Political myth as a legitimation strategy

The case of the golden age myth in the discourses of the Third Way

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Abstract

Golden age myths as an answer to political crises are a recurrent phenomenon, as recent populist versions such as 'Make America great again' in Donald Tumps 2016 campaign and 'Let's take back control' in the pro-Brexit campaign demonstrate. This article aims to demonstrate how the idea of a past golden age as the answer to a crisis of society was previously deeply embedded into the latest attempt to reform social democratic thinking: At the turn of the 20th century, the Third-Way social democrats in Germany and New Labour in Britain employed a golden age myth to define the aims of Third-Way politics. Analysing a corpus of texts from the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats (SPD) between 1990 and 2005, this article demonstrates how global ideological trends are locally legitimized differently through the use of local political myths. The construction of a golden age myth as a common element in the German and British Third-way discourses are compared. In doing so, the article presents a previously underutilised approach to macro-structures of political legitimation developed in German politico-linguistics (Klein, Josef 2000). The major contribution to the field of political discourse analysis lies in the discussion of mythopoesis as one legitimatory strategy, as well as in the analysis of the local adaptation of the golden age myth, which draws on Laclau's discourse theory and its idea of empty signifiers

Keywords

Introduction

Allusions to a golden age in politics have become commonplace. In slogans such as 'Make America great again' in Donald Tumps 2016 campaign and 'Let's take back control' in the pro-Brexit campaign, a previous halcyonic mythical state of the countries is assumed, which they supposedly need to return to in order to overcome the current problems. The late Zygmunt Bauman even claimed to diagnose a global epidemic of nostalgia as a result of losing all utopian hope, and called such a state 'retrotopia' (Bauman 2017).

This article aims to demonstrate how the idea of a past golden age as an answer to a perceived crises of society can already be found in the social democratic reform discourses of the Third-Way in Germany and the UK between 1994 and 2005. Analysing a corpus of party-ideological pamphlets, election manifestos and leader's speeches, I will discuss the legitimatory function of the myth and demonstrate its adaptation to the local political cultures of Germany and the UK. In doing so, I will present a previously underutilised approach to macro-structures of political legitimation developed in German politico-linguistics (Klein, Josef 2000) in which the research project is based. The major contribution to the field of political discourse analysis lies in the discussion of mythopoesis as legitimatory strategy as well as in the analysis of the local adaptation of the golden age myth, which draws on Laclau's discourse theory and its idea of empty signifiers (Laclau 1990, 2007, 2014; Torfing 1999; Howarth 2000).

The article begins with a section discussing its methodology, corpus and aims, followed by a theoretical discussion of the notion of macrostructures of political legitimation and the role of political myth in them. Following that, the article describes the discourse-historical context of the case study. Its findings are then presented and analysed in three steps: firstly, a brief summary of the argumentative marcro-structures of the discourses of the Third Way in the analysed corpus is presented in order to prepare the discussion of the role of the golden-age myth within this macro structure. A further section will present and analyse evidence for the golden age myth in the corpus. Finally, the article will demonstrate how the political symbol terms 'One Nation' and 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' are employed as empty signifiers in the construction of national golden age myths in the Third Way discourses in Germany and the UK in order to construe localised golden ages.

Methodology, corpus and aims

The research project 'Text and Context in the Discourses of the Third Way in Germany and the United Kingdom', on the results of which this article is drawn, aims to compare the linguistic features of the Third Way discourses in Germany and the UK in order to establish how the recontextualisation of this discourse into different polities changes those features. The research was conducted on a corpus of approximately 285,000 words, consisting of three major parts.

Firstly, the corpus contains book length publications which explicitly discuss and present changes in the party-political ideologies of social democratic parties: Giddens' (1998) *The Third Way*, Mandelson and Liddle's (1996) *The Blair Revolution* and Hombach's *Aufbruch* (1998, 2000). Party political ideologies are here not understood as fixed entities, but as 'contingent, changing traditions that people produce through their utterances and actions' (Bevir 2000, 280). Thus, the discourse present in these publications can be described as ideological reasoning.

Giddens was the most prominent proponent of *The Third Way*, and grounded it in academic sociological discourse. His publication is generally seen as *the* programmatic statement in support of

a *Third Way* (Bastow and Martin 2003; Finlayson 2003), and his ideas evidently influenced New Labour as they were the basis of seminars held by the Labour Party leadership which discussed and formulated policies following from the modernised approach to social democracy (Seldon 2005, 371). A less academic and more party-political discourse can be found in Mandelson and Liddle (1996) and Hombach (Hombach 1998). The work of all three authors, when considered together, affords a differentiated analysis of the discourse of party-ideological change, since they saw themselves and were seen by friends and opponents as important modernising figures within European social democracy.

Party conference speeches by the party leaders Blair, Schröder and Lafontaine form the second part of the corpus. In their speeches they presented and legitimised the core elements of the party's ideology. As the focus of the project was the linguistic construction and communication of the ideological repositioning of New Labour and 'Die Neue Mitte', speeches of the focal periods of that discourse were selected: one historical focal period in the modernisation discourse in the British Labour Party can be found between 1994 and 1997, when the party-political discourse of the Labour party changed dramatically under the leadership of Tony Blair. For the German Social Democrats (SPD), however, two focal periods must be taken into account: the modernising wing of the SPD started to become highly influential before the election in 1998, however, without achieving ideological hegemony. In their 1997 and 1998 speeches, Lafontaine and Schröder represent competing positions within the party. Only after Lafontaine stepped down did the Third Way agenda finally become hegemonic within the party, a process that culminated in the discourse on the 'Agenda 2010' in the second focal period in 2003–2004.

