Abstract
This paper presents the hypothesis that a second order discourse establishes itself and imposes a constructed reality in which Peace is regarded as impossible. This hypothesis is presented through an analysis of the genetic constitution of the discourses of Myth and History, from which the hybrid discourse emerges. It will be argued that:

1. The Discourse of Myth is characterized by:
   A. Thematic Necessity constituting its formal structure: mythological themes follow necessary fixed patterns.
   B. Interpretative Possibility constituting its material content: allowing variability in retellings, within fixed thematic structures.

2. The Discourse of History is characterized by:
   A. Evidence-Based Facts constituting its formal structure: distinguishing history from fiction.
   B. Contingent Events constituting its material content: events regarded as historically significant.

The emergence of the myth of the impossibility of Peace is the result of a subtle hybridization of the two first order discourses whereby a new Mytho-Historical discourse emerges. The hybrid discourse is characterized by the Thematic Necessity of Myth as its formal structure, and Contingent Events of History as its material content. In Mytho-Historical discourse, contingent events are attributed with the force of necessity. Furthermore, in the hybridization process the requirement of Evidence-Based Facts (Historical Discourse) and Interpretative Possibility (Mythology) are discarded.

The paper will conclude with examples of historically contingent facts, which have been appropriated by Mytho-Historical discourse and established as the foundations of the myth of the impossibility of peace.

Key Words: Myth, History, Discourse, Peace
Introduction

In his article entitled “Why do horrific pictures from conflict zones not stop wars?”, journalist and broadcaster, Paul Mason (2014), suggests a number of reasons why “despite the horrific content of the visual imagery of war, which bombards us daily, people still see war as an option and will sanction it even when it is put up to the test of democracy”\(^1\).

When war journalism started nearly a century ago, it was thought that by publishing pictures of the horrors of the frontlines, the public would start seeing through the popular narratives of glory, patriotism, duty and courage which support war initiatives. Ending war by showing its true face, was regarded as the motive and the justification for sending vulnerable unarmed journalist photographers onto the frontline.

Mason suggests three reasons why the hoped for outcome of war journalism has failed to materialize. Firstly, he argues, we have become desensitized by these images which have now lost their power to shock or move us. Secondly, even when they do shock, such images can be used to provoke people to seek revenge rather than peace. Finally, the same bombardment of images coming from a proliferation of sources with different and often conflicting agendas, has resulted in the spread of skepticism among a public which “has come to see all graphic imagery of war as potentially fake, manipulated or propagandist.” By becoming more media savvy, the public now acts as willing or even expectant consumers, with the ability to select or disregard news and images according to how their contents fit with their beliefs, preferences or expectations.

The main objective of this paper is to add a further level of explanation to Mason’s compelling questioning regarding the affectivity and justification of war journalism. Basing on a structural analysis of the two interrelated discourses of Mythology and History, it will be argued that a subtle hybridization of these two discourses gives rise to a hybrid Mytho–Historical discourse whose structure and content combine in ways that support the emergence of myths such as that of the inevitability of war.

It is hoped that by investigating and highlighting how such myths are constituted and how they operate, we may be better equipped with the tools required to understand and expose them. Thus while remaining informed of unfolding significant historic often tragic events, we will also be aware that the reporting of these events can achieve a mythic force which holds us in its grip, and through which the hope of peace has come to be regarded as not only futile, but also dangerous. Awareness of how such myths emerge and operate may place us in a better position to be able to loosen their grip, and to be able to project and strive for those possible peaceful futures which seem to have been pushed beyond the horizon of our imagination.

Discourses and the complexity of Language

In his seminal work, *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001) argues against the simplistic view that language consists mainly of factual statements and that its use is predominantly to point out and name objects or facts. Wittgenstein focuses on the various functions of language to show that language is better conceived of as a complex multitude of diverse, overlapping and related discourses. Language users continuously employ and engage in different types of discourses in their social relations and their attempts to negotiate the different communicative demands, with varying degrees of success.

In order to highlight this complexity of language and the multi-layered discourses it enables and employs, Wittgenstein uses a number of analogies, possibly the best known of which, being those of language games and of the instrument panel in a locomotive cabin.

By drawing an analogy between language and games Wittgenstein argues that the application of different sets of rules and modes of engagement, allows us to use language to engage in different types of discourses, in the same way that modifications in sets of rules give us the possibility to play different board games while still using the same board and pieces. In the same way that the same ball can be used to play a variety of ball games, the same language system is used to engage in discourses whose objectives can vary from merely pointing out objects, to discussing abstract concepts and ideas, or even to express or elicit emotions to change peoples’ moods or motivate them to action. Shifts in the rules of engagement allow for the possibility of the same language systems to be employed in different “language-games”. Wittgenstein emphasizes that there are countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “words”, “sentences”. This multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (2001, p. 10e).

