FOREIGN POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF ALTERITY:
A DIALOGICAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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1. Introduction

The questions of identity and identity formation within the discipline of International Relations witnessed an increased interest following the crisis that this discipline underwent during the 1980s. Identity offered new ground on which the discipline could revitalize itself. Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil mention with a certain acuity that the discipline of International Relations, stuck into the Cold War scheme, had enormous problems coping with the nationalist phenomenon. “The very suspicion, therefore, that somewhere along the way inter(national) relations has lost its constitutive ‘national’ component by becoming overwhelmingly statecentric is quite embarrassing.” This paper is aimed at reintegrating the national to the international perspective by developing a **dialogical theory of international relations**.

In the first part of this paper, I will develop several key notions necessary to the development of a dialogical understanding of international relations. Grounding my approach on the works of Russian intellectual Mikhail Mikhailovitch Bakhtin I will define what is to be understood by **dialogism** and its constitutive notion of **trangredience**. Both notions entail that any dialogical perspective on international relations will have to deal with the identity-alterity nexus. While it is widely acknowledged that an actor’s identity is socially constructed, as Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro point out in their reflections on the multiple contributions to *The Culture of National Security*, this is generally however a “starting point”, since only few studies say anything about the process of identity construction as most of the focus is on its impact. Hence, this paper seeks to contribute a research framework within which it will be possible to develop a theory of the process of identity construction in international relations and which will also enable us to see more concretely how these identities once formed might perform and interact.

The second part of this paper will be dedicated to the actual integration of dialogism within the discipline of International Relations. This will lead me to investigate the meaning of identity when one speaks about international relations and thus concentrate on national

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identity as a medium for any state to reach a sovereign and legitimate status within the international realm but also as a medium, a *hermeneutical locus*, for scholars in order to study the mechanisms of foreign policy defined as a politics of alterity. As I hope to show, a dialogical conception of international relations can help us to study both the rhetorical and behavioral components of foreign policy over time.\(^4\)

2. The Foundations of a dialogical approach to International Relations

2.a Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism and the identity-alterity nexus

The first part of this paper will be dedicated to the development of a bakhtinian conception of identity through Bakhtin’s conceptions of the self, alterity and their relations toward each other. As I will develop a theory of identity based upon one of the three models Bakhtin developed in his work\(^5\), throughout this paper I will take a hermeneutic and interpretative stance. The underpinning of the model I will draw upon is the key notion of *dialogism* which underlies Bakhtin’s thought and is fundamentally linked to another notion, that of alterity.\(^6\) In order to reflect on a general model applicable to the discipline of International Relations one should first render Bakhtin’s “anthropological philosophy”\(^7\), which parallels his literary theory, so as to understand identity and the link it has with alterity.

But what exactly is *dialogism*? Bearing in mind that Bakhtin essentially wrote literary theory, one should specify that *dialogism* is a conception that initially deals with discourse in its most general meaning, but relates more specifically to *utterance*. In “The Problem of Speech Genre”, Bakhtin states:

> The expression of an utterance can never be fully understood or explained if its thematic content is all that is taken into account. The expression of an utterance always *responds* to a greater or lesser degree, that is, it expresses the speaker’s attitude toward others’ utterances and not just his attitude toward the object of his utterance. […] However monological the utterance may be […], however much it

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\(^5\) The two other models of selfhood which I will not develop here are the *carnival self* and the *architectonic self*. See EMERSON, Caryl. “Keeping the Self Intact During the Culture Wars: A Centennial Essay for Mikhail Bakhtin”. *New Literary History*, vol. 27, 1996, p. 166.

\(^6\) It is worth noting that the term *dialogism* itself was never used by Bakhtin. This term, however, is a necessary notion as Michael Holquist notes: “There can be no theoretical excuse for spawning yet another ‘ism,’ but the history of Bakhtin’s reception seems to suggest that if we are to continue to think about his work in a way that is useful, some synthetic means must be found for categorizing the different ways he mediated on dialogue. That is, some way must be found to conceive his varied activity as a unity, without losing sight of the dynamic heterogeneity of his achievement” (HOLQUIST, Michael. *Dialogism*. Bakhtin and his World. London – New York, Routledge, coll. New Accents, 1990, p. 15).

may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. [...] The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself [...] is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well. [...] The interrelations between inserted others’ speech and the rest of the speech (one’s own) [...] are analogous (but, of course, not identical) to relations among rejoinders in dialogue.⁸