Election manifestos and election pamphlets represent the party to the electorate and therefore form the third part of the corpus. This third part covered a longer period (1987–2002) in order to allow a diachronic comparison of the language of New Labour and 'Die Neue Mitte' with that of its predecessors. The manifestos of the German CDU from 1998 and the British Conservatives in 1997 were included as a basis for a comparison of linguistic features of the two main political competitors in the general elections of those years.

The whole corpus was analysed manually. To begin with, an analysis of key topics of the discourse was undertaken, followed by a detailed analysis of genre features, as well as of legitimation strategies in lexis, argumentation and metaphor. During the analysis, any unexpected peculiarities of certain texts were noted and their existence in other parts of the corpus subsequently explored. An oscillating movement between theoretical reading and empirical analysis aimed to enlighten the complex functions of the linguistic elements under analysis.

The present paper aims to explore and discuss one particular finding from this project: the striking amount of re-derivations such as 'renewal', 'rebuilding' and 'reinvention' in both Giddens (1998) and Mandelson and Liddle (1996), which I have interpreted as elements of a 'golden age myth'.

Political legitimation and the role of mythopoesis

(1) Argumentative macrostructures of political discourse

Max Weber's (1947) idea that systems of authority aim to establish legitimacy is a longstanding axiom in sociology and discourse studies (Berger and Luckmann 1991; Chilton and Schäffner 1997; van Leeuwen 2007). Chilton and Schäffner (1997) define legitimisation and delegitimisation as one of the most basic strategies of political discourse: political actors have to defend themselves and their past, present and future actions. A core element of any analysis of political discourse is thus the analysis of argumentation (Krzyżanowski 2010, 83–85; Fairclough, Norman and Fairclough, Isabela 2012), as

argumentation is a method to transform a contested proposition into a socially accepted proposition via another socially accepted proposition (Klein, Wolfgang 1980, 19)

The basis of most discourse-analytical approaches to argumentation is Toulmin's model of argumentation (Toulmin 1958): Statements raise validity claims which need to be supported by warrants – rules which allow establishing the conclusion from the data. Although Toulmin's model is helpful for the analysis of argumentative texts, public discourse is often less structured. Elements of argument such as the warrants are often left implicit or expressed as part of a metaphor.

Following modern argumentation theories (Perelman et al. 1969; van Eemeren and Grootendorst [1992] 2016; Kopperschmidt 1989, 1989), discourse analysts of various schools have focused on the implicit warrants called 'topoi' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wengeler 2003; Krzyżanowski 2010; Kuck and Römer 2012). Kopperschmidt (1989), following Aristotle, distinguishes between formal and material topoi: formal topoi are general abstract warrants, and independent of the content of an argument. In contrast, material topoi are specific to a field of discourse and therefore at a lower level of abstraction than formal topoi – a good example is the warrant in Toulmin's original example ('A man born in Bermuda will be a British subject'). Discourse historical approaches are mainly interested in material topoi as patterns of thought or patterns of discourse, and compare the changes in these patterns over time.

Klein (2000) demonstrates that the pragmatics of political argumentation in different topics and different genres of political communication is integrated into reoccurring complex schemata, independent of genre and topic. These complex schemata, patterns of discourse formation in the sense of Reisigl (2014), are higher level argumentative structures which subsume the material topoi.

In Klein's view, the macro structures of political legitimation can be deduced from the fact that all political discourse calls for action and support this call with reference to an evaluation of the situation, a definition of aims and a reference to values of the political group or society as such. This analysis of the argumentative macro structures of political discourse is based on Austin's (1956) 'machinery of acting', which aims to capture the process of individual action planning and justification. This model of human activity describes the process of decision-making by analyzing failed actions and of excuses we make for them. Klein (2000, 634) argues that Austin's stages of acting are the basis of rational actions and therefore argumentative stages in practical reasoning, which must be introduced to understand complex political arguments: a call for political action is normally based on political aims – here called the *purposive topos[1]*. This must be supported by reference to the situation via the *data topos,* and evaluated on the basis of the *topos of values and principles*.

Figure 1 shows the complex topological patterns Klein (2000, 638), which are deduced from Austin's stages of acting and demonstrated to be an accurate representation of his corpus of political discourse in Germany.
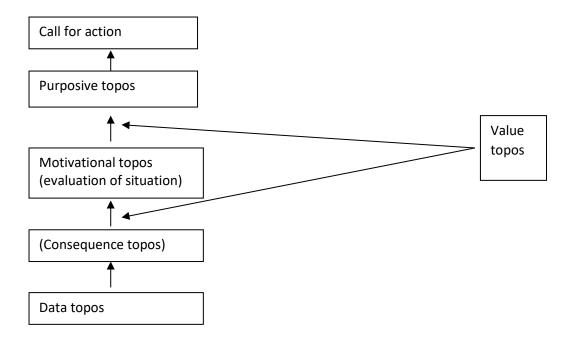
Call for action

↑

Purposive topos

↑

Motivational topos
(evaluation of situation)

↑

(Consequence topos)

↑

Data topos

Value topos

Figure 1: Macro topoi in political discourse, adapted and translated from (Klein, Josef 2000, 638)

In a more recent publication, Kuck and Römer (2012) convincingly establish that this macro-structure can also be found in a large corpus of newspaper articles representing the media discourse on the 'financial crisis' of 2008/2009. They are therefore useful for in-depth argumentation oriented study of discourse that 'aims to reveal how different elements of discourse are endowed with pragmatic meaning and thus place within different arguments according to the ‚more-or-less strategic aims set up by the speakers/authors of the text' (Krzyżanowski 2010, 83).

