# From political judgements to public justifications (and vice versa): How communities generate reasons upon which to act

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## Abstract

Existing literature in International Relations has firmly established that public justifications matter in world politics. They make it possible for a range of communities — nations, security communities, global advocacy networks and so on — to take political action. This article aims to improve on our understanding of how communities produce such justifications. It seeks to make conceptual and methodological contributions. On the conceptual level, I contend that political judgements generate public justifications and, vice versa, that these justifications shape future judgements. I outline a three-circuit map for studying the communicative processes that link judgements and justifications. On the methodological level, I argue that what I label a structured, focused communication analysis is well suited to put the three-circuit map to use to do empirical research. I tailor the structure and focus of such an analysis to the requirements of research on public justification.

## Keywords

communication, judgement, justification, legitimation, practice, rhetoric

## Introduction

Agents travel down many different roads in establishing legitimacy for policies, politics and polities. A road they very often frequent is paved with explicit communicative exchanges about good reasons upon which to act. In this study, the name used for this road is public justification. In the literature, other names such as collective legitimization

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(Claude, 1966; Lewis, 2005), deliberative legitimacy (Bjola, 2005) or simply legitimization (Barkin and Cronin, 1994; Hochstetler et al., 2000; Hurd, 2005; Steffek, 2003) are also frequently found.[1]

Public justifications are omnipresent in world politics. To give just a few examples taken from, respectively, realist, liberal, English School, constructivist and poststructuralist scholarship on the phenomenon: in order for international organizations to leave an impact, they have to give good reasons why they ought to be important in world politics (Claude, 1966; Niebuhr, 1950); civil society can leave a mark on global politics by making good reasons for change resonate with a broader state and non-state audience (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Price, 1995); international order gets reproduced through the justifications actors provide (Bull, 1995; Jaeger, 2008); economic policies are deeply shaped by the justifications that actors provide for their stances (Naylor, 2011; Zangl, 2008); and whether states go to war or not has a lot to do with how domestic contestations about justifying and dejustifying the resort to war play out (Levy, 2008; McDonald, 2010).

Recent literature has firmly established that justifications matter for world politics. They make it possible for a community, such as a nation, to act (Jackson, 2006; Krebs and Jackson, 2007). Addressing the question of how communities generate these justifications, this article builds on this literature. Engaging with social and political theorists dealing with this phenomenon, it seeks to make three contributions. First, I elaborate on the concept of public justification. I define the concept broadly in terms of a community's converging on compelling reasons upon which to act. Similarly to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), I caution that this is not to be equated with consensus 'all the way down'.[2] I contend that agreements in communities tend to be patchworks of different intensities and extents. Second, following leads provided by a heterogeneous group of scholars (Beiner, 1983; Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Elster, 1983: 88), I argue that it is political judgements — subsuming particulars under universals — that generate public justifications, and, vice versa, that these justifications shape judgements. In order to facilitate research on this link between judgements and justifications, I develop a three-circuit map. The map elaborates on the linkages through which judgements generate justifications (perimeter and resonance circuits) and justifications affect judgements (resonance and structuration circuits). Third, borrowing from methodological writings in our discipline (Crawford, 2002: 119–130; George and Bennett, 2004: 67–72) and beyond (de Volo and Schatz, 2004; Marcus, 1998; Sacks, 1995), I tailor what I label a structured, focused communication analysis to inquiries into the makings of public justifications.

The article is organized in five sections. First, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the existing International Relations literature on justification. Second, I delineate the defining features of public justification. Third, I elaborate on political judgement. Fourth, I link the two concepts together in the three-circuit map. Fifth, I develop the structured, focused communication analysis. The conclusion summarizes my findings and develops an agenda for further research.

## Existing research on rhetoric and justification

There are four clusters of literature, all concerned with rhetoric broadly speaking, that deal with justification in considerable depth. Drawing from debates on Habermas's

theory of communicative action sparked by Müller (1994), Risse (2000) introduced the logic of arguing to International Relations. This strand of thought submits that there are (narrowly confined) spaces in world politics where actors communicate in a manner that the better argument comes to the fore (Deitelhoff, 2009; Lynch, 2002). The argument that provides the — intersubjectively speaking — best reasons prevails. Putting norm entrepreneurs centre stage, the advocacy literature qualifies this strong emphasis on the better argument. These entrepreneurs are politically savvy actors who want their ideas to leave a mark on politics. They do so by employing already taken-for-granted normative ideas as frames, for example, established human rights norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999). Studies on rhetorical force break with the theory of communicative action even further. Interlocutors justify their stance in a manner that generates rhetorical force. Receivers are left with the non-choice of yielding or violating their own identity (Bially Mattern, 2001; Krebs and Jackson, 2007). Borrowing from speech act theory, the securitization literature is also full of references to justification (Buzan et al., 1998; Hansen, 2011; Vuori, 2008; Wæver, 1995). The securitization of an issue justifies 'extreme measures' (Williams, 1998: 435), including the resort to war (De Goede, 2008).

These clusters make important contributions to International Relations. On a theoretical level, they develop plausible alternatives to the logic of consequences and appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1989). The logic of consequences, and especially its rational choice variant, is frequently criticized for what Granovetter (2001) calls instrumentalist and reductionist biases. In its quest for analytically useful simplifications of a complex world (Keohane, 1988: 379; Martin, 2007: 112), rational choice oversimplifies the process of how individuals figure out what to do[3] by assuming that agents compute costs and benefits in order to further their exogenously given interests (instrumentalism). They also oversimplify the inner dynamics of collective actors by reducing collective properties to individual properties (reductionism). The logic of appropriateness (Berger, 1996; Herman, 1996) suffers from a structural bias. With agency being over-socialized (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Sending, 2002; Sewell, 1992), it remains unclear how actors can be anything but the puppets of the structures into which they are embedded. Research on justification tends to circumvent these biases, oftentimes by situating itself in the borderlands between consequentialism and appropriateness (Joachim, 2003; Jourde, 2007; Krebs and Jackson, 2007).[4]

Equally important, these four clusters make important contributions to highly salient empirical questions about today's world politics. Due to their focus on the power of the word, literatures on justification provide convincing explanations for empirical puzzles that could not be explained previously. This applies in particular to puzzles where the seemingly weak — for instance, non-governmental organizations — leave a major mark on global governance, ranging from issues as diverse as the chemical weapons taboo (Price, 1995) to same-sex unions (Kollman, 2007). On a more general level, the four clusters on justification provide a timely focus on communication. Deutsch's intriguing metaphor of communication as the nervous system of government, coined a long time ago (Deutsch, 1966), notwithstanding, International Relations has been slow to take communication seriously. Putting rhetoric — broadly understood — at the centre of its inquiries, research on justification helps the discipline to move beyond all-too-narrow

understandings of communication. This move is highly warranted in our globalizing world. Much of what we refer to as globalization and global governance is constituted by communication. This puts even more of an onus on our discipline to improve our understanding of communication.

