical benefits, but was important as a symbolic issue (2004). There is no substitute privatisation in the process of re-building Kosovo. As the Eide-report argued (2004), where direct intervention proved unsuccessful in impeding interethnic violence, the international effort had to shift more towards the economic development stemming from the EU, with the effect of eventually '[bringing] Kosovo closer to European standards'. The antagonism is then between a socialist past, which looms with its promise of regression into primordial chaos, and a capitalist future, the latter being an important nodal point in the mythical horizon of a stable, European state and a place in the international society.

The antagonism in the second narrative is linked not necessarily to the socialism of Yugoslavia, as much as to the external forces constituting the false independence- or the lack of 'independence from independence' in Kurti's words- which exists in being blocked from pursuing the idea of an ethnically Albanian state. Sovereignty is, in one narrative, an identity precipitated by a collective, stable market economy, while it lies in the struggle for a popular Albanian state in the second. The mythical horizon of the unification myth promises not just an end to international, neo-liberal rule, but also a resolution to the question of Kosovan identity, in its affirmation of Albanian ethnicity. However, union with Albania, is cast both as a question of functionality (through integration of energy sectors; a common foreign policy to protect the interest of Albanians worldwide) as well as something directly produced by the antagonism of Belgrade. A sovereign Kosovo can only be truly sovereign in its ability to at once deny its own existence through reunion, as well as its ability to pursue international relations with supranational bodies such as the EU and NATO as a distinct political entity. This is where the true liminality becomes apparent: there is a decisive moment of existing 'ontologically in between all forms of being', and it is the promise of an ethno-state which welds together the chain of equivalence in this particular discourse.

The cultural-symbolic order which the EU establishes under the pretext of avoiding a diplomatic conflict with Serbia, includes in part the erasure of a central historical symbol, contained in the Albanian flag. On one hand, this Deleuzian deterritorialization creates a liminal subject, who is, in the original words of Victor Turner: 'tabula rasa, upon which knowledge is inscribed'. It is here that hegemony works through the mythical horizon, by promising the fulfilment the subject is bereft of, and thus ordering the chain of equivalence in a tempo-narrative order. Kosovo's history is one of ethnical violence, flamed by the failure of socialism to present a viable alternative to the primordial chaos. Emerging from the chaos, the 'Newborn Kosovo' has but one way forward, and that is towards the inclusionary European community.

On the other hand, the flag becomes overdetermined with the symbolism of foreign intervention. 'It is as if we were declaring independence from Albania, and not from Serbia' as Kurti puts it (2018). By way of managing every aspect of Kosovo's sovereignty, from the military presence of KFOR, to the institutions of UNMIK and the EU, the subject becomes so split between different narratives of state-building, that unification signifies not only a question of politico-economic rationale, but also one of de-colonisation. The completion of the identity can only succeed through the expulsion of the Other, and they are currently two. Thus, the identity reached through a possible unification with Albania, is not so much that of a Greater

Albania, as much as that of sovereignty afforded by the agency imbedded in the *process* of unification. Although the mythical horizon promises fulness, it is in fact the endeavour which constitutes the subject position.

We thus see through the prism of myth, how the undecidability of sovereignty goes beyond simple, material power relations, but is fundamentally wedded to the way in which we perceive the world. The entire struggle for discursive hegemony takes place constantly, and though we can only analyse the moments of fixation, the framework we have introduced allows for a more thorough use of the category of myth. Speculations on whether Kosovo will overcome their diplomatic differences with Serbia and eventually join the EU, or instead realise the nationalist dream of a Greater Albania, I will concede to other scholars. Instead, I argue that we cannot separate the understandings of Kosovo's sovereignty from its discursive construction.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to introduce a richer understanding of myth to the field of IR. This has done by primarily relating to two research questions: 1) How does myth structure discourse? and; 2) how does myth shape different logics of sovereignty in liminal states? In attempting to answer these questions, we started out with reviewing the current situation in Kosovo and contrasting that to the general debates of sovereignty and contested states (Krasner, 2001; Kurtulus, 2005; Caspersen & Stanfield, 2011; Kolstø, 2006). What we found, however, was that mainstream ideas of sovereignty and statehood, as either functional and absolutist or gradual and involving international recognition, failed to account for the unique subject position of Kosovo. Instead we turned to the idea of liminality as a way to explain the way that Kosovo is on the threshold of becoming a state but stuck in a form of ontological in-betweenness.