(2) The role of mythopoesis in political legitimation

So far, I have outlined a theory of legitimation in political discourse as mainly consisting of argumentative schemes. However, political discourse has more functions than argumentative (de)legitimization, it also construes reality and projects individual and social identities as a basis for legitimacy. Furthermore, argumentation is only one discursive mode: Genres of political discourse are often a mix of the discourse modes of narrative, description and argumentation. (Fairclough, Norman 2003, 68; Bax 2011, 54–58).

Both Flood (2002) and van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) make the case for mythopoesis as a narrative strategy of legitimation. A particular type of mythopoietic legitimization in political discourse is political myth. Both Tudor (1972) and Flood (2002) see political myth as deeply engrained in all forms of ideological and political discourse and suggest the narrative mode as the central defining aspect of political myths. Flood (2002) suggests that myths are a narrative accepted as 'valid in its essentials by the group' (Flood 2002, 44) and can be understood as 'ideologically marked narratives' which are 'associated with the values, assumptions and goals of a specific ideology or identifiable family of ideologies' (Flood 2002, 42) .

The fact that ideological reasoning and political myth are interlinked has been pointed out by many authors. Tudor (1972, 126), argues that in most societies 'myths are incorporated into a general ideology composed of several mutual supporting practical points of view'. This is supported by McGuire (1987, 20), who understands myth and ideology as being structurally different, but as being functionally equivalent. Whereas an ideology is a belief system consisting of 'quasi-logical and quasi

scientific' propositions based on what is believed to be evidence, myths tell stories 'about what exists and why, and these stories are presented as both divinely revealed or inspired and recounting inevitable, superhuman causes.'

(3) Political myths as empty signifiers

A final theoretical step is necessary to prepare the following analysis. One of the main aims of this paper is to describe the recontextualisation of the British Third-Way discourse into the German political culture. The question is therefore, how the golden age myth has been adapted locally. I will demonstrate later, how the local adaptation of the 'golden age' – in the UK as the original unified nation or 'one nation', in Germany as 'soziale Marktwirtschaft' (social market economy) – is used as an empty signifier and how these empty signifiers rely on a local chain of signification.

The idea of empty signifiers has been developed in the post-foundational discourse theory of the Essex school (Laclau 2007, 2014; Torfing 1999; Howarth 2000). In short, an empty signifier is emptied of its signified because of changes in the chain of signification. In this semiotic approach, a signifier is only meaningful as difference, as being different from other signifiers. We only know what a chair is because we can distinguish it from armchairs, settees, bean bags and so on. However, with abstract concepts and values, these chains of signification can change and slide – as one element changes meaning, so do all the others. An empty signifier can, because of its near emptiness, then signify the whole discourse and become hegemonic as it can suture the necessary incompleteness of discursive structures, i.e. try to suggest a completeness where no completeness can be. No ideology is able to represent all interests in a polity, but an empty signifier suggests that a particular political ideology does just that. Of course, no signifier can be totally empty of meaning as they would not signify anything at all. This has been acknowledged by Laclau (2000: 304) : '… the universality obtainable through equivalential logics will always be a universality contaminated by particularity. There is not, strictly speaking, a signifier which is truly empty, but one which is only tendentially so.'

Political myths can fulfil the same function as empty signifiers. According to Bennett (1980, 168–69), myths are deeply embedded in our thinking because in our cognitive development we are exposed to many different culturally specific narratives on which we base our future behaviour. Myths are therefore the basis of primary process thinking, which is characterized 'by projection, fantasy, the incorporation of nonverbal imagery, a high emotional content, the easy connection of disparate ideas, the failure to make underlying assumptions explicit, and the generation of multiple levels of meaning. (Bennett 1980, 169)

This means that the reference to myths facilitates an emotional connection with the audience, and a discourse invoking these myths can link the political reality it construes to the private experience of the participants. Thus, myths are a powerful rhetorical tool to 'condition the public to the powerful symbols used by politicians' (Bennett 1980, 168). They also render 'the true range of objective social differences irrelevant (or nearly irrelevant) in the policy process' (Bennett 1980, 171) as people's policy preferences are based on the repertoire of myths as the basis of evaluation. Here, Bennett (1980) describes the effect of political myths as parallel to the effects of empty signifiers: both aim to render differences between ideological positions nearly irrelevant in order to be able to signify the system as a whole.

The case that myths are deeply embedded discursive structures and can function as empty signifiers signified by political symbol words such as 'one nation' and 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' is supported by the argument that political myths, despite being defined as narrative in form, do not have to be recounted at full length to fulfil their discursive function. (Flood 2002, 125) . Instead, lexical items can become symbol terms – indexicals – for those very myths.

Discourse-Historical Context: Discourses of the Third-Way as Social Democratic Reform Discourses

Parallel developments in political discourses in different polities offer an opportunity for discourse analysts: they allow the researcher interested in discourse-linguistic analysis of political discourse to analyse the connection between text and context. One of these opportunities are the reform discourses in social democratic parties of the Third way at the turn of the 21st Century. Their parallel attempt to overcome long lasting electoral failure by presenting a 'Third Way' of politics allows the discourse analyst to demonstrate how potentially parallel ideological developments are locally adapted to the political culture and the political system of the country, and to discuss why particular discursive strategies are restricted in certain political cultures. In the following paragraphs, I will summarize the context of the Third-Way discourses and introduce the corpus this study is based on.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, both the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats (SPD) were electorally unsuccessful and were often and increasingly seen as being in crisis. In the early 1990s, Conservative parties were hegemonic in both countries for nearly a decade with no end in sight. This famously led to the assessment of the 'end of the social democratic century' by the sociologist and politician Ralf Dahrendorf (Dahrendorf 1988), as the assumed changes of the globalised economy had supposedly caused ruptures in Keynesian post war consensus, a political hegemony based on a compromise between organised Labour and capital. This loss of the basis of social democratic policy, but also post-materialistic social changes, particularly amongst traditional Labour voters, led to the crisis of social democracy (Borchert 1996; Burnham 1996; Walter 2009).