Despite these strengths, however, there are also some weaknesses that these literatures still have to address in more convincing fashion. Three among these are especially noteworthy. First, it often remains unclear what justification actually is. Justification is hardly ever defined. A hint usually provided is that justification has something to do with a consensus among actors. But big assumptions about consensus oversimplify the configuration of agreements in a community. It is very rare that every member of a community agrees on a justification. Since communities are heterogeneous, it is much more frequent that some members agree and others do not agree (Benhabib, 1986; Young, 1990). In other words, agreements and disagreements vary in extent. Furthermore, these agreements and disagreements vary in intensity. A consensus scores highly on the intensity scale of agreements. Compromises or simple acquiescence, for example, are less intensely held agreements; but they are still agreements.[5]

Second, authors on justification are reluctant to address the micro-foundations of justifications. Whether or not communities converge on justifications has a lot to do with how senders play their cards and how receivers react to the messages that senders try to disseminate. This begs the question of what makes senders and receivers tick. How do senders arrive at arguments on justification? How do they determine the tactics for disseminating them? How do receivers evaluate these arguments? How are they won over? The securitization literature is still ill-equipped to deal with these questions. Authors do not deal systematically with the question of what makes these actors securitize an issue in the first place or not. Furthermore, the audience remains bracketed; there is no account of how an audience is won over or not (McDonald, 2008). The problem with the advocacy literature is that it remains inconsistent in answering these questions. On the one hand, the literature, sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly, suggests that advocates are strategic framers. They calculate costs and benefits of their advocacy. On the other hand, the audience is conceived of as simple followers of appropriateness; there is no calculation and strategic reasoning. Thus, there are two competing underlying theories of agency that are not easily reconcilable. These are thorny issues and it is understandable when some authors caution that being agnostic about these, at least for the time being, may be the best way to move forward (Krebs and Jackson, 2007). By the same token, however, addressing the micro-foundations more systematically would certainly improve our grasp of how justification works.

Third, the making and unmaking of the positioning of the communicators and its repercussions for communicative success and failure remain under-researched. While the four clusters provide important insights about how the power of the word shapes processes of justification, accounts of the authority of the speaker warrant further elaboration. Research borrowing from Habermas's communicative action has narrow scope conditions. It is applicable only to those rare instances in which communicative authority is equally distributed among all participants of a communicative encounter. The remaining three clusters acknowledge unequal distributions of communicative authority but do not address them in much depth. Positioning tends to remain implicit or enter as an exogenous variable. To put this differently, there is plenty of insight into the making of compelling frames,

especially in research on advocacy and rhetorical force, but less on the making of communicative authority, and how these two makings are intertwined.

Clues provided by political and social theorists help meet these three challenges. First, authors as different as Habermas (1991: 117), on the one hand, and Boltanski and Thévenaut (2000: 228), on the other, conceptualize justification as something that is, broadly speaking, reasonable; 'the justifiable … is reasonable', as the latter put it. Justification, therefore, is about agents trying to figure out a reasonable answer to the question of what they should do. Furthermore, there is a move away from strong assumptions of collectivity. It is no coincidence that Boltanski and Thévenaut write about public justification (as opposed to, say, collective justification). The 'public' is meant to signal a departure from strong intersubjectivity assumptions. Agreements are possible on the communal level but they hardly ever amount to a consensus shared by everyone.

Second, micro-foundations can be fruitfully conceptualized as political judgement. Interest in this concept criss-crosses different paradigms in the social sciences. In an effort to overcome individualistic biases, authors with affinities to rational choice (Elster, 1983: 88; Sen, 2002: 271–310), political psychology (Kahnemann et al., 1982; Marcus et al., 2000; Simon, 1982) and political theory (Beiner, 1983; Benhabib, 2001) use this concept. Even more significant for the task at hand, a number of theorists have linked judgements to justification (Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Boltanski and Thévenaut, 2006).

Third, classical rhetoric tells us a lot about how to weave the making and unmaking of communicative authority into our accounts on communication. Communicative authority is something akin to what Aristotle referred to as *ethos* (1975: 1356a). Aristotle correctly emphasizes that the manner in which actors get their messages across adds to or takes away opportunities for them to be heard and for their message to be persuasive to an audience. Some of the means to augment communicative authority in a communicative encounter are techniques. They can be learnt. Teaching orators to do so has been at the core of theories of rhetoric for millennia (Cicero, 1976; Quintilian, 2001). Other means, however, are less tangible and it is far from clear how — and even whether — they can be learnt. This applies especially to Max Weber's concept of charisma. Some actors have a quasi-natural aura that, for better or worse, makes an audience follow their lead, whereas others lack this powerful means of winning over an audience (Weber, 1922: 140). Bourdieu (1991: 109) is another social theorist with a very firm grasp about how communication generates the status of 'authorized spokesperson' for some actors and not others and how this status, in turn, deeply affects communicative outcomes.

The following three sections build on these insights. I first define public justification, then conceptualize political judgement, and, finally, link the two together in order to get a more complete picture of the dynamics of communicative encounters on public justification.

## Public justification

I define public justification as a communicative process through which a political community converges on what it regards as compelling reasons upon which to act. Thus defined, public justification has four key features. This section discusses these features in detail.

