The July 20 plot: reading news as myth in the imagining of the British nation

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Abstract

This paper analyses foreign news articles that appeared in three London newspapers during the Second World War, covering 'The July 20 Plot', an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler in 1944.

The analysis is supported by reading the news articles as an 'other world' myth, through which characteristics of their own nation, imagined by Britons, was observed as existing in opposition to that of the Germany portrayed. International news is thus solidified as a source of historical enquiry, as well as a site of discourse that can be examined as the expression of mythological knowledge that typifies an imagined national community.

Keywords: news, myth, Second World War, July 20 Plot, wartime Britain, national identity, imagined communities

Introduction

The "father of history", Greek chronicler Herodotus, offers an unlikely opportunity to re-examine the co-constitutive relationship between news and nation. From an academic standpoint, Herodotus' eminent text *The Histories,* a sprawling and digressive account of the Greco-Persian War and the surrounding geographies, people and cultures, is often considered unreliable in its lack of focus, objectivity, and thoroughness (Mendelsohn 2008). Herodotus was chiefly concerned with the customs, superstitions, beliefs, emotions, and drama surrounding the events and people on which he reported. Historians often pass over Herodotus, preferring the more reliable writings of Thucydides, who "set the methodological standard for historical writing for the next thousand years" (Mendelsohn 2008). But Herodotus is often revisited as an early example of documentation that has a social role through narrative and storytelling.

While it lacks in academic rigour, *The Histories* can be seen as a source of cultural discourse. Applying a rhetorical analysis to the intriguing (if often inaccurate) accounts of Herodotus' surroundings reveals the kind of information with which his readers were constructing their reality. The prose of Herodotus, steeped in the Greek tradition of dramatic oral storytelling, is an early example of using narrative "formulas" that audiences of the time used to make sense of the information provided (Knight & Dean, 1982, p. 146-147).

A revisiting of *The Histories* can provide an approach to news as both a source of fact and of social and cultural influences. When employed in a historical context, analyses of news that take a rhetorical approach can reveal underlying value systems and beliefs that are at work in what Benedict Anderson (1991) terms the 'imagining of national community'. This article examines news content from Britain in 1944 as a form of myth that was involved in the creation of British national identity, specifically in relation to wartime Germany. Through textual analysis of British news articles covering the July 20 assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, I aim to show that these texts constructed a myth of Nazi Germany as an 'other world', when characterising the relationship between the two nations. In the articles, I found several themes in the characterization of Germany that can be read as existing in opposition to core, underlying beliefs that distinguish British national imaginings. This study aims to further promote an approach to news that asks similar questions as those asked of myths, as it gains a better understanding of the kind of community being imagined by Britons in 1944.

International news and the imagined community

Benedict Anderson's celebrated characterisation of nation as imagined, limited and sovereign is central to understanding the discursive function of news in national groups. The birth of the modern nation aligned with the definite decline of the notion of temporality in which cosmology and history were intrinsically linked[1] (Anderson 2006, p. 36). Once citizens moved beyond the idea of future, present, and past occurring instantaneously, events could be seen as "moving calendrically through secular time" (p. 26). Events occurred simultaneously, linked only by coincidence. "Nations given

political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and…glide into a limitless future." (pp. 11-12)

Anderson argues the front page of a newspaper is a site of a nation imagining itself because it aligns with the idea of a group of citizens existing within a nation at once:

The newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life (pp. 35-36).

Widespread and simultaneous consumption establishes a newspaper as a prime site for the imagining of a community. A 'confidence in shared anonymity' promoted through newspapers is what Anderson identifies as the 'hallmark of the modern nation' (p. 36). Thus, the newspaper is an integral part of modern conceptualisations of nation.