In 1997, the British Labour party managed to break 18 years of conservative hegemony with the help of a discourse of the Third Way. A parallel situation existed in Germany, where a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition under chancellor Helmut Kohl had dominated politics for 16 years. In 1998, the SPD under Oskar Lafontaine as party leader and with Gerhard Schröder as Chancellor candidate aimed to follow the success of the Labour Party under Tony Blair by adapting the Third-Way politics to the German political system.

Bastow and Martin (2003) argue that the Third Way should actually be understood as a variety of ideologies rather than as a particular one. They define Third-Way discourses as a 'mode of ideological reasoning rather than a distinctive ideology in itself' (Bastow and Martin 2003, 2) and see social democratic reform discourses from the 1990s onwards only as one variation. They demonstrate that five basic elements characterize all third-way discourses:

(1) The idea of politics beyond left and right;

(2) A notion of a crisis of nation and politics;

(3) A necessary renewal of ethical principles;

(4) A renewal of politics based on and lead by communities;

(5) Proponents of a third-way have a sense of agency and see their parties as a living symbol of the change they wish to bring about.

Findings and Discussion

(1) Argumentative Macrostructures of the Discourses of the Third Way

In this section, I briefly summarize the results of the analysis of the macro topoi in the discourses of the Third Way in the defined corpus only as far as they are necessary to understand the role of the golden age myth in this argumentative structure. The details of this analysis can be found in Kranert (2016). Kranert (2016) demonstrates that in the defined corpus both discourses clearly show a similar macro structure, but the slots in the structure are partly filled differently and specifically for the political cultures of Germany and the UK.

The *data topos* (i.e. the reference to the political and economic situation) of both discourses is, as the analysis of third way discourses by Bastow and Martin (2003) predicted, dominated by crisis topoi, but the actual tokens of the topoi differ in Germany and the UK. Whereas in the British discourse, 'change' and 'globalisation' are mainly made responsible for the crisis of party and society, in the German discourse the metaphor of the 'blocked society' ('blockierte Gesellschaft') and the crisis of the 'party state' and 'corporatism' in its specific German version are dominant.

The *analysis of topoi of values and principles* revealed that a reorientation of social democratic values is prevalent: arguments for 'necessary' changes of values are contextualised by reassertions of core values in order to demonstrate that the new approach is still 'social democratic'. Concepts, which were previously not seen as belonging to a social democratic ideology, such as the positive effects of markets are moved to the core, whilst concepts from the traditional social democracy are separated, in order to remove them from the core. In total, the topos of values is not only populated by speech acts of APPEAL TO VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, but by speech acts of JUSTIYFYING VALUES (Kranert 2016, 139-148).

The *purposive topos* (i.e. the definition of political aims) contained goals such as 'secure future for social democracy' and 'better future for Germany/ the UK', 'better economic standing' and 'less unemployment'. The topoi of a better future were often construed through metaphorical scenarios such as NATION AS A BUILDING (dominant in the British discourse) and POLITICS AS JOURNEY (dominant in Germany).

(2) The Golden Age Myth as a Purposive Topos in the Discourses of the Third Way

In his analysis of New Labour's language, Fairclough (2000, 18–19) demonstrated that the repeated attributive use of 'new' was used as a way of rebranding the Labour Party. This strategy was inspired by the 'New Democrats' in the US and can, in turn, also be found in the language of the German SPD at the time, who described themselves as 'die neue Mitte'/ 'the new centre ground'.

In the lexical analysis of my corpus, however, I found many examples of 'renew' and 'renewal', and in further searches this re-derivation also applied to other verbs or nominalised verbs. A selection of examples from both Giddens and Mandelson & Liddle can be found in Table 1. Similar examples can be found in Blair's speeches in the corpus, where 'renew' is overrepresented with 246.32 per million words (pmw) against the British National Corpus (BNC) with 12.55 pmw, and 'rebuilt' is overrepresented with 164.21 pmw against 16.01 pmw in the BNC.

Giddens (1998)	Mandelson & Liddle (1996)

(1) radical **re**thinking in relation to the changing nature of aging (46)	(13) **re**invention/**re**application/**re**statement of Labour
(2) A **renew**ed social democracy has to be left of centre (47)	(14) Make Britain a young country again - Economic dynamism and vitality **re**stored (15)
(3) **re**construct state (70)	(15) The concept of community enables New Labour to **re**claim ground that should never have been conceded to our political opponents (21)
(4) state legitimacy has to be **re**newed (72)	
(5) **re**newal of public sphere (77)	(16) 'He wants Labour to **re**discover its identity by building on its founding values, not on any rigid ideology …' (31)
(6) **re**inventing government	
(7) **re**newal of civic culture (80)	(17) **re**invention of Labour (2,39)
(8) **re**newal of deprived local communities	(18) **re**build manufacturing strength (85)
(9) **re**built public sphere (106)	(19) (divided Kingdom) - a **re**united Kingdom (124)
(10) **re**capturing of public space (107)	(20) A strong society can be **re**built only on firm foundations (124)
(11) **re**distribution of possibilities	
(12) not dismantle but **re**construct welfare state (113)	(21) **re**store the meaningfulness of the principle of individually based … social insurance (127)
	(22) New Labour **re**unites society (143)
	(23) **Re**build a strong sense of community (155)
	(24) party's health **re**stored (212)
	(25) **Re**vitalising the civil service

Table 1: re-derivations as evidence for a golden age myth

To understand and interpret the phenomenon of the re-derivations in the data, we first have to understand their semantics: according to Carstairs-McCarty (2002, 23–24), re-derivations in English can be separated into two groups:

> a) 're-' meaning again ('rewrite, repaint, revisit'), phonetically [ri];
> b) 're-'- meaning something like 'back again' ('revive, return, restore, revise, reverse') phonetically [rə];

These groups are not necessarily allomorph and can construct different lexical items with the same root, for example 'return' in the sense of 'come back' as opposed to 're-turn' meaning 'turn again'. We must now answer two major questions: first, we need to describe the discursive function of this recurrent use of re-derivations in the discourse of New Labour, and secondly, we need to see if here similar structures in the discourse of 'Die Neue Mitte' in Germany.