Ideally speaking, an utterance does not obtain its full meaning unless it is rendered as part of a semantic network which includes all existing utterances. Hence, dialogism is this *interweaving* of utterances that respond to each other. In the quotation above, one can clearly see that Bakhtin distinguishes between two levels within an utterance. The first level, which we can call ontological and on which I ground my theoretical approach, is constituted by dialogism-per-se, that is the universal process through which we can actually give meaning to utterances by their *interweaving*. The second level is to be found in the characterization of the utterance. In a bakhtinian perspective, it means that each utterance possesses a style and that this style reflects a type of alterity figuration. In other words, it is a matter of evaluating the extent to which the other is taken into account in an utterance. To give an example, a possible characterization resides in what Bakhtin calls monologism. Indeed, monologism,

[...] at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights [...]. With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons.⁹

A monologue, if it represents the reflexive absence of an other, still participates in the dialogue with the latter. It is worth noting, at this point, that dialogism is not necessarily a direct dialogue between two active interlocutors. Bakhtin’s dialogical theory says that any actual and active utterance can rightly enter into a dialogue with an absent and passive

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utterance. All in all, an utterance is functionally defined by at least one or many utterances and it belongs to a set of utterances either contemporary or preexisting, active or passive. Bakhtin express this clearly in the following:

“The utterance proves to be a very complex and multiplanar phenomenon if considered not in isolation and with respect to its author (the speaker) only, but as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other, related utterances […]. In reality […] any utterance, in addition to its own theme, always responds (in the broad sense of the word) in one form or another to others’ utterances that precede it. [T]he Utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communication. [F]rom the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account the possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. […] An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity. […] This addressee can be an immediate participant-interlocutor in an everyday dialogue, […] a more or less differentiated public, ethnic group, contemporaries, like-minded people, opponents and enemies. […] And it can also be an indefinite, unconcretized other […]. Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance.”

Addressivity is an essential characteristic of an utterance and it allows us to anchor dialogism into a theory of identity for at least two reasons. First, an utterance is an encompassing category which does not limit itself to discourse. Any utterance is a conception of the world, a Weltanschauung. The context of the enunciation is fundamental in so far as “in any case the extra-verbal situation is the only exterior cause of the utterance, it does not act from outside like a mechanical force. No, the situation enters inside the utterance as a necessary constitutive of its semantic structure.” Secondly, in an intertextual relation, the utterance is considered as witnessing a subject. In order to become dialogical, the semantic or logical relation to an object must therefore be embodied in a discourse, that is an utterance, and receive an author, that is the creator of this utterance through which he/she expresses

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12 Todorov, Tzvetan. *Ibid*.
his/her position. In other words, from language we enter another realm of existence, that is the realm of the subject\textsuperscript{15}.

Now I shall mention two fundamental elements within the dialogical conception of discourse and life: the separation and the simultaneity of the self and the other\textsuperscript{16}. Michael Holquist makes it clear that dialogism deals with bodies (i.e. physical, political, ideational) that are holding simultaneous yet different space\textsuperscript{17}. This means that the value and the meaning of an utterance are relative to its expression, its context of expression and its relation to another utterance. An utterance is always put forward as a function of other utterances and thus expresses an answer to one or many utterances which preceded it. This simultaneity, however, does not imply that utterances should be expressed in relation to the same temporal continuum. A dialogue can indeed be established between a present utterance and a past utterance since the latter never really is fixed by time\textsuperscript{18}. As expressed by Bakhtin:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of the past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival\textsuperscript{19}.

In review, dialogism is defined as the interweaving of utterances that respond to each other. An utterance is characterized by its expression, its context and its relation to another utterance whether this relation is present or past, active or passive. Furthermore, an utterance’s addressivity links its discursive dimension to its subjective one by enabling the discerning of its figuration of alterity, hence dialogically of its own self.

I shall now turn to Bakhtin’s anthropological philosophy in order to see the place of alterity in the definition of identity. In Bakhtin’s characteristic style, one can see a movement


\textsuperscript{17} HOLQUIST, Michael. Ibid., pp. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{18} In his exquisite study of the footnote, Anthony Grafton somehow reaches a similar conclusion as for the historical discipline: “Only the use of the footnotes enables historians to make their texts not monologues but conversations, in which modern scholars, their predecessors, and their subjects all take part” (GRAFTON, Anthony. The Footnote. A curious history. London, Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 234).
beginning in literature and ending in the realm of existence. Writing on the relation existing between the writer and his/her hero and of the necessity for the former to detach him/herself from the latter (if he/she resembles the author too much), Bakhtin affirms that this activity of putting things in perspective, or in other words to perceive him/herself under another referent is a daily act of our existence. Generally, we can say of the other that he/she is a transgressing element of our own conscience. The notion of transgression, borrowed from the German school of aestheticism, states that an element is called transgressing when it designates “elements of our conscience which are exteriors to it but nonetheless essential to the process of its perfection, to its constitution as a totality.” Transgression thus defines the necessary relation and dependence that a self establishes with multiple alterities. Bakhtin explains that a self cannot feel itself within its own realm of existence. Human beings, he states, have an “absolute need for the other, for the other’s seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity – the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality.” Transgression is constitutive of dialogism; a person truly is his/herself, finished in his/her own totality, only to the extent that he/she can integrate the regard of the other. Hence for Bakhtin it is only possible to become truly self-conscious, to be oneself, when one reveals one’s self to the other, through the other and with the help of the other. Let’s take the example of an observer: he/she can only see the things toward which he/she is turned. Another observer facing him/her will also only be able to see what stands in front of him/her. Both of them are doing the same thing, at the same time but in accordance with a different referent. In other words, both of them are separated yet simultaneous. One has access to a reality which the other cannot perceive and vice versa. Dialogue allows them to cover the entirety of the world but always through their relative positions in the world.