First, public justification is about a political community figuring out what to do. This community can be a nation-state, civil society network, security community and so on. Justification is a constant and never-ending demand on the politics of a community. It is an 'imperative', as Boltanski and Thévenot (2000: 209) put it, at least in political systems that allow the public to raise criticisms (Bies and Shapiro, 1988: 677). This imperative is by no means limited to justifying *a posteriori*. To be sure, such justifications can be quite important. They may serve, for example, some face-saving value for decision-makers in the aftermath of a decision they made. But there is much more to justification. In order for a community to be able to initiate and sustain a course of action — especially the most fateful ones such as a nation's going to war — justification is a constant challenge. Oftentimes, even the most influential leaders depend on some measure of more widely agreed-upon reasons in a community in order to make the community act in certain ways rather than others (Jackson, 2006; Krebs and Jackson, 2007). In Sewell's terminology, explaining public justifications provides paradigmatic explanations for political action (Sewell, 2005: 332). These are not explanations that can give the utmost detail of the nuances of every action taken. But they can explain how a general course of action becomes possible.

Second, public justifications are generated through communication. Members of a community can communicate with one another in a meaningful way because they share a stock of background knowledge that anchors their communication. There is a repertoire of universals from which senders can select the building blocks of their messages and that enables receivers to make sense of these messages. To be sure, the extent to which universals are shared across a community is always limited. Individuals may acquire a certain measure of more or less idiosyncratic universals, different sub-communities within a community may adhere to different universals, and the same universals may be interpreted rather differently by different actors within the community (Ansell, 1997: 373; Beiner, 1983: 132). This plurality poses challenges for communication and understanding. But it is constitutive of communities that, despite all the plurality, there is a constellation of agreements that provides actors with opportunities to engage in some kind of meaningful communication with one another.

Third, public justifications are convergences of reasons. Note that convergence is a much broader term than consensus. Given the plurality of communities, we cannot always expect consensus upon shared reasons (D'Agostino, 1996; Gaus, 2003). We cannot always expect convergences either, but these are more frequent. Different degrees of depth of convergence can be distinguished. Acquiescence is the most superficial one of these degrees. People simply acquiesce with a dominant argument but they are not convinced (Nölle-Neumann, 1980). In a compromise, people are not fully convinced either but they agree to mutual concessions that do not violate their deepest-held beliefs (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: 374–375; Habermas, 1991: 117). In a consensus, people share an argument; they are convinced of it (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 39; Habermas, 1995). Mobilization is the deepest kind of convergence. Not only are people persuaded, but they are also fully prepared to contribute their share to the joint action to be taken (Snow et al., 1986; Tilly, 1978).

In addition, different degrees of breadth of convergence can be distinguished. Not everyone in a community shares one of the depths of convergence described above. Depending

on how broad the convergence with regard to any of these different degrees of depth is, I distinguish between limited, widespread and complete convergence. While the latter is very rare indeed, the former two occur more frequently. In short, convergences tend to be patchworks of different intensities and extents of agreements. Hardly ever do they amount to consensus or even mobilization shared by everyone.

Fourth, public justifications are about convergences of compelling reasons upon which to act as a community.[6] In International Relations, these reasons are sometimes narrowed down to a single category. There is a strand of thought that writes about reasons understood as just reasons (Müller, 2011; Welch, 1993). The securitization literature conceptualizes reasons in terms of their security implications (Buzan et al., 1998). Other authors develop typologies in order to capture the full range of reasons around which communities converge. In our discipline, Alker (2011) writes about political, ethical and religious reasons. In social theory, Habermas (1991: 117) distinguishes pragmatic, ethical and moral reasons. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identify six orders of worth in order to get at different patterns of establishing the reasonable.[7]

An alternative route for understanding the nature of these reasons is to follow Bruno Latour's maxim to 'follow the actors themselves' (Latour, 2005: 12). In this reading, the scholarly task is to uncover what kinds of intersubjectively compelling reasons actors generate. 'The task of defining and ordering the social' is 'left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst' (Latour, 2005: 23). This study pursues this route of scholarly restraint. Different kinds of reasons are frequently interwoven. For the actors we study, distinctions between, say, reasons of consequences and reasons of appropriateness are often fluid at best. It is an important task, therefore, to uncover in empirical research how actors, in a given situation, weave different reasons together in order to arrive at what is compelling to them as opposed to superimposing scholarly categories upon their own highly contingent 'logics of action'.

## Political judgement

What is political judgement? I define it as the human faculty to orientate oneself in a political situation procedurally and substantially by subsuming the particulars of this situation, sometimes more reflexively and sometimes more habitually, under selected universals of political life.[8] This section discusses the four key features of this definition.

First, political judgement is a human faculty. With the exception of the Sophists (Tindale, 2004: 45), classical thought was very sceptical about this, arguing that only a handful of talented and educated people acquire the capacity to judge (Aristotle, 1934, 1975; Kant, 1956: B171–172; 1974: Einl. II; Plato, 1925, 1961). Although Arendt's influential work on judgement can be understood as a reinterpretation of Kant's writings on judgement in many ways, she makes a very strong case that judgement is a human faculty (Arendt, 1961, 2003, 2006). It is not that people always exercise this judgement and, if they do so, their judgements may be far removed from the good judgements that Plato and Aristotle had in mind. But everybody has the capacity to judge. Current debates on judgement widely agree that judgement is a human faculty (Beiner, 1983; Benhabib, 2001).

Second, judging involves subsuming particulars under universals. Universals have already been discussed above. They are what classical scholars of rhetoric aptly baptized

commonplaces (Aristotle, 1975; Cicero, 2003). Some ideas are so familiar to us that we trust using them as anchors for our figuring out what to do. They make up a repertoire of universals that we can employ to make sense of the world. Particulars are the more tangible ideas through which a socially embedded individual (henceforth, simply individual) comes to define a given political situation. These more tangible ideas become intelligible only in light of the interpretation of universals that individuals apply to them.

In more concise language, this process of applying universals to particulars entails subsuming particulars under universals. In its most simple form, P becomes intelligible to me because there is a category U that is familiar to me and I interpret P to be a manifestation of U. Most cases of judgement are more complex than this. Judgements are often intricately woven webs of subsumptions, featuring multiple particulars and universals. With particulars and subsumptions of particulars under universals we have to be even more sceptical to what extent they are shared within a community than with regard to universals.