Looking at the following examples from the corpus in more detail, the re-derivations in Mandelson and Liddle's text seem to construe a sense of 'back to the original' or back to the good old times, even when they just mean 'again'. They therefore blur the differences suggested by Carstairs-McCarty's (2002) morphological analysis:

(26) He [Blair, MK] wants Labour to rediscover its identity by building on its founding values, not on any rigid ideology […]. (Mandelson and Liddle 1996, 31, emphasis MK)

(27) For Labour, modernisation is about far more than red roses […]. It is about a fundamental reinvention of what Labour offers to the British people. […] However, the business of reinvention does not involve abandonment of Labour's basic principles and convictions. It means a sharper

definition of those core aims and values and their thorough <u>re</u>application to the circumstances of the modern world. (Mandelson and Liddle 1996, 2, emphasis MK)

(28) A <u>Re</u>united Kingdom – A strong society can be <u>re</u>built only on firm foundations. Mandelson and Liddle 1996, 124, emphasis MK)

In (26), 'rediscover' clearly expresses an idea of 'back to the roots', as the 'rediscovery' is metaphorically rendered as the 'building on foundation values'. I suggest this can be read as a purposive topos of 'Labour must discover its original identity again.' This aim is supported by the value topos of post-ideology, which is typical for discourses of the Third Way.

Example (27) can be read as both 'new-invention' and 'rediscovery' of Labour values. The interpretation as 'new-invention' is supported by the modifier 'fundamental' and the context of 'modernisation'. However, the text stresses that this does not mean to 'abandon' the core values of the Labour Party, but to apply them again ('reapplication'). The whole 're-' rhetoric therefore incorporates two contradicting semantics used in the New Labour discourse: the focus on the Labour party being 'new' and aiming for a 'new Britain' on the one hand, and a 'golden age' myth on the other. This is consistent with findings in the discourse of change in the topos of values and principles, which in many cases follows the pattern of 'this is a return to our original values'. Following Buckler and Dolowitz (2009), this can be seen as a strategy to integrate changes of ideology with the ideological core and therefore not to alienate some parts of the membership that could be seen as resistant to change.

The re-derivation in (28) clearly represents a call to return to a former state of affairs: a formerly united Britain, Britain as a glorious building in need of repair. I suggest these examples should be read as a reference to a golden age myth which Tannock (1995, 454) understands as part of a nostalgia rhetoric that

> […] turns to the past to find/ construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The 'positively evaluated' past is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing.

Although the German language does not have a similarly ambiguous and universal structure to the prefix 're-', once one is aware of the golden age myth from the discourse of New Labour, a parallel but culturally adapted rhetoric can be found in Hombach's text. As TABLE 2 illustrates, 'wieder-', 're-' and 'zurück-' constructions are used to construe the same meaning.

Hombach (1998)	Hombach (2000) - translation
(29) Es gilt, zu den Prinzipien der sozialen Marktwirtschaft **zurück**zukehren' (14)	(29') We need to get **back** to the principles of a social market economy (xxxv)
(30) Der Kernbegriff ist die **Re**konstruktion der sozialen Marktwirtschaft (14, 55)	(30') An at the heart of this synthesis lies the **re**construction of the social market economy.(xxxv)
(31) Wir alle haben die große Aufgabe, das Modell Deutschland **er**neuern (25)	(31') We are all facing the challenge to create a new model for Germany
(32) Die traditionellen Institutionen zu aktivieren, sie umzubauen, nicht einzureißen, das ist die Aufgabe. (42)	(32') Our task ist to **re**built and breath new life into traditional institutions, not to undermine them (15)

(33) Wir müssen die Politik **wieder** in Gang bringen' (46)	(33') We must **re**vitalize Politics (18)
(34) Die soziale Marktwirtschaft hat nicht versagt. Aber es gilt, zu ihren Prinzipien **zurück**zukehren (49)	(34') The social market economy has not failed. But there is a call for us to **re**turn to its principles. (21)
(35) Eine **Rück**kehr zu diesen Eckwerten [Konsens und Kooperation, positives Ordnungsdenken statt Laissez-faire, Pragmatismus in der Wirtschaftspolitik] erwarten heute alle, die sich mit dem Ethos der sozialen Marktwirtschaft identifizieren (58)	(35') All those who identify with the ethos of the social market economy are looking for a <u>re</u>turn to these values [consensus and co-operation, calculated intervention in place of laissez-faire, pragmatism in economic policy] (28)
(36) Die **Erneu**erung des sozialdemokratischen Politikmodells jenseits der Kategorien "Rechts" und "Links" ist ein internationaler Trend (62)	(36') The **re**newal of the social democratic model beyond the categories left and right is an international trend (32)
(37) Ein Element ist die Wiederentdeckung des Wertes von Konsens und Kooperation (63)	(37') One such reality is the rediscovery of the value of co-operation and consensus. (32)
(38) Können wir es schaffen, das Verständnis für die Notwendigkeit eines aktivierenden Staat wiederzubeleben, der die auseinanderstrebenden Interessen zusammenführt? (117)	(38') Is it possible for us to revive this awareness of the need for a proactive state which reconciles conflicting interests? (76)