It is therefore impossible to conceive a finite being as a totality outside the relations that link it to the other. Identity-per-se cannot be total and finite since it is relative to its position in the world, a world that only allows identity a limited perception of itself. For Bakhtin, in order to reach a finite and total identity, one has to integrate through dialogue the

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20 It would be wrong to consider Bakhtin as someone viewing at literature as existence. On the importance of daily life in Bakhtin’s work see EMERSON, Caryl. *Op. cit.*, pp. 112-115.
vision that a multitude of other identities (alterity) possess of the world, as we have seen in the example of the two observers. The only ethically and epistemologically sound way to undertake such an assimilation is through the dialogue. Indeed, the dialogical relation allows the integration of the other with the self on a basis that respects the other as a self since the other is ontologically necessary to the completion of one’s own self. Monological utterances, as described above, enter the dialogical network that is existence but they stand on an unsound ethical and epistemological position since they tend to subvert the other and do not allow it a proper conscience that is reflexively identical to them. Within a monological figuration, the other becomes an object of the self’s own conscience which can be interpreted and modified at will in function of the self’s own needs as an identity.

Before adapting Bakhtin’s dialogism to the discipline of International Relations, I shall synthesize briefly what we have seen so far. Bakhtin’s dialogism draws both on ethical and epistemological concerns. This is reflected in the transgredient structure of the relation existing between alterity and identity. Ethically, the completion and the perfection of identity is determined by the reflexive and dialogical integration of alterity, this is to be opposed to an unethical approach which would understand alterity both as an object and through monological lenses. Epistemologically, dialogism enables us to tackle the question of identity and alterity through the existence of an hermeneutical locus – a conception that draws on the three main characteristics of an utterance (expression, context, and relation) but that I will develop in the next section – by using its definition as an interweaving of mutually-responsive utterances. This interweaving relation constitutes the transgredient relation between an identity and an alterity: one cannot be defined without another.

2.b Dialogism, transgredience, and International Relations

Within the discipline of International Relations, the ethical concern with regard to alterity can be found for instance in authors such as Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney. Both authors, grounding their approach on the thoughts of writers such as Tzvetan Todorov or Ashis Nandy, shed light on the need to redefine the “third image” notion.

developed by Kenneth Waltz\(^{30}\) within a “World History” and a constructivist approach to international relations\(^{31}\) in order to fully integrate the ethical realm into the field of International Relations theory. In this global approach where cultural interactions play a preponderant role, the place of the other is fundamental. In words that parallel somehow those of Bakhtin, Inayatullah and Blaney reveal that they:

\[\ldots\] suspect that our worldview, our culture, and ourself are partial, parochial, and perhaps invalid in some significant way. \[\ldots\] Through critical conversation we require others both to affirm the veracity and to expose the limits of our vision. Thus the discovery of the other is not incidental but necessary to our quest for meaning and wholeness.\(^{32}\)

Then, shifting from an ontological point of view to an epistemological one, they explain that they do not want to eliminate the classical factors used for the explanation and the understanding of international relations (i.e. gain and power) but on the contrary,

\[\ldots\] we wish to suggest that we may attain a richer understanding of these motives if we envision them as aspects of the social construction of human agency in a culturally full international society where the search for identity and meaning requires that the self discover the other.\(^{33}\)

If Inayatullah and Blaney articulate here, without naming it, the basis of transgressedience, they do not help us in knowing how we can evolve from an ontological and ethical perspective of the international system (a type of devoir-être, or normative should-be, which is to be linked more to critical theorists than to Bakhtin)\(^{34}\) to an epistemological and methodological approach allowing us to fully integrate alterity within the study of international relations. To do so, I propose here two conclusions for the notions of identity and alterity which we can draw from our excursion into Bakhtin’s Work.