Third, judging entails orientating oneself in a political situation. This orientation occurs on two equally important dimensions: substantive and procedural. Individuals orientate themselves substantially by figuring out whether something constitutes a political situation in the first place; if it does, how their communities are to explain the dynamics of this situation; and, based on this grasp of the situation, how the communities are to act. Substantive judgements, in other words, are about individuals trying to make up their minds about what political actions are to be taken by the communities to which they belong. But there is more to orientating oneself in a political situation. Individuals also orientate themselves procedurally. They figure out to what community they belong in a given situation, how they relate to other members of this community and how they can make themselves heard in this community.

Note that the universals, and therefore also the particulars of substantive and procedural judgements, are quite different. The compartment of the repertoire of universals that pertains to substantive judgements is all about widely taken-for-granted ideas about the political community and its relations to other communities, for example, what the community stands for, what makes it flourish, and what threatens it. The compartment of the repertoire of universals that is of relevance for procedural judgements, by contrast, is all about widely taken-for-granted relations among actors that define their locations and aspirations in a community's political games. These differences between the compartments of universals manifest themselves in different judgements. In the literature, most authors write about what is here referred to as substantive judgements. Yet Bourdieu puts a lot of emphasis on procedural judgements (Bourdieu, 1984). Arendt's work is telling about both. In her controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she argues convincingly that Adolf Eichmann refused to make substantive judgements about the evils of Nazism. But she also shows that he did make — catastrophic — procedural judgements. He judged himself to be in a role of mere receiver of orders, whatever these orders entailed (Arendt, 1964).

Fourth, substantive and procedural orientations range from habitual to reflexive. Kant makes an influential distinction between determinant and reflexive judgements (Kant, 1974: Einl. V). In his view, some judgements do not involve individual autonomy but are determined by clear-cut rules for how to subsume particulars under universals. Other

judgements, by contrast, are different. He maintains that these are reflexive. It is a matter of searching and finding an adequate universal for a particular as well as a plausible subsumption between the two. Kant argues that aesthetic judgements are reflexive. Hannah Arendt discovered the salience of reflexive judgements for politics. She holds that political judgements are reflexive judgements. The selection of the universals and the exercise of subsuming particulars under them are anything but automatic.

Yet Arendt may have gone a bit far with her emphasis on reflexive judgements. Conceptualizations of non-reflexive judgements return in the work of Bourdieu. He does not maintain that these judgements are determinant in the Kantian sense — there are no set rules for subsuming — but he makes a convincing case that agents sometimes subsume particulars under universals habitually. They do not reflect upon them but simply practise what they are used to. Exercising political judgement is best understood on a spectrum from habitual to reflexive. Some judgements are fully reflexive, others are fully habitual, and there is a grey area in between. Note that procedural and substantive dimensions of a given judgement may not be reflexive or habitual to the same extent. Its procedural dimension, for example, may tend towards the habitual end of the spectrum, whereas its substantive dimension may approximate the reflexive end of the spectrum.

Similarly to my definition of public justification, political judgement is located at a higher and more inclusive level of abstraction than existing logics of action. Political judgement thus defined is compatible with research on the four logics of action but it does not privilege any one of them (or other approaches to political agency) *a priori*. Instead, it is a conceptual vantage point for analysing how actors figure out what to do in a given situation. What scholarly logic of action these actors approximate (and if they approximate one or several of them at all) is a matter of empirical research, and I very much suspect that this varies greatly across actors and situations.

## A three-circuit map

This section argues that political judgements generate public justifications, and, vice versa, efforts of justification shape judgements. I develop a three-circuit map as conceptual guidance for empirical research on these connections between judgement and justification.

For heuristic purposes, the map simplifies these connections by identifying three circuits[9] of interaction: perimeter, resonance and structuration. The perimeter circuit, linking the repertoire of universals to judgements and justification, provisionally circumscribes the boundaries of interaction. At times challenging and at times confirming these boundaries, the resonance circuit puts the judgements of different actors, and attempts by these actors to influence public justification, into communicative relations with one another. The structuration circuit feeds what the perimeter and resonance circuits produce back into the repertoire. These circuits operate continuously and simultaneously. Figure 1 summarizes the three-circuit map.

The perimeter circuit links repertoire and judgement to public justification. Individuals make political judgements by selecting universals from the repertoire and subsuming the particulars of a given political situation under these universals. These
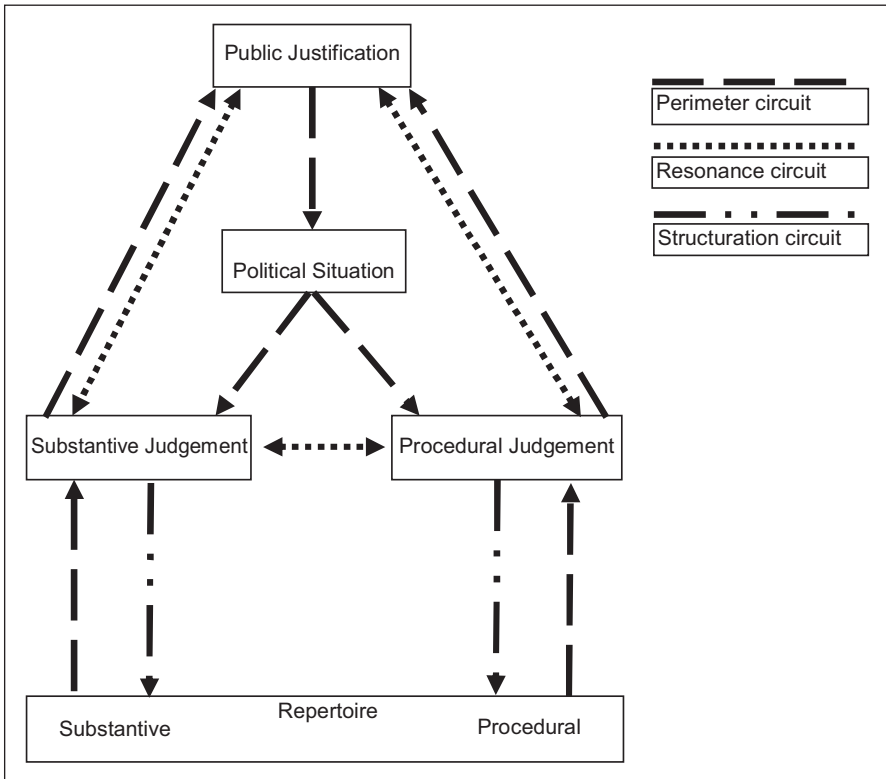
**Figure 1.** Three-circuit map

judgements have two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the substantive dimension. Individuals figure out whether something constitutes a political situation for their community, and, if so, what the community should do. On the other hand, there is the procedural dimension. They make procedural judgements as to what their relevant community is in a given situation, their political efficacy in this situation, and, if they judge themselves efficacious, what measures are to be taken to make themselves heard.[10]