Table 2: 'rück-' and 'wieder-'derivations in Hombach (1998, 2000)

Numerous times in his text, Hombach calls 'Rekonstruktion der sozialen Marktwirtschaft' a core concept ('Kernbegriff') of the SPD of the new centre. 'Rekonstruieren' in German is similar to the English concept of 'reconstruct'. We can therefore conclude that the German Third-Way contained allusions to the golden-age topos as well. This golden age myth is again the purposive topos of an argumentative network: the call for 'Erneuerung' (pp. 25 and 27) is followed by crisis topoi ('Zufriedenheitsfalle'/'trap of contentment', p. 28; 'ein Teufelskreis aus apokalyptischer Weltsicht und mentaler und struktureller Reformunfähigkeit'/'vicious circle of apocalyptic world view as well as mental and structural inability to reform', p. 29; 'Jammergesellschaft'/'society of moaners', p. 33; 'Globalisierung' pp. 33-43).

Turning to the party conference speeches in the corpus, references to the 'golden age' myth can also be found in Blair's conference speeches:

(39) That is why our country needs reborn for today. New Labour being born here in this hall today. (Blair 1995b, 292)

(40) Today I place before you my vision of a new Britain - a nation reborn, prosperous, secure, united - <u>one Britain</u>. (Blair 1995a, 94–95)

(41) I believe in Britain. I believe in the British people. One cross on the ballot paper. <u>One nation</u> was reborn. (Blair 1997, 68)

(42)The prize is immense. It is new Britain, <u>one Britain</u> - the people united by shared values, shared aims, a government governing for all the people and the party, this party, the Labour Party, new Labour, founded by the people, back truly as the people's party. New Labour, new Britain, the party **re**newed, the country **re**born. New Labour. New Britain. (Prolonged applause) (Blair, 1995b: 103–104)

The argument here is that the British Nation is in need of a new leadership (purposive topos), because the country is in crisis (data topos). There are three important mechanisms at play in these quotations: firstly, the use of the myth in the discourse on New Labour is similar to the use in other narratives of national renewal: the 'rebirth of a nation' is a metaphorical argument that nationalists use to claim the authenticity of a nation and to evoke the idea that a nation has always been in existence, and simply needs to be recovered. In these cases, the golden age myth is used to construe continuity and group solidarity (Smith 1997, 50). In a discourse of party modernisation this myth can be used to construct ideological groupness and to convince more traditional party supporters that at the core the party is staying the same. The janus-faced rhetoric implied in the ambiguity of re-derivations communicates a purposive topos persuasively to both modernisers and non-modernisers, as the nation under New Labour will be new (as in the slogan 'New Labour. New Britain'), but in addition it will be renewed, rebuilt and reunited – i.e. past glory will be restored. In some of Blair's speeches, this second understanding is communicated by a construction of a historical unbroken lineage in Labour politics: the 'rebirth' is constructed in bringing the country back to the foundation of the welfare state by the Labour party in the 1950s and 1960s.

Secondly, the parallel 'rebirth' of Labour and the Nation is part of a strategy to address the public and to legitimize New Labour's claim for power. With this argumentative structure, the golden age myth displays a more general theme in Third-Way-ideologies: New Labour as a special agent for the change of society, for the renewal of the nation (Bastow and Martin 2003, 42). In the quotations about the 'reborn Labour Party', 'new Labour', is the special agent that can save the British people, because New Labour's values are the values of the nation. This metaphoric argumentation has two functions: the metaphor of the reborn Labour party construes continuity of values within the party, depicting New Labour's values as the traditional values of the Labour party before it lost its way in the late 1970s and 1980s. Further, the metonymic structure of the party as guarantor for the renewal of the nation is also typical for political myths, as Cassirer has argued (see Tudor 1972, 130): in political myth, part is often identified with the whole, the individual identified with the species.

In Schröder's party conference speeches, the golden age myth is only used in a far more constrained version, and it clearly does not construe the SPD as a special agent for the renewal of the nation. Similar to Hombach, Schröder uses 'Erneuerung der sozialen Marktwirtschaft' to delegitimize the Kohl-government by metaphorically claiming that they have destroyed the social market economy and that the SPD needs to rebuild it. Schröder also construes the golden age with reference to heroes of the SPD: August Bebel, Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, and Schmidt's 'Modell Deutschland' is used as a political golden age myth. Here, Schröder employs the golden-age-topos to integrate the history of the party and the golden age of Germany in the person of Helmut Schmidt, who was probably one of the best known and liked SPD elder statesmen at that time. However, these elements are not, as they are in Blair's speeches, connected to a central myth of renewal of the party and renewal of the country.

Both the strong national reference and the special status of the party are not compatible with the German political culture: firstly, there is a lack of a political myth of Germany as an old unified nation. Historically, Germany is a young nation state as it did not exist as such before 1871. The catastrophe of nationalism, of two world wars, and as a physically divided nation restricts the use of a national

rhetoric so shortly after the reunification. However, as I will show in the next part, the empty signifier 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' offered a suitable alternative.

Secondly, the use of a golden-age-myth to argue for the SPD as a special agent of the renewal of a golden age of Germany would be problematic in the context of a political system that normally returns coalition governments in general elections. But a further element of the German political system blurs the distinction between parties in government and parties in opposition. While in the UK the distinction government – opposition on a national level is clear cut, the situation is more complicated in Germany. There, the state parliaments are elected separately, but state governments are represented nationally in the second chamber, the Bundesrat. Hence opposition parties can reach a majority in the second chamber, the Bundesrat, and most political decision will then have to be negotiated between government and opposition. This was the case in the 1990s. Thus, at the time both bigger parties shared power. Therefore, the construction of the one of them as 'the establishment that neglected the people' would not be credible. This is only possible in a first-past-the-post system such as the UK, which also does not have an elected second chamber as a veto player.