\(\text{29} \text{Ashis Nandy extensively wrote on the Indian and British responses to colonialism and on the dialogue of civilizations.}\)


\(\text{31} \text{On constructivism in International Relations Theory see KUBÁLKOVÁ, Vendulka; ONUF, Nicholas; KOWERT, Paul. “Constructing Constructivism”. \textit{International Relations in a Constructed World}, 1998, pp. 3-21.}\)

\(\text{32} \text{INAYATULLAH, Naeem ; BLANEY, David L. \textit{Op. cit.}, pp. 65-66 (italics are mine). See also p. 73.}\)

\(\text{33} \text{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 74.}\)

\(\text{34} \text{See for instance \textit{Ibid.}, p. 82 : “[W]e must turn the axis of study away from the North American fixation with competition and order to that of suffering, exploitation, and injustice. \[\ldots\] We must expose the hegemony of the motive of competitive gain as well as the sustained disciplinary imperialism of ‘economism’. We need to treat this hegemony as an explicitly cultural phenomenon”. This is to be contrasted with Bakhtin’s acknowledged indifference to questions of power in general (EMERSON, Caryl. \textit{Op. cit.}, pp. 118-119).}\)
First, we can define identity as an utterance with the meaning given before. Indeed, we saw that an utterance does not limit itself to a simple linguistic act but is also the incarnation of a conception of the world. Equally, an utterance is the reflection of an existential and structural situation within which the author of the utterance belongs. The link between those two elements, an utterance and its author, is crucial since it offers us the semiotic of the former according to the latter. At the same time, the author’s identity is analytically accessible to us through the creation of a hermeneutical locus. In a bakhtinian perspective, the hermeneutical locus is the interweaving in a specific place (the utterance) of an identity’s expression, its contextuality and its relation to other identities (other utterances). It is worth noting that this conception is close to the one articulated by Charles Taylor in his Sources of the Self. Indeed for Taylor, the question of identity is the question to know who I am, and to know who I am is to know where I am.\textsuperscript{35}

Second, we also saw that any utterance can only be articulated as a function of other utterances and hence an identity can be understood ontologically and epistemologically only within its relation to one or more alterities, that is other identities. Those multiple identities are separated from each other by the diverse contextualities in which they developed and continue to develop, as well as the contextualities through which they enter into simultaneous relations with one another. As we have seen, this simultaneity does not dismiss the existence of either relations with utterances (identities) from the past or privileged dialogical relations with a limited number of identities (in function of historical and/or structural circumstances) in their mutual definition. Indeed by showing the different figurations of alterity I hope to demonstrate the transgredient character of the dialogical relation within which the self and the other mutually define themselves. In short, the self is constituted/constructed in relation to the other (however it is figured), and through a parallel scheme, the other as an identity undergoes the same process. This is clearly expressed by David Campbell in his study of United States foreign policy:

The problematic of identity/difference contains, therefore, no foundations which are prior to, or outside of, its operation. […] The constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries which serve to demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’, a ‘self’ from an ‘other’, a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign’.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{36} CAMPBELL, David. Writing Security. United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, p. 8 (italics are mine). The inscription of boundaries to which Campbell is referring to is reflected in our opinion in the figurations of alterity which we will develop latter on.
I can now formulate the main lines of a dialogical theory of international relations which I will further develop in the next part of this paper. One aim of such a theory is to bridge the gap existing between the national and international levels in any analysis of interstate relations by discerning the transgredient character of the constitution of an identity and the link this transgredient character reveals between the domestic agency of identity and its international counterpart. As we will see, national identity is to be considered the hermeneutical locus where one can find out which alterities are to be examined as a determinant in this constitution (relationality), to which extent and under which circumstances (contextuality), and through which figuration (expressivity). Thus, we see that traditional conceptions of foreign policy have to be reformulated along those new lines.

3. National identity, foreign policy and the politics of alterity

3.a National identity and International Relations

In the previous part, we defined identity as an utterance. This definition implied that identity both is a discursive and a performative act. To follow Denis-Constant Martin, “[...] identity is a discourse, better, a narration and should be analyzed as such. Identity also is an address which supposes addressees and which entangles individuals and groups”37. This echoes what was previously said about dialogism and its addressivity. Furthermore, to understand dialogism as a theory of identity is to understand the latter as a narrative. Narrative identity is a conception of identity that unifies into one ontological and methodological scheme the three dimensions of time, space and relationality of an identity defined as an utterance and in its relations to other identities38. This reminds us of what I called the hermeneutical locus within dialogism. In effect, Margaret Somers underlines that such a type of approach: “[...] provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space”39. Hence such an opportunity is to be taken within a dialogical approach of identity in order to grasp this “virtual seat”, as Claude Lévi-Strauss put it, which is necessary to

39 Ibid., p. 607.
understand and explain a certain number of things but to which we cannot ultimately give a real existence. Thus,

Narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events. Indeed, the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting (however unstably) parts to a constructed configuration or a social network of relationships (however incoherent or unrealizable) composed of symbolic, institutional, and material practices. [...] To make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality. This works for us because when events are located in a temporal (however fleeting) and sequential plot we can then explain their relationship to other events. Plot can thus be seen as the logic or syntax of narrative.