We then turned to the Essex school of discourse analysis, drawing particularly on the poststructural approach of Laclau and Mouffe (2001). We found meaning in the social world to be fundamentally unstable and based on articulations, which in turn forms chains of equivalence, the very foundation of discourse. However, an important, but seemingly underdeveloped concept in Laclau and Mouffe, and other poststructural scholars (Howarth, 2006; 2010; Howarth & Griggs, 2012), is the notion of fantasmatic logic. This is where the idea of myth becomes conceptually important to our argument.

Myth works through fantasmatic logic to explain why certain discourses gain traction over others. There is a distinct temporal logic to them, as they work on the suspension created between past and future. It is also from here we conceived our methodological categories of *primordial chaos*, *state of liminality* and *mythical horizon*. In our argument, we see myth as a narrative, wherein the subjects are constituted as striving from a form of primordial chaos towards a mythical horizon, carrying the promise of resolving the antagonism of their current liminal state.

With this theoretical framework, we analysed two different myths regarding Kosovan sovereignty and state-building: the myth of the European state and the unification myth. In the first, we found that the Yugoslav war and Kosovo's socialist past clashed with the idea of a liberal and stable democratic Europe. However, the failure to resolve the outstanding issue of Kosovan recognition, and the remnants of socialism constitutes a form of liminality, upon which the promise of Europeaness through market liberalisation works as a horizon for which to strive. Conversely, the ethnic myth of unification, presents another meaning behind the notion of sovereignty. Here, the constitution of the liminal subject lies in the antagonism of the presence of an Other, blocking Kosovo from joining their Albanian brethren. Historically, the power struggle in the region has meant that there has always been an outside presence which Kosovans identify in relation to. Kurti's words of how he 're-become Albanian' when faced with Serbian aggression, captures the logic of the argument perfectly.

What present themselves through this analysis, are two divergent understandings of 'sovereignty'. On one hand, it is articulated as being a liberal and democratic, and distinctly European, idea; something attained by the privatisation of business and embodied in visa liberalisation. Kosovo becomes sovereign by becoming truly European. On the other hand, it is the very presence of the international community in Kosovo, which blocks their identity formation. The lack of independence from independence is symbolised by their de-historicised flag and their constitutional inability to unify with another country. Their past thus becomes an antagonism, as the EU demands that they become Kosovan without being Albanian. The mythical unification would resolve this antagonism, not necessarily by the realising of a new state, but through the agency involved in the process.

How then does this answer the overarching research question? By examining discourses surrounding Kosovan sovereignty, we have applied and developed a distinct framework for analysing political myths. It could be argued that this paper has been moving in the periphery of what classically constitutes the field of IR, by focusing on a rather local case. However, there are two points to my counter-argument. Firstly, IR generally tends to focus on the

international system, and/or the actors therein. However, the very point of poststructural discourse analysis is to move that focus from the actors themselves, and unto the discourses which shapes them. If we accept that claim that we cannot make a conventional structure-agency distinction, due to the constitutive but fleeting nature of discourse, these discourses becomes valid objects of analysis. Secondly, and this would be a topic worth investigating further in future research, the fact that we perceive concepts like ‘sovereignty’ as highly contextual, means that we in a sense reject universality. This in turn means that we must localise ourselves on certain levels to study the impact of political myths. The more abstract the level of analysis is, the higher the number of competing discourses, which would mean a much wider scope than could realistically be encompassed in this paper.

For future research, one could move in several directions. The pertinence of political myths is particularly salient in *exempli gratia* Viktor Órban’s Hungary where the Christian past of the nation is being invoked in the construction of boundaries. However, it must be noted that of true interest, and for the sake of challenging the arguments made in this paper, would be a non-European example. For by invoking scholars of the poststructuralist field from a certain time and place, we must also acknowledge that we have excluded other forms of knowledge from other places in the world.

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