Wittgenstein mentions numerous examples of possible “language-games” such as “reporting an event”, “making up a story”, “making a joke”, “giving orders, and obeying them”, amongst others.

Each of these language-games or types of discourses, such as historical discourse, religious discourse and scientific discourse, functions in accordance to specific rule variants which may not always be explicitly stated or obvious. When engaging in historical discourse, for example, it is expected that statements are factual and possibly backed by some recorded or witnessed evidence. In the case of religious discourse, the requirement for evidence takes on a modified meaning from that of historical discourse. By contrast, in religious discourse modes of verification such as an appeal to divine revelation or reference to scripture may be accepted as adequate.

Through the language-game analogy Wittgenstein thus draws our attention both to the multi-dimensionality of language as well as to its dynamic state of change and development.
However, while the game analogy works well in drawing our attention to the fluidity, open-endedness and complexity of language, it may also give the impression that like conventional games, language-games serve merely for entertainment or playful purposes.

To counter this impression Wittgenstein emphasizes that the game analogy holds for all discourses equally, and it is not intended to draw distinctions between serious or authentic discourses and less serious or playful discourses. At the level of language, the distinction between “the real world” and the “play world” does not apply. Each of these discourses have their specialized function and should be regarded as multiple layers or different facets, each contributing to the complexity and wealth of the entire or whole language-game, which Wittgenstein equates to a “form of life.”

This complexity and complementarity of the different discourses is further highlighted in Wittgenstein’s analogy of the locomotive’s cabin.

It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro. (2001, p. 6e)

Just as the effectiveness of the locomotive depends on all the specialized functions of each lever mechanism, (cranks, switches, pumps, etc.), language also depends on the different functions of all the different sub-games, or discourses which make it up. Each specific discourse adds to the overall efficiency, range and possibility of the language, which it both constitutes and enables. However, one must note that the similarity of the surface features of these handles hides very different underlying mechanisms. Similarly, different discourses, though “looking more or less alike” may also hide different constitutive features and functions. A lack of awareness of such differences by language users may be as problematic and possibly dangerous as a lack of familiarity with a locomotive’s levers, by its driver. Thus Wittgenstein’s locomotive metaphor highlights the importance of awareness of the internal mechanisms and functions of the discourses, which language users may be engaged in. It also hints at the dangers of a lack of such awareness.

Wittgenstein’s insights into the complexity and functions of discourses will now be employed to carry out a structural analysis of the two discourses of History and Myth. Following this analysis, I will turn to Roland Barthes’ (1973) semiological analysis of the structure of first order and second order signs to investigate the process and consequences of the hybridization of these two discourses.

**Structure and Content analysis of the discourses of Myth and the of History**

The relation between the two discourses of myth and history are a prime example of what Wittgenstein would call ‘family resemblances’ (*Familienähnlichkeit*) to explain how discourses both resemble and also differ from one another.
The discourses of myth and history are not, never were, and will probably never be completely distinct. Like two intertwining spirals, they continually merge, overlap and separate, drawing nourishment both from their common traits as well as from the differences in their structures and content.

Thus the hybridization of myth and history proposed in this paper is not suggested as a one-off event which took place at a particular point in time. Rather, what is suggested here is that their cross-fertilisation is an ongoing perpetual dynamic.

**The Structure of myth - Thematic Necessity**

Mythological discourse, whether classical or contemporary, is characterized by the re-telling of narratives drawn from an interconnected collection of tales, which are mostly familiar to the audience. Because the narrative content of mythology does not claim strict factual correspondence to evidenced historical events, each re-telling of these tales allows space for changes and modifications to be introduced to the narrative. These changes allow for different interpretations so that the same themes, or re-worked familiar narratives, will ‘reveal’ truths, meanings, or explanations, which are in tune with the particular contextual requirements of the particular occasions of their re-telling (Calasso, 1994; Stiegler, 1994; Vernant, 1988). While the narrative content of a myth may vary, the theme around which it is woven remains unchanged, thus giving the retelling a familiarity which allows both recognition and acceptance of the tale, as well as the possibility of new interpretations and meaning.

The theme of the abduction of prize women would be an example of one such thematic structure which functions as a narrative scaffold which can be assembled and dismantled repeatedly to be re-used in different occasions and locations and to serve different purposes. Using the familiarity of the theme as a supporting scaffold, the mythologist or story teller can work around the tale, reshaping its contours and skillfully reconstructing its details, even giving it new reach and new meanings without weakening or compromising its foundational structure.