An identity then, seen as a narrative “event”, is to be plotted through a multitude of commitments and identifications which basically give the structures and the horizon by which individuals determine what is good, what is worth, what should be done or with what one should associate or oppose oneself. An individual is then composed by several identities, multiple personal and collective selves. These different identities are not equivalent for those committing and/or identifying themselves with them, they are hierarchically articulated. There are “evaluative criterion” which can allow us to see if some identities are felt contingents – to the extent that they are circumstantial – or if others, however, might be felt as hypergoods. Hypergoods are, as Charles Taylor defined it, “[...] goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about”. Identities capable of generating strong emotions and which possess a political importance such as religious, national, or ethnic identities fulfill the hypergoods’ category conditions.

What then is identity in regard to the discipline of International Relations? I think that the answer to this question lies in the problematic of agency: who or what is the agent of international relations? It is now widely acknowledged that there are no single agents in the international realm; International Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations,

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**Notes:**

41 SOMERS, Margaret R. Ibid., pp. 616-617.
43 SOMERS, Margaret R. Ibid., p. 617.
Transnational entities or even emerging forms of identity like the so-called “Earth identity” are generally considered, with some restrictions on the latter, as agents. Nonetheless, the state remains the main agent of international relations. One should note, however, that a state, within the international relations realm, does not possess a proper ontological status outside the acts constituting its reality. Those acts aimed at establishing a sovereign presence are primarily directed to those constituting the state itself: the individuals as a national community. Their national/collective identity is the product of an identity discourse whose goal is to stabilize an identity that ought to be considered as primary and unique. In effect, a national identity is in competition with other types of identities whether personal or collective. The whole process of nation-building thus is to transform a contingent and unstable identity into a hypergood. An identity discourse henceforth produces both the national community and the organization that represents it: the state. Denis-Constant Martin explains that an identity discourse generates the community and thus legitimizes the organization that represents the former and holds the authority to speak in its name. This formulation of identity, when coupled with the Bakhtinian definition, reminds us of Benedict Anderson’s conception of the nation as an “imagined political community”, in the sense that the national community/identity is imagined through an identity discourse which limits the commitments and identifications in order to reach a certain sovereign status whether internally (legitimacy) or externally (independence).

In the end, we can say that the main actor of international relations is the state as an identity producer which tries to consolidate both an external and internal self through the creation of an identity discourse aimed equally at individuals within the state and other state-identities surrounding it. This identity discourse is necessary as the state do not possess a pre-discursive and stable identity, consequently a state is characterized as a society of normalization which “[...] secures the content and confines of its identity through the imposition of a norm rather than the enforcement of a rule. In doing so, it encourages and legitimizes certain dispositions and orientations while opposing and delegitimizing others, a process that is neither deterministic in its operation nor totally hegemonic in its

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consequences”. As a cultural and ideological artifact, the state is figured textually, discursively and performatively as a series of norms defining a national identity which represents, as a specific type of utterance, the hermeneutical locus where we can actually detect the dialogical process underlying international relations.

3.b The politics of alterity as an understanding of foreign policy

One of the main means to the construction of a national community resides in the articulation of a foreign policy. As Campbell explains, foreign policy is a formative performance in order for a state to give itself a meaning (a national identity) and to make sense of a reality that surrounds it (a Weltanschauung). This formative process is to be seen through the dialogical lenses we defined in the previous part of this paper as both the identity and the worldview are the results of the transgressed relations existing between a state-identity and other states-identities. However, with a dialogical framework, as it was foreseen by Campbell,

Foreign policy shift from a concern of relations between states which takes place across a historical, frozen and pre-given boundaries to a concern with the establishment of the boundaries that constitute, at one and to the same time, the ‘state’ and the ‘international system.’ [F]oreign policy is a ‘specific sort of boundary-producing political performance.’

This affirmation is to be slightly tamed since foreign policy still and will remain the discursive and performative relations established between sovereign national states. Yet the shift noted by Campbell does exist as a particular instance of foreign policy which is to be regarded as a politics of alterity. In effect, national identity constitutes itself through a dialogical process with other type of identities and the politics of alterity can thus be understood as a practice of boundary making working equally within and without the “state”. This reformulation of foreign policy along a bakhtinian perspective allows us to integrate both the national and the international level into a dialogical theory of international relations.