Anderson's work is an example of a rhetorical approach to news content that identifies its discursive impact. News has long been widely acknowledged to have a socially constructive role that is morally loaded and often ideological, occurring through a naturalisation of particular belief systems[2]. Schudson (1982) states that while 'news isn't fictional... it is conventional' (p. 98). Schudson is one of many whose approaches to news favour a rhetorical, rather than transmission, model of communication (Knight & Dean 1982; Bennett & Edelman 1985), building on Carey's (1989) ideas of communication as ritual (p. 15). These approaches evaluate the cultural and moral potency of news as reaffirming underlying knowledge systems and norms. News content is seen to be transcending the reporting and documenting role assigned to it in a transmission approach. Bird and Dardenne (1997) also call for an analysis of news as a social construct, one that avoids the dichotomy of fact and fiction and identifies assumptions that are inherently embedded in news conventions. They assert: 'while news is not fiction, it is a story about reality, not reality itself' (p. 346). Rhetorical approaches to communication position news as playing a central part in the character of a particular societal group through the enacting and documenting of social drama (Lule, 2001, p. 33). This process involves active engagement and resistance, and is a fluid and dynamic construction and reconstruction of social reality.

In a rhetorical approach to news, 'power' is regarded in the Foucauldian sense of the word:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of chain....Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. (Foucault 1980, p. 98)

Foucault therefore insists that an analysis of power must start from the mechanisms of power, not the centre, or the base of power (p. 99). As discourse, news content is one of these mechanisms of power, one of the systems through which power circulates. An analysis of news' socially formative impact must therefore start with news as a technology of power (Foucault 1980 [1977], p. 99).

Taking a rhetorical approach to British wartime news allows us to see the subject articles as sites of networked power relationships, where audiences engaged with news in imagining their own national community. Discussion of press freedom during the 1940s was largely based around the idea that lowering citizen morale was equal to aiding and abetting the enemy. Supporting the war at home was generally conceived to be supporting troops fighting abroad[3]. Both legislation and ensuing debate cultivated solidarity and loyalty through news coverage, the 'fourth front' of the war (Knightley 1975, p. 240).

However, in contrast to Goebbels' finely tuned propaganda machine, the British press was subject to a censorship that was mostly self-enforced, especially in the later years of the war. The 'old boys club' relationship between Fleet Street and Westminster has been scorned by some analysts attempting to glean an objective and completely unbiased version of events from newspapers of the time. 'Nearly every journalist packed away his principles "for the duration",' write Moorcraft and Taylor (2008), claiming that 'London censors were already writing the first draft of history' (pp. 57-58). A rhetorical approach to these 'first drafts' however, is concerned with the

knowledge that can be gleaned about British national imagining evident in this discourse.

News values in international news—particularly mid-century Europe—were central to a citizen's notion of place in a world relative to other nations beyond sovereign borders (Rantanen 2003, pp. 447-48). Europe in the middle of the 20th century existed as a synergetic point for the realising of national audiences. Given the steady rise in newspaper circulation and dissemination, national imagining often occurred through the press. Urban-dwelling Britons, in particular, bought six hundred newspapers for every thousand citizens in 1914 (Hobsbawm 1995, p. 194). National imagining during the two World Wars and the interwar years occurred on a mass scale, with reportage and the film camera making the world 'more visible to the common man than ever before' (Hobsbawm 1995, p. 192). This coincided with a global environment in which nations were establishing themselves as interdependent within a global community. This global change was felt with particular potency in Britain, as an 'avalanche of independence movements that was to obliterate the [British] empire' as it rolled across Europe and beyond (Sonya Rose 2001, p. 221).

Anderson's concept of nation—as applied to international news—aligns with the outbreak of a national consciousness that was in full swing across Europe in the dying days of World War II. In 1944, foreign news was a potent site of a national imagination in relationship to other nations. Anderson thought of nations as limited communities, limited because citizens imagine their nation with finite, if elastic, boundaries—both geographic and political—beyond which other nations exist[4] (p. 7). If communication is at the centre of a citizen imagining her nation, then international news is a central site of her imagining it as *limited*. News covering foreign events identifies and characterises other imagined communities beyond domestic boundaries. Simultaneously, international news stories identify characteristics of the domestic nation. Grounding an analysis in Anderson's ideas of nation and a rhetorical approach to news identifies the historic and ideological influences present in the imagining of the British nation as a community in the 1940s.