Substantive and procedural judgements feed into communicative contestations to forge public justifications. Substantive judgements affect these efforts in various ways. Those individuals who succeed in making themselves heard actively shape the debate by translating their judgements into arguments; those who are merely in the audience use their substantive judgements to make sense of these arguments. Procedural judgements are of key importance, too. They influence who defines him- or herself as sender or receiver of arguments, and how senders play their cards to sell their arguments. Argumentation, in this context, is to be understood much more broadly (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2011; Crawford, 2009) than is usually done in International Relations. Similarly to conceptualizations in classical rhetoric, it is about persuasion and winning over an audience. On rare

occasions (i.e. if the procedural judgements allow this), even truth-seeking argumentations in a Habermasian sense are possible. But given the, at least in current politics, unaccommodating repertoires for procedural universals allowing for such a truth-seeking discourse — Habermas himself emphasizes this again and again — these are rare occasions.

Efforts to establish public justifications have repercussions for the political situation at hand. Failures to generate justifications — these are very frequent — undermine a community's abilities to influence a political situation. This contributes to the perpetuation of the situation.[11] Successes, by contrast, enable it to initiate and sustain action that potentially affects the situation significantly. As alluded to above, public justifications provide paradigmatic explanations. Justifications provide explanations of how it becomes possible for communities to embark on a general course of action.

Finally, the perimeter circuit comes full circle when the evolution of the political situation feeds back into substantive and procedural judgements. On the one hand, a stagnation of the material underpinnings of the situation does not prompt actors to change their judgements. On the other hand, changing material underpinnings of a situation provide an impetus for actors to reconsider what universals are most apt to subsume the particulars of this situation.[12] Reorientation may even culminate in substantive judgements that a constellation ceases to be a political situation to be dealt with. The challenge to make sense of it, therefore, ends and attention shifts elsewhere. Yet, usually, challenges of political judgement persist for quite a while once something has been identified as a political situation. In other words, it would be misleading to expect the perimeter circuit to complete only one cycle. It usually completes many of them.

The resonance circuit pushes and shoves judgements and justifications through the arguments exchanged among the actors. Depending on the procedural judgements, this circuit flows into two ideal-typical directions. On the one hand, there is the receptive direction of flow. Actors judge themselves to be recipients of arguments. They are open to be persuaded by arguments made by those whom they consider to be more authorized to speak. If these arguments, depending on the message and performance of the senders, resonate with the recipients, they adopt them as their substantive judgements or at least modify their own substantive judgements. This, in turn, feeds back into procedural judgements. It strengthens the positioning of the successful senders as senders of messages, and confirms the recipients' role as recipients of arguments. The opposite is possible as well. Senders may start off being very well positioned but lose this positioning in the resonance circuit because of failures to make their message stick with the audience.

On the other hand, there is the strategic direction of flow. Here, individuals procedurally judge themselves to be senders rather than recipients of messages. Next, making procedural judgements about how to affect the process of justification most effectively, they reconcile their procedural judgements with their substantive judgements. In extreme cases, their substantive judgements are merely filters for their procedural judgements. Politically savvy actors relegate their own substantive judgements to the back seat of the public debate; their own judgements merely circumscribe to what extent they can bend their own persuasions while trying to compose arguments that resonate with the audience. Usually, agents balance procedural and substantive judgements on a more equal

basis. They have their own lines of reasoning about what a community should do, and package them into arguments that cater to the beliefs and sentiments of the audience.

Depending on how well the senders perform in argumentative encounters, these arguments succeed or fail to leave their mark on public justifications. These successes and failures, in turn, provoke new procedural judgements. Failures to make arguments resonate tend to make senders rethink their strategy. They revise their procedural judgements about how to shape public discourse, and a new cycle of the strategic flow of the resonance circuit begins. In extreme cases, they even radically revise their procedural judgements and switch from a strategic to a receptive mode. Successful efforts at winning over, by contrast, direct agents towards continuing the strategic mode. Procedural judgements may be simply reproduced or slightly adapted in order to further emphasize aspects of the previous arguments that have proven to be successful with the audience.

Finally, there is the structuration circuit. Procedural and substantive judgements — formulated and reformulated through the perimeter and resonance circuits — feed back into the repertoire. This feedback partly reproduces the procedural and substantive compartments of the repertoire. After all, agents make use of available universals. Using them in judgements and justification confirms their status as universals. But the feedback also rearranges and changes the repertoire. Repertoires tend to be large, whereas only very few universals are selected for judgements. The few chosen ones are confirmed and emphasized. This makes sure that they remain at — or move to — the forefront of the actors' minds. Universals that are not selected for judgements are not privileged in this way and, over time, may lose their status as universals altogether.