The politics of alterity is constituted by two components: the alterity rhetoric and the practices of alterity. The first one is to be understood as the rhetorical momentum of foreign policy as a politics of alterity. To follow the French historian François Hartog, “an alterity rhetoric fundamentally is an operation of translation: it is aimed at transforming the otherness

52 Ibid., p. 24.
53 Ibid., p. 69.
into sameness (tradere). Hartog discovers this alterity rhetoric within the work of Herodotus and tries to understand how the ancient Greeks figured alterity, the non-Greeks, through a framework Herodotus helped to formalize. The title of Hartog’s book, The mirror of Herodotus, is revealing since Herodotus’ mirror is the mirror of the historian vis-à-vis his/her own identity, Herodotus being generally considered as the father of History. Furthermore,

[the] mirror can be understood two other ways. If otherness is a negative mirror, the mirror of Herodotus, it is to be found in the lógoi [i.e. discourses, utterances] dedicated to the non-Greeks, the mirror he holds up to the Greeks. […] The mirror of Herodotus also is the hístór’s eye which, wandering and relaying the world, orders it into a Greek knowledge space and which constructs for the Greeks a representation of their recent past […]..

Homer for instance is to be considered as one of the first hístór and thus he gave to the Greeks the “intellectual framework of their heterology”. The Odyssey as a “poetic anthropology” is at the origins of the “vision that the Greeks had of themselves and of the others. [The Odyssey] contributed, not in an abstract way but through an adventure narrative, a framework, a long-standing paradigm in order to see and say the world, to traverse it and have a representation of it, or to inhabit its lands and make it a ‘human’ world, that is to say a Greek one”.

The lógoi (utterances) such as Herodotus’ travel narrative undertake an operation of translation, of figuration by which the self is dialogically intelligible through the other. Moreover, a hístór’s narrative – an hístór being the originator(s) of these lógoi - allows the ordering of one’s own representation into a space which both is a knowledge space and a moral space. There are several type of operations of translation, of figuration, which basically are transition procedures from the world we relay to the world within which we relay, in other words it is a procedure that allows the other (existing in the world we relay) to be instrumentalized as a function of the self’s composition (existing in the world from which we relay). Inversion or comparison (whether simple or analogical) for instance are two basic procedures of translation for instance. To follow Hartog’s development further, the inversion

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55 Ibid., p. 19.
is a convenient figure which translate alterity into an “anti-self”, it “builds up a ‘transparent’
ality for the listener or the reader: there is not a and b, but simply a and the inverse of a”. In
any type of figuration, the rhetoric employed has to embody an universal form in order to
mask the procedure of inversion itself or has Hartog puts it the “trademark” of the procedures
used by an utterance⁵⁹. Thus any type of figuration in translating alterity into elements
enabling an identity to grasp it fulfills a heuristic function by allowing to understand, to
realize, to make sense of an alterity which might have been completely opaque without it.
“Inversion is a fiction which ‘shows’ and makes understand: it is one of the figures
elaborating a representation of the world”⁶⁰.

The alterity rhetoric within international relations is to be observe mainly in the
different textual or discursive expressions (lógoi) that constitutes the texts of foreign policy, it
also can be found in any type of textual expressions which are to related a way or another to
the production of a national identity. Any of such instances are to be considered as hístôr that
is producer of an alterity rhetoric. He/she is the one fixing the boundaries which delineate the
moral and knowledge spaces through which the subsequent operations of translation will be
effectuated. Those operations can be either monological or dialogical, that is they can either
instrumentalize alterity or enter in a true dialogue with it. The alterity rhetoric constitutes the
expressivity of the politics of alterity, that is to say it constitutes part of the hermeneutical
locus by which the transgredient relations existing between a national identity (the author) and
other alterities (the addressees) can be found and thus can be analysed.

The second component of the politics of alterity resides in the performative
momentum of foreign policy: the practices of alterity. As I mentioned in the introduction,
foreign policy not only has a rhetorical constituent but also a behavioral one. Pure rhetoric is
much more value if it is combined with an actual performance. Practices of alterity are all
those performances which carry out in one way or another the alterity rhetoric. These
practices are aimed at establishing concretely the boundaries defining the norms within and
without the state and, consequently, rejecting the ones that are considered as exterior to the
boundaries enacted or integrating the ones that are considered as analogous to them. Of course
these enactments are based upon criteria defining social acceptability and the first enactment
of any type of practices of alterity is by listing or naming what is to be considered as alterity

⁵⁸ I will not develop the comparison here, I can only refer the reader to Hartog’s (HARDOG, François. Op. cit.,
⁶⁰ HARDOG, François. Ibid., pp. 225-228.
or as analogous. We are here at the jointure between rhetoric and praxis. The *hístôr*, for instance, fixes a semantic catalogue and thereby affirms its preeminence on those upon whom it imposes *its* own terms. Its capacity to name what it is or more to say what it perceives as reality confers it a tremendous power since to name is to classify.\(^{61}\)