Both cultural influences on the local adaptation of the Third-Way discourse demonstrate, that politics is, as Schöpflin (1997, 27) argues: 'an aspect of the overall cultural system. Every political action is embedded in a wider cultural context. Cultural presuppositions and values may not be seen as narrowly political – influencing political action – and symbolic action is not perceived as a central means of interaction between political elites and public opinion, yet they do have this role.'

(3) 'One Nation' and 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' as Empty Signifiers in National Golden Age Myths

In this final part of the data analysis and discussion, I would like to demonstrate how, in all parts of the German and British corpus, the golden age is specified using a central cultural symbol term, which I will interpret as an empty signifier.

In the case of New Labour, the signifier use is 'one nation', originated in Disraeli's fight against extreme individualism within conservatism and his warning that Britain might end up divided in to two nations (Heywood 2007, 83). Disraeli, and his narrative of 'Two Nations' in his 1845 novel Sibyl (which was subtitled 'The Two Nations') is one of the foremost ancestral lines in Conservative party history; however, the term 'One Nation' itself was never used by Disraeli himself (Seawright 2010, 5). The symbol term 'One nation' developed and became a signifier for one nation political myth when it became the name of a group within the Conservative party in the 1950s, which aimed to revive and renew Disraeli's myth with a pamphlet 'One Nation' (Seawright 2010, 11). 'One nation' as a core concept was later abandoned by the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher's leadership, and was, as we will see, adopted by New Labour.

A first instance in the discourse of New Labour can be found in the 1997 election manifesto:

(43) I want a Britain that is <u>one nation</u>, with shared values and purpose, where merit comes before privilege, run for the many not the few, strong and sure of itself at home and abroad .[...] I want to renew our country's faith in the ability of its government and politics to deliver. (The Labour Party 1997, 1)

In this quotation, 'one nation' is part of the general depoliticising strategy of the manifesto, presenting 'new Labour' as a catch-all party of the political centre ground. This development of 'One nation' as a national empty signifier has another historical origin: the national interest has been used in a 'persuasive unitary sense' since the seventeenth century (Williams 1983, 223; see also Fairclough, Norman 2000, 34). 'New Labour' tried to redefine 'one nation' as a nation with 'shared values and

purpose', the main value being merit. Thus, not only is the adoption of the symbol term a move of the Labour Party to the 'middle ground', i.e. closer to the Conservatives, but also the redefinition: 'merit' foregrounds as the main value individual merits and backgrounds the idea that everything people do is on the basis of the contribution of others, which would be a more democratic socialist view. In order to adopt 'one nation' as a programme word for 'new Labour', it is set in opposition to the stigma word 'vested interest', which signifies the policies of the Conservatives.

Variations of this can be found in quotations 40-42 from Blair's speeches: they demonstrate that at the centre of the golden age myth of New Labour is the empty signifier 'One Nation' or 'One Britain' that aims to suture dislocation within the party and the nation, using the metaphorical frame of REBIRTH for both party and country.

In Mandelson's quotation, example (28) above, this is slightly less obvious. The goal defined here is to reunite the country, which presupposes that it has been divided. So again, the Disraelian myth of the divided country that needs re-uniting is called upon, expressing a purposive topos for the country:

Both Hombach (1998) and also Schröder in his party conference speeches connect the golden age to the mirandum that became the central programme word of the modernized SPD in 1998: 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' (Social market economy) is the golden age, the original state that all other German parties have neglected and that the SPD wants to 'reconstruct'.

Hombach calls on Ludwig Erhard, supposedly the father of the social market economy, and connects his name to the golden age myth as well as to the topos of the end of ideology. In the metaphorical scenario used, the founding father of the social market economy has not been an SPD-politician now their sympathiser (he has not left the SPD in his will), but his natural political allies (the CDU) have neglected his ideas (but his own grandsons have abandoned him):

(44) Ludwig Erhard hat die deutschen Sozialdemokraten nicht in seinem Testament bedacht. Aber seine Enkel haben sein Erbe verspielt, seine Erkenntnisse sind heute herrenloses Gut. Es ist nur legitim, Ludwig Erhard für eine moderne Politik der Sozialdemokraten zu entdecken und seine Erkenntnisse zu nutzen. Er wird ein Stützpfeiler der Brücke sein, die liberale Prinzipien und die Grundwerte der Sozialdemokratie zu einer vernünftigen und durchschlagkräftigen Synthese verbindet. Der Kernbegriff dieser Synthese ist die Rekonstruktion der sozialen Marktwirtschaft. (Hombach 1998, 54–55, emphasis MK)

Ludwig Erhard did not leave the Social Democrats anything in his will. But his heirs have frittered away his heritage and his ideas have been abandoned. His name may fairly be invoked in connection with the contemporary policies of the Social democrats, and his ideas be exploited. He will stand as one of the pillars that carry the bridge which links liberal principles to the basic values of the SPD, thereby forming a powerful ad rational synthesis of interest. At the centre of this synthesis lies the reconstruction of the social market economy. (Hombach 2000, 25, emphasis MK)

Following the quotation, the new programme term[2] 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' is also connected to a more traditional social democratic term 'starker Staat' (strong state). The latter is then reinterpreted in the modernised understanding, where the state functions as a regulator in a market society and integrates interests in a corporate system of partners – to use the metaphor from the Schröder-Blair-Paper: 'The state should not row, but steer: not so much control, as challenge. Solutions to problems must be joined up' (Blair and Schröder 1999, § 24).