In addition, new universals may be added to the repertoire. There are several pathways for this. One of them involves particulars of judgements as well as entire judgements and justifications becoming emphasized in different cases of public justification again and again. Thus, over time, they can become universals themselves. A more complicated route involves inventing new universals, initially by relating them to existing ones. Agents standing somewhat apart from mainstream discourses because of their idiosyncratic universals or their belonging to sub-communities within a community may be tempted to infuse discourses on the community level with new widely shared universals. They can make ideas stick as new universals with the community only if they — at least initially — link these new ideas closely to existing universals. Over time, the old and the new may lose their resemblances and move further apart (or the old may even lose its status as universal). In Ludwig Wittgenstein's terminology, these new universals and the previously established ones share a family resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1984: paras 65–78). Over time, this family resemblance may become more and more difficult to discern.[13]

## Designing research on public justification

Developing a methodology for using the map for empirical research, this section builds a bridge between the conceptual and empirical levels.[14] The methodology borrows from ethnography (de Volo and Schatz, 2004; Marcus, 1998) and ethnomethodology (Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Sacks, 1995), as well as informal argument analysis (Crawford, 2002: 119–130) and structured, focused comparison (George and Bennett, 2004: 67–72). With due apologies to George and Bennett, perhaps the most appropriate label for it is structured, focused communication analysis. In order to clarify my contentions, I

conclude by illustrating my methodological discussions with sketching a research design for an inquiry into how Germany came to refuse to join George W. Bush's 'coalition of the willing' in intervening in Iraq.

A structured, focused communication analysis is structured by the questions the researcher asks to make sense of the background knowledge available to actors, their putting this knowledge to use while communicating with one another, and the repercussions of this putting to use (including possible changes of this knowledge). It is focused on the scrutiny of a distinct series of communicative encounters through which a community succeeds or fails to figure out what to do. Tailored to inquiring into public justification, such an analysis involves six research tasks. It identifies the evolution of the (a) substantive and (b) procedural dimensions of the repertoire. Then, it traces the (c) perimeter, (d) resonance and (e) structuration circuits. Finally, it (f) discusses alternative explanations.

Completing each research task is structured by a set of questions. Aiming to uncover the configuration of established ideas on relatedness vis-a-vis other communities and within the community, the questions are broad when it comes to identifying the evolving repertoire. The goal is to describe this evolution in detail. Three questions help to (a) get at the substantive compartment of the repertoire: how does the community relate to other communities? What culture of interaction does it stand for vis-a-vis those communities with which it positively identifies? What culture of interaction does it stand for vis-a-vis those communities from which it demarcates itself? There are also three sets of questions to (b) understand the procedural compartment: which actors are recognized as political leaders, experts and/or moral authorities? What is the culture of interaction among the recognized agents? What is the culture of interaction between the recognized agents and the receivers?

The questions for the process-tracing tasks are more concrete. Four questions structure (c) the analysis of the perimeter circuit: what universals do actors select from the repertoire and how do they mould particulars out of them in order to figure out what the community should do? How do these substantive orientations affect debates on public justification? What universals do actors select from the repertoire and how do they mould particulars out of them in order to figure out their political efficacy within the community? How do these procedural orientations affect debates on public justification? Three questions help to (d) trace the resonance circuit: how do senders compose and revisit their messages in order to make them resonate? How do these messages affect debates on public justification and the positioning of the senders? How are receivers won over by messages originating from the senders? How do substantive persuasions affect the positioning of the senders? Two questions structure (e) the analysis of the structuration circuit: how do substantive persuasions feed back into the repertoire? How do procedural persuasions feed back into the repertoire?

The analysis concludes with a discussion of alternative explanations. There are two sets of alternative explanations. First, there are the four clusters of literature that take justification seriously. The three-circuit map is more complex than these approaches. Thus, the onus is on the map to add to the insights generated by research on communicative action, advocacy, rhetorical force and securitization. Second, there is also a need to demonstrate empirically that producing plausible answers to research puzzles in which

we are interested requires pursuing a research agenda on justification. Many authors adhering to the logic of consequences are rather sceptical of this.

The six tasks call for uncovering different degrees of empirical detail. Identifying the constitutive elements of the repertoire (a, b) requires thick description. Any nuance of a universal may matter for the later analysis of the circuits. It is important to take detailed stock of these universals, including the extent to which they are consensual and contested. The three-circuit map provides more guidance for the operation of the circuits (c, d, e). Here, the analysis is more focused and aims at process-tracing.[15] For reasons of feasibility, it primarily focuses on the main protagonists and traces the evolution of their judgements, and how their judgements shape the process of justification, in detail.[16] The secondary focus is on other communicative participants, including the role of the broader public, where inferences to judgements necessitate less in-depth analysis.[17] Addressing alternative explanations starts with the level of empirical detail that these alternative explanations postulate. This usually ranges from correlation and control for many positivist approaches to process-tracing for many postpositivist approaches. If necessary, it proceeds to the mix of thick description and process-tracing required for applying the three-circuit map in empirical research.

The principal time frame of the analysis focuses on what happens between the beginning and end of a distinct series of communicative encounters on a political situation. Yet, in order to be able to thickly describe the repertoire prior to the series in sufficient detail, this time frame has to be significantly extended backwards, and in order to be able to determine structuration effects, it has to be significantly extended forwards. At a minimum, the analysis is to be extended to the previous and next times, respectively, in which a community addressed a similar political situation. Table 1 summarizes the methodological steps required for a structured, focused communication analysis, spelling out how such a structure and focus is to be attained for studying the making of public justifications.

In order to illustrate the above methodological discussion, let me conclude this section with a brief sketch of how such an analysis would look when addressing a particular case. The series of domestic communicative encounters about the question of whether Germany should join the so-called 'coalition of the willing' and go to war against Saddam Hussein in 2003 or not makes for a useful illustration.[18] I confine myself to highlighting some important methodological issues pertaining to structuring and focusing the analysis.

At the core of analysing the substantive compartment of the repertoire is the evolution of Germany's post-World War II culture of military restraint. Of particular importance are the debates about Kosovo in the late 1990s. A centre-left coalition with deep roots in pacifism joined a military intervention against Slobodan Milosevic. Did this amount to a shift away from Germany's long-standing culture of military restraint? Examining the development of the procedural compartment requires identifying the underlying ideas that constitute two kinds of political games: debating foreign policy and electoral campaigning. These games are often distinct but in the case of Germany in 2003, they were deeply intertwined. What were the universals constituting these two games?