Once this first step is performed there are several types of practices of alterity which can be act out such as the loyalty tests or a pure and simple physical or psychological separation of those who are considered as not belonging to the national identity.\(^{62}\) An example of practices of alterity from Japan during the 1920’s and 1930’s will help clarify the theoretical argument. As this example will show, otherness is here semantically fixed through legal terms and the practices of alterity consequently have a more direct impact on those infringing the norms established. During the period in concern there was a strong ideological pressure in order to realize the *kokutai* – the national polity. Since the adoption of the 1890 Constitution which established the Japanese State there was a necessity for the latter as an institutional and ideological body to constitute a collective identity which previously did not exist, namely the Japanese; the general impression at that time was that in order to achieve a national polity (*kokutai*) one had to constitute a national community (*kokumin*). *Kokutai* is difficult to define exactly as the Japanese themselves did not reach a stable or agreed conception of what it is. What is important however is not what the *kokutai* is but how it was used.\(^{64}\) Nonetheless, we can see that there was a belief “in the existence of a unique Japanese character formed by historical and environmental forces, and [...] that the strength and vitality of the nation depended upon its preservation and upon making all borrowings compatible with it”\(^{65}\).

Henceforth, *kokutai* – the *devoir-être* of the whole Japanese society – is grounded on a mythic history of the Japanese people, that is the origins of the Japanese race-culture, of its singularity and its destiny. To hyphenize the terms race and culture is to underline the progressive assimilation of both terms within Japanese language. In effect, the term *jinshu* designates what we can call a race or a human group distinct from the others by its biological

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and physical characteristics whether as a term like minzoku designates the ethnic group or a human group distinct from the others by its cultural characteristics. This semantic differentiation was progressively abandoned in common language, minzoku incorporating more and more semantic elements from jinshu. Those expressions of inclusion and exclusion, part of an alterity rhetoric, appeared when there was a need to draw new symbolic boundaries in order to distinguish Japaneseness and the Japanese people as a national and homogenous group.

During the late Meiji and Taishô eras, Japan faced tremendous economic changes which naturally brought about sociopolitical ones. One of the main aspects that the Japanese élites and one might say the general population witnessed and focussed on was socialism and more generally any will to modify the Japanese system into a westernized one. The fear was that these “dangerous thoughts” (kiken shisô) would imperil both the kokutai and the imperial regime – the main pillar of Japanese society as a national community – and also that un-Japanese ways would began to develop within the population. Emperor Taishô shared these fears as shows a 1923 imperial prescript in which he ordered the Japanese people to run away from any type of radical thinking and to moderate their social critics. Henceforth,

by the end of the Taisho era, a growing sense of national frustration and crisis had created a mood within the government and among the concerned public for new methods to control radical thought. It was obvious that the old methods were becoming less effective, particularly in the face of a rapidly rising level of ideological and political sophistication among the general populace.

The result of this was to be the establishment of the 1925 “Peace Preservation Law” which draw the ideological limits to which organizations and individuals had to conform. The first article went this way:

Anyone who has organized an association with the objective of altering the kokutai or the form of government or denying the system of private property, and anyone who has joined such an association with full knowledge of its object, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labor for a term not exceeding ten years.

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68 Ibid., p. 33.
69 Quoted in Ibid., p. 63.
The “Peace Preservation Law” was directed against the participation in an organization or an action defined by the beliefs that motivated them and not against the personal conviction about the beliefs itself. Actually however, the Ministry of Justice applied a more direct approach to this whole problem as it set up an “Office of Thought” (shisôbu) which was designed to prosecute any individuals or organizations participating in “crimes of thought” (shisôhan)\(^{70}\) and this through the supervision of “thought prosecutors” (shisô gakari kenji).

A major aspect of “Peace Preservation Law” was the transformation of the term kokutai into a legal term which allowed a very broad interpretation of the law from the judicial and police authorities since kokutai was an un-precisely defined notion. Furtermore, the use of kokutai was not without any kind of symbolic thought. More than a criminal law the “Peace Preservation Law” also was a strong affirmation of the unity and the harmony of the nation in a period of political, economical and social crisis. The aim was to appease Japanese society by fighting its illnesses in showing to the people the way to social integration. As Richard Mitchell pinpoints:

> The use of the enigmatic and highly emotional term kokutai reflected a continuation of the government drive to indoctrinate its subjects in the way of reverence for the emperor. […] [T]he use of kokutai in the Peace Preservation Law was [also] a logical extension of this ongoing reaction to modernization and Westernization. By using this phrase, the government informed all the emperor’s subjects of its intention to preserve the Japanese way of life in the face of rapid change.\(^{71}\)