Numerous common themes such as that of the survival and return of the abandoned child, emerge repeatedly in classical mythology and also remain clearly operative in our own popular narratives.

The iteration of these identifiable themes allows the audience to engage while also giving them the confidence to accept the newly introduced twists and adaptations. The familiarity of themes provides the footholds or rhythm which entices the audience to be drawn into the narrative space with enough confidence to engage with, and embrace novel developments. The continued relevance and development of mythological re-tellings, therefore depends on the both the thematic necessity and also the re-interpretation of narrative content, which the rigidity of this structure enables.

**The Content of Myth – Interpretative Possibility**

While the structure of mythological discourse is characterized by thematic necessity, its narrative content allows for interpretative possibility. Thus the structure and content of mythological discourse work together to produce that minimal difference required for the continued emergence of meaning.
But Zeus chose the copy; he wanted that minimal difference which is enough to overturn order and generate the new, generate meaning … All Zeus’ other adventures, all Hera’s other vendettas, would be nothing more than further heaves on the same wheel of necessity which Hera set rolling to punish the woman most like herself.” (Calasso, R. 1994, p. 24)

One example of interpretative possibility is provided by the well-known classical myth of Pandora’s box. Pandora releases the curses from her jar, but Hope (Elpis) remains trapped inside. This is part of the rigid thematic necessity of the myth, which draws on the familiar thematic structure of gift exchange running through this myth (Hesiod, 1988; Vernant, 1988). In contrast to the strict thematic necessity, the narrative content related to hope, allows for the myth’s wealth of interpretative possibility (Verdenius, 1971). Why does hope remain in the jar? Is it locked away from the reach of humans, or is it kept in store for them? Is it left in the jar to make human life possible despite its futility?

In fact, the story of Pandora is best known for its presentation of Hope (Elpis), the precise meaning of which has puzzled commentators from antiquity. (Bartlett, R. C. 2006, p. 185)

Examples of the interpretative possibility of mythological discourse abound. Was Helen seduced or abducted? Was Prometheus the savior of mankind, or was he its curse?

The structure and content of mythological discourse is thus characterized by thematic necessity and interpretative possibility respectively.

The Discourse of History – The Parting of the Ways

For the Western tradition, History and Mythology part ways around the 5th century BC with the writings of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. Less than two centuries before Herodotus, Hesiod (c.700BC) would start his myths by invoking the muses, the daughters of memory (Hesiod, 1988). In direct contrast, Herodotus launches a new genre of discourse by proclaiming his authority on his accounts and insists on the factual nature of their contents.

This is the Showing forth of the Inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, to the end that neither the deeds of men may be forgotten by lapse of time, nor the works great and marvelous, which have been produced some by Hellenes and some by Barbarians, may lose their renown; and especially that the causes may be remembered for which these waged war with one another. (Herodotus. 1954, p. 1)

Hesiod and Herodotus inhabit different regions of an era in which the world-view shifted from the mythological to the philosophical (Vernant, 1988). Hesiod seeks inspiration from a source which is beyond his own time and memory. He is the singer of myths whose source lies beyond the knowledge and memory of mortals.
In stark contrast, Herodotus’ opening declaration stamps his authority. The sources of his narrative are his own searches and efforts, and his stated objective is the conquest of memory over forgetfulness. The sources of these narratives will no longer be lost in myth. History starts by identifying and proclaiming its sources and explicitly dissociating itself from the hidden sources of myth.

Modeled on Herodotus’ proclamation, historical discourse consists in the recording of historically significant events, with the aim that these events become part of cultural memory. This discourse adds another tool to the linguistic toolbox, its function being to supplement living memory by producing evidence-based records of historically significant events. This requirement for recorded evidence gives the discourse of history its distinctive structure.

While evidence-based facts form the underlying structure of historical discourse, the content which fills this structure and completes the narrative is made up of contingent events of historical significance. The contingency of these events, the possibility that things could also have happened otherwise, is essential for their historical significance. What may be of historical significance is not the fact that this or that particular monarch or leader died. That humans, no matter how important they may be must die, is a necessary fact. But what may give this necessity its historical significance may be the contingent circumstances surrounding that particular death. The fact that a king dies, has no historical significance in itself, all humans die, kings included. A king’s death in itself, teaches us nothing, but how he died, (was he poisoned, did he die peacefully in old age), may give it historical significance. History is about important events that happened, which may not have happened, or may have happened otherwise.