Analysing the perimeter circuit proceeds by tracing how actors related this repertoire to the question of intervention against Saddam Hussein. On a substantive level, the key task is to trace how actors related representations of the evolving culture of restraint to Iraq. On a procedural level, the paramount task is to determine

**Table 1.** Structured, focused communication analysis

| Research tasks | Questions | Timeline | Empirical depth |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Identify evolution of repertoire (substantive ideas) | How does the community relate to other communities? What culture of interaction does it stand for vis-a-vis those communities with which it positively identifies? What culture of interaction does it stand for vis-a-vis those communities from which it demarcates itself? | Prior to set of communicative encounters | Thick description |
| Identify evolution of repertoire (procedural ideas) | Which individuals and organizations are recognized as political leaders, experts and/or moral authorities? What is the culture of interaction among the recognized agents? What is the culture of interaction between the recognized agents and the public? | Prior to set of communicative encounters | Thick description |
| Trace perimenter circuit | What universals do actors select from the repertoire and how do they mould particulars out of them in order to figure out what the community should do? How do these substantive orientations affect debates on public justification? What universals do actors select from the repertoire and how do they mould particulars out of them in order to figure out their political efficacy within the community? How do these procedural orientations affect debates on public justification? | During set of communicative encounters | Process-tracing |
| Trace resonance circuit | How do senders compose and revisit their messages in order to make them resonate? How do these messages affect debates on public justification and the positioning of the senders? How are receivers won over by messages originating from the senders? How do substantive persuasions affect the positioning of the senders? | During set of communicative encounters | Process-tracing |

*(Continued)*

**Table 1.** (Continued)

| Research tasks | Questions | Timeline | Empirical depth |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trace structuration circuit | How do substantive persuasions feed back into the repertoire? How do procedural persuasions feed back into the repertoire? | During set of communicative encounters and aftermath | Process-tracing |
| Discuss alternative explanations | What is the added value of the three-circuit map compared to established logics of action (consequences, appropriateness, argumentation and practice)? | Adapt to alternative explanations discussed | |

how they related understandings of political efficacy to the debate on Iraq, determining who the senders and the receivers were, how they come to be placed in the driving seat or the back seat, and how those in the driving seat came to play their cards. In the German case, even a narrow focus on the two main contenders for chancellorship — incumbent Gerhard Schröder and challenger Edmund Stoiber — would produce important results. Due to the electoral campaign, these two agents were clearly in the limelight.

The resonance circuit then takes the researcher firmly into the public debate on Iraq. Perhaps the most fascinating question is how Schröder and Stoiber reconciled their procedural and substantive judgements. Taken together, do these two sets of judgements explain why Schröder vigorously opposed intervention from the beginning and Stoiber, over time and somehow reluctantly, came to embrace an oppositional stance as well? How did other agents enter and shape the debate, for example, intellectuals and journalists, advocates from the trade unions, churches, and other civil society networks? Equally important, what do opinion polls tell us about when, how and by whom the public was won over?

Inquiring into the structuration circuit necessitates addressing the question of whether Iraq 2003 marks a reversal of German foreign policy behind the pre-Kosovo pacifistic leanings. It also requires looking at the question of whether the broad public debate about Iraq 2003 was an exception or whether it has become the norm in matters of peace and war. Much of this depends on whether the researcher finds evidence that modes of electoral campaigning have found their way into established procedural ideas on how to justify resorting to military means through the 2003 debate. Some of it may also depend on whether the researcher finds evidence that Schröder's rather idiosyncratic universals for how to rally the nation — he is sometimes referred to quite aptly as 'Medienkanzler'[19] (media chancellor) — have become more widely shared universals.

The last round of questions is to be asked about the added value compared to alternative explanations. Research on communicative action is not an obvious candidate for explaining this case convincingly. Electoral campaigns make it very unlikely that actors communicate in order to let the better argument come to the fore. The securitization literature does not appear to be a strong candidate either. The debate about Iraq was thoroughly securitized

but this, in the majority view, did not justify taking drastic action (i.e. intervening). Explanations suggested by research on advocacy and rhetorical force, by contrast, are to be dealt with in more depth. An interesting alternative explanation challenging a research agenda on public justification is a rational choice account that focuses on Schröder. The hypothesis that the non-intervention was entirely due to Schröder's deflection from domestic problems would amount to something that may be labelled a diversionary theory of peace.

The time frame for the core analysis spans from the time when George W. Bush started his campaign for intervention in September 2002 to the actual intervention in May 2003. In order to get at the evolution of the repertoire, this frame is to be extended backwards at least to the debate about how to respond to the escalation of violence in Kosovo in 1998. An alternative extension would start with October 1990 because reunification had deep effects on the evolution of taken-for-granted ideas on foreign policy and foreign policymaking. The analysis is to be extended forward to March 2011. Analysing the debates about intervention in Libya — the first ones since 2003 — provides an opportunity for researchers to determine whether the 2003 public justifications for non-intervention sedimented into the repertoire.

Process-tracing and, even more so, thick description require consulting multiple sources. Key sources for process-tracing include biographies and autobiographies, speeches and writings of the main protagonists, as well as parliamentary debates, newspaper and/or news magazines, and public opinion polls in order to identify the doings of actors who stand less in the political limelight and to be able to trace the repercussions of the communicative encounters. For the thick description, all of the above is important as well. But more sources are to be added with a view of getting at deeply held taken-for-granted ideas. Even sources that are usually not considered of much value for researching world politics, such as films, novels, paintings and cartoons, can turn out to be very useful to complete this task.

## Conclusion

This study addressed the question of how communities produce public justifications. It confined itself to the conceptual and methodological levels of exploring this question. On the conceptual level, I argued that it is political judgements that generate public justifications, and, vice versa, justifications shape judgements. I developed the three-circuit map as a heuristic device for studying the flows from judgements to justifications (perimeter and resonance), and justifications to judgements (resonance and structuration). On the methodological level, my discussions about how to put the three-circuit map to use in empirical research developed a structured, focused communication analysis and tailored it to the study of public justification.

While this article primarily seeks to build on the existing literature on justification, the three-circuit map may also be a fruitful device for further eclectic research on communication in world politics. The research map, not being a fully fledged theory, remains sufficiently open to invite inter-perspectival debate. Such a debate would help to further zoom in on certain areas of the map. Exploring criss-crossings between the literature on social movements (Tilly, 2008) and Foucault-inspired studies on governmentability

(Joseph, 2010), for instance, would help to improve our grasp of the repertoire available to actors. Studies on argumentation (Crawford, 2000) and political psychology (Mercer, 2010) have important things to say about how emotions constitute practical reasoning, and, thus, on how actors come to make political judgements.