Similar structures as found in the Hombach quotation can be found in both the 1998 SPD election manifesto and Schröder's party conference speeches. Just as in the discourse of New Labour, we can

see that a conservative programme word is adapted through the use of the golden age myth and reinterpreted into the party's programme terminology. The chosen term 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' has been the label for the economic policies of the German conservative party, the Christian democrats (CDU) since 1949 (Stötzel and Eitz 2002, 381), and in the 1950s the term was used in election campaigns as a programme term by the CDU. Analysing the early use of the term, Nonhoff (2006) demonstrates that there have been clear discursive movements to position the term as an empty signifier for the society of the GFR. The SPD, however, only used the term 'Marktwirtschaft' since 1953, using different attributes such as 'geplante' (planed) and 'sozialistische' (socialist) to distinguish it from the conservative use (Stötzel and Eitz 2002, 382). In the SPD election manifestos of 1990 and 1994, this conservative economic programme word is redefined as 'ökologisch-soziale Marktwirtschaft', as the SPD integrates an ecological approach into their policies, reacting to the Green Party's success. Thus, only with the adoption as a social democratic programme term, one could argue, has it truly been established as the German national empty signifier, used by both major political parties, emptied of concrete political meaning, allowing voters of all political quarters to project meaning onto it.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 illustrate that the golden age myth linked to 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' and Ludwig Erhard has even influenced the multi-modal representation of Schröder as a chancellor candidate in election campaign materials. In Figure 3, taken from an election pamphlet in the corpus (Vorstand der SPD July 1998), Schröder strongly resembles Erhard both in pose and with the typical cigar.

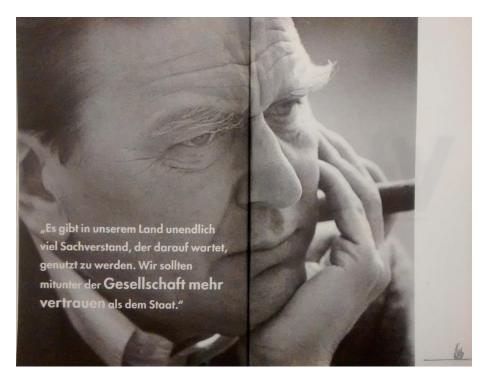**Figure 2: Ludwig Erhard (Koch 03/03/1964, CCO 1.0 license)**

Figure 3: Double page from 'Wir sind bereit' (Vorstand der SPD July 1998, 42–43)[3]

Conclusions

In my analysis of the golden age myth in the discourses of the Third Way in Germany and the UK I have demonstrated how allusions to political myths can be part of the macro-argumentative structure in political discourse. There, they are often represented by culturally dependent catch terms, rather that the whole narrative of the myth. In the case of the Third Way, the golden age myth is recontextualized through re-derivations and the use of local empty signifiers. In this discourse, the myth is mainly located in purposive topos: the aim is to return to an earlier stage of politics and at the same time adapt that stage to the new situation. This allows Third-Way parties to reach out to traditional voters by claiming credit for the introduction of the welfare state as well as to reach out to new, more centrist voters by claiming that this is new politics.

I demonstrated furthermore how the argumentative macro structures have been adapted to their respective political culture: the golden ages in Germany and the UK are different. Both political discourses rely on established empty signifiers to fulfil the representation of a specific golden age: in the UK, it is the 'one nation' myth. This allowed the Labour Party to draw in more progressive conservative voters who had been neglected by the Thatcherite conservatives. At the same time, the British golden age myth construes the Labour party as a special agent for change: in a similar manner to how the party has supposedly managed to reform itself, it will be able to also reform the country that has been neglected by the conservative government of the last 18 years.

The German Third-Way discourse uses a similar discursive mechanism: it adopts and adapts the hegemonic conservative term 'Soziale Marktwirtschaft' and uses it as an empty signifier for German politics. The governing CDU/CSU-FDP coalition is then construed as having become the antagonist of that empty signifier: despite being the founders of this type of social economic policy, they have allegedly neglected it and therefore, according to the SPD, sentenced the country to a complete standstill. However, the SPD does not try to represent itself as a special agent of political change as one would expect from Third Way parties, following Bastow and Martin (2003) . This would not have

been credible in a corporatist political system where neither of the two major political parties is ever in opposition for any length of time: they will always be part of some state governments and therefore be part of or even in control of the second chamber.

The key question of course remains, what this means for a supposedly progressive party – why do progressive parties look backwards, ask for a return to a golden age, become retrotopic? The answers given in this paper lie in the problem of identity construction – in this case the ideological identity of the party as much as the aim to integrate the party identity with an identity of the broader electorate. In times of change, the golden age of the party allows an integration of both 'modernizers' and 'traditionalists'. It terms of the nation, an empty signifier allows the projection of as many individual and group identities onto the emptied signifier as possible.

On a more abstract level, this article demonstrated how abstract empty signifiers are central to national politics and how they are integrated into whatever ideological discourse is happening in order to make it accessible. In future comparative discourse research in the field of political discourse analysis, I suggest research to be undertaken to produce lexicological longitudinal studies to understand how these empty signifiers are established in different polities, in order to produce background data that helps the intercultural understanding of different political discourses.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] Klein (2000, 637) actually calls this *final topos*, but as this, in my experience, seems to confuse English readers, I translated it as purposive topos – parallel to the grammatical term final clause/ purposive clause.

[2] A programme term is, roughly speaking, a term with positive connotation. claimed by a political party as central to their ideology. The distinction in "Fahnenwort" (programme term) and "Stigmawort" (stigma term) was originally developed in (Hermanns 1989), but has since been applied broadly in the German tradition of politico-linguistics. For more details on German political lexicography see (Girnth 2015, 60-65).

[3] Reproduced with kind permission from the Social democratic Party of Germany (SPD).

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