The condition or requirement of evidence-based facts distinguishes history from mythological discourse. This rule constitutes the formal structure of historical discourse. The narrative content which fills this structure and completes historical discourse is made up of contingent historical events.

The structures and content of myth and history can be presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mythology</th>
<th>Formal Structure</th>
<th>Material Narrative Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Evidence-Based Facts</td>
<td>Contingent Historical Events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Thematic Necessity | Interpretative Possibility |

The Transformation of Discourse

Having analyzed the distinct formal structures and narrative contents of myth and history, it is now possible to show how elements of the two discourses can merge to form a hybridized discourse. The following presentation of this process of hybridization draws heavily on Barthes’ analysis of the semiological process by which linguistic signs, are transformed into persuasive ‘myths’. By focusing on

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2 Discussions regarding the possibility of objectivity in recording history (historical epistemology) and the nature of the factuality of events themselves (historical ontology), though interesting and relevant, are beyond the scope of this paper. The relevant points being highlighted here are how history is generally understood and the accepted rules with which we engage in this discourse.
Barthes’ seminal essay “Myth Today” (1973), I will argue that the proposed hybridization of myth and history runs parallel to the semiological transformation described by Barthes.

In “Myth Today”, Barthes describes myth a special type of speech which emerges through a parasitic hijacking of first order linguistic signs. A first order sign may be anything that can be endowed with meaning, “the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.” (1973, p. 123). At the first order level, signs form the association of a signifier with a signified concept. This association is also dependent on the context and the contingent factualities within which it is made.

In the process of myth formation, first order signs are emptied of all contingent reference and then used to build new associations between them and ahistorical (timeless) concepts. In this way myths both construct and present a new reality in which these contingent facts are endowed with unquestionable necessity. Since there is no outward change in the sign itself, the transformation in its level of signification from one of contingent associations to one of necessary impositions, is subtle and unobserved:

“In passing from history to nature myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all the dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible…” (Barthes, R. 1973, p. 156)

To follow an example used by Barthes, an object such as a red rose can act as a signifier, which when associated with the concept ‘passion’, can take on the function of a linguistic sign, one which in this case Barthes calls ‘passionified roses’. At the start of this process of first order signification, the signifier, the rose, is empty of meaning. The rose itself is arbitrary in its significance – it could mean anything or nothing – but by its association with a signified concept (passion or love), the sign emerges as filled with meaning. Meaning (the content of a sign), therefore emerges from the association of an arbitrary (empty) signifier and a concept. But this emergence of meaning, as well as the success of its use is also dependent on the particular context in which it is embedded:

“The meaning (of the first order language sign: the word or picture) is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, idea, decisions.” (Barthes, R. 1973, p. 127)

The success of the ‘passionification’ of the roses depends on contingent facts such as, to take just one example, the way they are presented or offered. It is not difficult to envisage how different shades or nuances of the same event of an offer of roses, could easily change the sign from one of passion into one of ridicule or insult. Even when the context is right, there is always room for multiple levels of interpretation of the same linguistic sign.
By contrast, in the second order of signification, through the process of shifting the sign to the force of myth, this openness or possibility is drained out and the sign is associated with an ahistorical concept. This robs the myth of any space for interpretation or nuance:

“When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates…” (1973, p. 127)

At this level the roses, irrespective of context or history, must necessarily signify passion. Passion is no longer signified by the roses, an association requiring history and context, but rather, at this second order level, passion becomes the very nature of roses. The association between the signifier and the signified thus loses its arbitrariness and becomes a naturalized connection. “We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature.” (1973, p. 140). In contrast to the arbitrariness of first order signification, myth “makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.” (1973, p. 126). It does not only point out a fact, but makes that fact a necessary fact. All gifted red roses are naturally, and must necessarily be, ‘passionified’.

The hybridization of Myth and History

The insights on the effects and consequences of semiological processes can now be used as a model to analyse the parallel process at the discourse level, whereby the first order discourses of history and myth merge into the suggested second order mytho-historic discourse.

In his famous analysis of the picture of “the negro saluting the French flag”, Barthes (1973) holds that the shift to the second level of signification drains the picture of its historical content and transforms or refills the emptied sign with a natural and universal connection between the signifier, (the image content of the picture), and the signified concept (loyalty to the French Flag).

If we shift the same analysis from the semiological to the discourse level, we find that the picture would pertain to historical discourse since it portrays an evidence-based fact of a (potentially) historical significant event, namely that black French military members saluted the French flag. It therefore fulfills both the structural requirement (factual evidence) and the content requirement (historically significant event) that together make up historical discourse.