In the last decade, a lot of studies — especially the four clusters on justification — have dealt with how messages come to succeed in leaving, or fail to leave, their mark on political outcomes. More debate across different perspectives may help us improve our understanding of what kinds of messages stick with what kinds of audiences. There may be some receivers who are more easily won over by rather abstract quasi-syllogistic messages, for example, and others by more concrete analogical reasoning. Likewise, the interplay of verbal and non-verbal messages may be very important, too. When it comes to resonance and structuration more generally, more debate is required between authors who focus on the discursive level and writers who primarily address the practices operating underneath the radar screen of discourse (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). Perhaps De Certeau's imaginative criss-crossings between practice and rhetoric point in the right direction (De Certeau, 1984).

Such a debate may also help to zoom out from the map and look at adjacent areas. Today, communicative infrastructures may very well make for the most fascinating of these areas. Some time ago, Flusser (1998) sketched several thought-provoking types of communicative encounters, depending on who listens and who receives as well as the communicative channels through which they interact. It seems that we need to adapt these and similar attempts to the ongoing communications revolution. As the spread of revolutionary activities in the Arab world highlights dramatically, the rapid advancements in communications technology have very important repercussions for politics. This includes how elites and counter-elites justify their actions, how they mobilize support, and how they defend and change political systems.

This study started off as a study on public justification and ends with sketching a much broader research agenda on communication. This is no coincidence. Politics — global politics very much included — is all about implicit and explicit communication. Our field has come a long way towards paying more attention to communication, especially in the last two decades. Scholarship tending more towards the so-called 'argumentative turn' (Fischer and Forester, 1993) and 'practice turn' (Schatzki et al., 2001), respectively, has especially contributed to this.[20] But it is time to explore the criss-crossings of different perspectives more closely in order to get a better grasp of the doings of *homo communicans* in our evolving world. The three-circuit map is meant to facilitate this endeavour.

## Notes

  1  Legitimization (or legitimation) is a broader concept and does not necessarily involve these explicit exchanges.

2　I borrow this expression from an ontological debate sparked by Alexander Wendt (1999: 92–138).

3　This study is concerned with practical reasoning on the micro (judgement) and macro (justification) levels. 'Figuring out what to do' is a useful paraphrase for practical reasoning (see Milgram, 2001: 1).

4　Yet sharing a sociological ontology, most accounts on justification — mine included — are closer to appropriateness than consequences. In this context, it is noteworthy that March and Olsen (1989: 49) write that establishing appropriateness has a lot to do with communication. This is an important clue because it introduces a dynamic element that guards against determinism.

5　Among the four clusters of literature, arguments on rhetorical force — if further refined — may be best equipped to accommodate these different intensities and extents of agreements. Schimmelfennig's writings on rhetorical action allude to a kind of agreement that is located in between acquiescence and compromise (Schimmelfennig, 2000). On compromise, see Bellamy et al. (2012).

6　I use the term 'compelling' in order to avoid the term 'persuasive', which tends to carry connotations of idealized communicative encounters with it in International Relations. In the English language, 'compelling reasons' has a broad meaning, ranging from 'convincing reasons' to 'overpowering reasons'. This broad range is very apt for the study of public justifications. For similarly broad conceptualizations of persuasion, see understandings of political communication outside International Relations (Seiter and Gass, 2004).

7　There is an interesting tension in Boltanski and Thévenot's work. On the one hand, they define public justification in terms of intersubjectively just reasons upon which to act. On the other hand, their orders of worth go considerably beyond the equation of reasons with just reasons. The mode of evaluation in the civic order of worth, for example, is the collective interest.

8　I deal with this concept in more depth elsewhere (Kornprobst, 2011).

9　I borrow this metaphor from Clegg's work on power (Clegg, 1989).

10　Note that different forms of power are woven into the repertoire that underpins judgements on political efficacy. What I suggest here is far removed from an argument about free choice.

11　Take global environmental governance, for example. Failures to reach public justifications for actions to be taken against climate change contribute to the exacerbation of an already rather dire situation.

12　Yet note that whether such a reorientation occurs or not is, ultimately, up to socially embedded agency. There is no automatism linking a changing situation to changing judgements. Judgement involves a measure of autonomy and this makes it impossible for the researcher to predict what an agent will do.

13　At first glance, George W. Bush's doctrine of pre-emption, used for justifying the intervention against Saddam Hussein, may appear as an entirely novel universal in US foreign policy discourse. At second glance, however, pre-emption can be traced back to firmly established universals, most importantly, appeasement.

14　Due to length restrictions of an article, it is sometimes impossible to combine detailed theoretical explorations with fully fledged empirical research. As an alternative, the theorist may elaborate on methodological tools required to put innovative theoretical frameworks to use. This section follows this strategy, which is increasingly often used in the field (Pouliot, 2007; Wiener, 2009).

15　Sociological interpretations of process-tracing are more compatible with the three-circuit map than individualistic ones. For a very good overview, see Faletti (2006).

16　Conversational analysis, a strand of ethnomethodology, encourages the researcher to examine the sequencing of communicative moves (Sacks, 1995). This is, *inter alia*, very useful for identifying the protagonists.

17  When it comes to putting resonance under scrutiny, for example, a congruence test suffices for the secondary focus, whereas a more demanding diffusion test is required for the primary one. On these tests, see Kornprobst (2007: 83).

18  A much broader analysis would be interesting as well. What does the three-circuit map have to contribute to explain the schism in the transatlantic security community over Iraq?

19  This characterization was particularly frequently found among journalists. For example, see König (2002).

20  In International Relations, authors associated with the argumentative (or rhetorical) turn include, for example, Kratochwil (1989), Müller (1994), Risse (2000), Crawford (2002), Mitzen (2005), Goddard (2006), Krebs and Jackson (2007), and Bjola and Kornprobst (2011). For the practice (or habitual) turn, see, for instance, Guzzini (2000), Hopf (2002), Neumann (2002), Adler (2005), Pouliot (2008) and Wiener (2008).

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