A major point of interest for us is the implementation, from 1933 up to the end of World War II, by the Ministry of Justice of a new policy concerning the “thought criminals”: the tenkô politics. Tenkô is a term which we can translate as apostasy\(^{72}\). This policy consisted in the abandon of any legal charges against a “criminal”, considered as a potential apostate (tenkôsha), if he/she rejected the ideology underlying his actions for which he/she was arrested and/or condemned. Since the implementation of this policy around two-third to three-quarter of all the 1925’s laws offenders chose to renounce through formal declaration at their

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\(^{70}\) Even so legally the Shisôbu was designed to focus on organizations and their activities, practically however they were considered as actual expressions of “dangerous thought” emanating from individuals. See STEINHOFF, Patricia G. « Tenkô and Thought Control ». Japan and the World. Essays on Japanese History and Politics in Honour of Ishida Takeshi, London, Macmillan Press, ed. by Gail Lee Bernstein and Haruhiro Fukui, 1988, p. 79.


\(^{72}\) STEINHOFF, Patricia G. Ibid., pp. 78-94 and MITCHELL, Richard H. Ibid., pp. 127-147. Tenkô was concretized as a formal and legal term in a 1936 law.
former ideological and organizational belonging (such as the Japanese Political Party for instance. The reasons, if we put aside the physical and psychological pressures\textsuperscript{73}, were very clear for someone like Hirata Susumu, a “thought prosecutor”:

[No] thought criminal was hopeless. […] Since they were all Japanese, sooner or later they would all come around to realizing that their ideas were wrong.\textsuperscript{74}

This historical example allows us to settle the objects which we must examine in order to understand international relations dialogically. The “dangerous thoughts” obviously are constituted by two elements, one domestic the other international. The domestic component, which I developed here, is the establishment and the continuous consolidation of a national identity defined through an inversion of another – Western and especially American – identity (its expressivity). This domestic component further carried on into both an alterity rhetoric and practices of alterity such as the “Peace Preservation Law” and the tenkô procedure. This rhetoric of alterity and, to a lesser extent, the practices of alterity are interestingly illustrated during World War II by a manga issue in May 1942 which shows perfectly the operation of inversion. The manga entitled “Purging One’s Head of Anglo-Americanism” (1942) represents a woman combing her hair in order to “get rid of that dandruff encrusting your head!” The scurf combed out are words such as extravagance, selfishness, hedonism, liberalism, materialism, money worship, individualism\textsuperscript{75}. This particular politics of alterity is extremely interesting since it allows us to understand clearly how the national community is to be understood for Japan at that time: a community that is both defined by culture and through racial grounds. As the quotation from the “thought prosecutor” suggests, a Japanese marginalizing himself by adopting a foreign ideology is still Japanese, he/she is in the wrong but he/she is not demonized as would have been American or European during World War II\textsuperscript{76}. This domestic conception is of course to be balanced with an international component (its contextuality and relationality) – a development outside the scope of this paper – which for Japan at that time was represented by the tense and conflicting relations it had with the United States and to a lesser degree China and the USSR. This international dimension will have to

\textsuperscript{73} The physical and psychological pressures never were a systematic policy from the Japanese police or justice. Several prosecutors called policemen to order in cases of physical abuses or torture reminding them that criminal laws were grounded on “moral principles” and were aimed at “protecting human rights” (See MITCHELL, Richard H. Op. cit., pp. 101-102).

\textsuperscript{74} Quoted in Ibid., p. 127.

be integrated into both a diachronic and synchronic analysis of Japanese’s politics of alterity as to determine which alterity was the dominant one in its foreign policy discourse and in its domestic identity discourse and to which extent a dialogical approach of foreign policy as I have shown here can shed light to the more traditional approaches.

4. Concluding notes

In this paper I tried to develop a dialogical conception of international relations in order to both bridges the gap existing between the national and international realm and to integrate fully alterity within international relations studies. Grounding my approach on Bakhtin’s work I established the main lines of a dialogical theory of international relations. Such a theory considers alterity as a transgressive element to the constitution, expression and performance of a national identity which is to be regarded as a hermeneutical locus where relationality to alterity, contextuality of the national identity and the expressivity of the figuration of alterity are to be found and analyzed. This analysis is necessary if one wants to shed light to foreign policy as a politics of alterity, that is the practice of boundary making within and without the state. This politics is composed by two elements (an alterity rhetoric and practices of alterity) which are analytical components of national identity as a hermeneutical locus. Such an approach of foreign policy is not aimed at replacing traditional visions but at giving an additional tool for a better understanding of international relations. Interstates’ interactions cannot only be simplified in terms of power or interests, they also include the constitution of national identities which have to be felt by individuals constituting these states – the actual problematic of an European identity is the best illustration of such a process. A dialogical theory of international relations will not only help to understand this process but also to comprehend its functions and consequences.

76 Ibid., pp. 203-290.
References