It is clear from Barthes’ analysis that it is precisely the historic contingency of the event, (the content of historic discourse), that is being drained out of this picture. In sharp contrast, the structure of historical discourse, the requirement for evidenced facts remains untouched.

As a result of this draining of its historical contingency, the ‘historical’ picture acquires its mythical power by taking on aspects of mythological discourse – an appeal to thematic universality – while holding on to the force attributed to it by its evidence base. To be precise, the contingent nature of historical content is attributed with the thematic necessity which characterizes the structure myth.
As a result of this exchange, the evidenced fact of this the historic picture, is no longer evidence merely that at least one black military member was pictured saluting the French flag, but becomes evidence to a newly established necessary fact, backed by solid historical evidence, that all French subjects, irrespective or their ethnicity or background, universally salute the French flag.

This process can be presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; order discourse</th>
<th>Formal Structure</th>
<th>Material Narrative Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mythology</td>
<td>Thematic Necessity</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resultant hybrid discourse emerges from a selective cross-fertilization of formal structures and material narrative contents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; order hybrid</th>
<th>Formal Structure</th>
<th>Material Narrative Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mytho-Historic Hybrid Discourse</td>
<td>Thematic Necessity (From Mythology)</td>
<td>Contingent Historic Events (From History)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The shift from history to myth is therefore, only partial. The resulting discourse is not full blooded myth, but a hybrid discourse which maintains genetic elements of both parent discourses. While the structural constitution of the hybrid discourse remains that of myth (thematic necessity), the nature of its content is taken from history (contingent historic events).

It is also essential that through this process of hybridization some essential elements of the first order discourses are not carried forward but discarded. The formal structural constitution of historical discourse – the requirement for evidence-based fact – does not pass on into the genetic structure of the hybrid, as there is in fact no evidence that all black military personnel do salute the French flag. The narrative content of myth, that is, the interpretative possibility is also discarded.

As a result of the discarding of the requirement of evidence-based facts and the possibility of interpretation, the picture thus takes on the mythic power of establishing thematic necessity. Drawing on its new power, it now states categorically that all black French soldiers salute the French flag, and that this is a natural fact not a historic one.

The thematic necessity drawn from the structural form of myth replaces the contingent nature of the event, and gives the resulting myth its universal and unquestionable quality.

**Conclusion**

How does this discourse function in the case of the emergence of the myth of impossibility of peace?

The myth has now been shown to arise from a two-step process whereby, first it establishes a factual sign: “look this is the French empire”; and secondly, it imposes
this fact as a self-evident, necessary fact: “here is undeniable evidence that all it subjects respect and are loyal to the empire.”

At the discourse level the myth of the inevitability of war is established through the following parallel steps:

Step 1. It takes hold of a first order sign, for example, a picture of the shelling of the city of Kobani, or a convoy of armed vehicles advancing through the desert. At this level, the sign says, “look this is an explosion which took place during the shelling of Kobani on the 18th of October 2014.” This sign is then emptied of these contingent contents of the event, thus preparing it to be used as raw material for a new association.

Step 2. The emptied sign is filled with a new signified concept, in this case not a particular explosion but the fact of war itself. Through this new association the sign says and shows more than just a contingent event of an explosion during a shelling campaign. By taking on the thematic necessity of myth, the sign now says, “look this is war, here is factual evidence of war, it is a necessary fact which cannot be denied.”

Step 3. The emergence of the myth, through sustained production of signs of war takes on the force of a self-evident necessary fact. It now does not only point out the fact that this is war, but it also imposes this fact on nature (Barthes, 1973). “Can’t you see it? How can you deny that war is a permanent necessary condition? Here is undeniable evidence of this fact”.

The hybrid constitution of the mytho-historic discourse gives it the constituent qualities required for it to be able to force us to acknowledge the logical necessity of this newly established reality.

“Look peace is shattered. It is impossible to establish, and to believe in peace is to invite the terrors which may result from naive complacency. Do you still want to maintain that there is a hope for peace? Is this what you want to invite upon us?”

It thus turns out that the language and pictures of war journalism in fact act as the signifiers in the construction of the myth of the inevitability of war and the impossibility of peace.

My argument is not a blanket indictment of war photography or war journalism. It is clear that one type of signifier does not act alone in this process, but must operate within a complex realm of signifiers which act together to form a cultural mindset which projects and nourishes the myth.

But awareness of how these myths are constituted and how they operate may allow us to be better equipped to understand and expose them. Finally, therefore, the argument presented in this paper is a call for awareness that, while we do well to remain informed of unfolding historically significant events, we should also be ever vigilant of the mythic force that narratives and images of war may exert upon us.
References


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