News as myth

Many authors have examined the similarities of contemporary popular culture with that of myth (Przywalny 2014; Bouchard 2013; Midgley, 2011). Nowadays contemporary myths are thought of as 'networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of understanding the world' (Midgley 2011, p. 1), the naturalised knowledge that works at an implicit level. Myths can reveal things about ourselves that a mere recital of events cannot (Kumar 2013, p. 77). Contemporary myth stands as an integral part of the contemporary thought structures that characterise a society.

Barthes (2009 [1972]) also writes on contemporary myths, commenting that they rely on discourse to exist (p. 133). Myths are part of socially constructed ideas of narrative and assumptions, naturalised through the dynamic process of discourse. 'Myth has a double function', Barthes (2009 [1972]) states, 'It points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us' (p. 140).

Seeing news as myth allows similar questions to be asked of journalistic content as are asked of the mythical. Bird and Dardenne (1997) claim that 'one of the most productive ways to see news is to consider it as myth' (p. 336), forcing us to trace the storytelling abilities of journalists as they actively reshape paradigms:

It is a process that is more complex than either a consensual model or a manipulative model, which assigns all the control to the media, and sees media as somehow outside of, yet affecting culture. Rather, media are very much part of culture, but with a particular kind of privileged status within it (p. 346).

Lule (2001) identifies news as modern day myth in much the same way as Barthes, highlighting the discursive power of news content. 'News stories offer sacred, societal narratives with shared values and beliefs', he argues, 'with lessons and themes, and with exemplary models that instruct and inform' (p. 18). Lule identifies the shared functionality of news and myth: creating, reshaping, and reinforcing dominant ideologies, beliefs and values within a particular cultural group (p. 21) and argues news is present in myth as naturalised knowledge that often goes unquestioned (p. 37).

The 'other world' myth constructs a far off reality that exists in opposition to a 'home world'. Studied from many angles[5], in societal terms, the other world can reflect the collective or reflexive imagining of a group of people in relation to another group, whether actual or abstract. Eliade (1964) speaks of the other world in terms of the divine or ancient. In archaic societies, the other world was thought of as the plane of absolute realities, where 'there are absolute values, capable of guiding man and human existence' (p. 139). Lule (2001) also identifies the other world myth as a reflection of the prevailing values of a larger society (p.152). The other world myth, he says, 'help[s] define a society in relation to other societies' (p. 153).

International news significantly embodies this other world mythological function, especially for a sovereign state towards the end of the Second World War. At the time, mass media was providing depictions of foreign nations to citizenry on such a regular and accessible basis that the imagining of one's nation was inevitably done in relation to other nations.

International news exists against a mythological neutral, defining the characteristics of a home country in relation to the overseas events being described (Knight & Dean 1982, p. 150). International news in British newspapers identified and reinforced British societal norms against which external events in Germany occurred. In a textual analysis framed by Anderson and the mythical construct of the other world, news can be seen to be reflecting the prevailing values of British society. Examining the social role of international news as that of modern myth allows us to identify the national imagining of wartime Britain. The themes identified in the analysis below rely on certain constructions of reality that were integrated into the British national consciousness, found and reinforced through news articles.

The Event

On the morning of Thursday July 20, 1944, a bomb exploded in Hitler's summer headquarters, in what was then East Prussia (now Poland). The bomb had been placed under a map table during a tactics meeting. It exploded while Hitler and several aides and advisors were present, killing three people but only mildly wounding the dictator. The explosion was the culmination of what would become known as the 'July 20 Plot' by a group of both serving and retired German army generals and their subordinates who had planned to assassinate Hitler. Their plan involved utilising the national

emergency plan Operation Valkyrie[6] to take control of the government and military (Fest 1995, p. 237). Hitler's survival meant that Valkyrie was never put into full effect. Although some sections of Berlin came under control of the coup leaders, within six hours the Nazi government had regained control and suppressed the uprising. The attempt resulted in the arrest and execution (or suicide) of the 'Plotters', as they became known, and the increased Nazification of the German armed forces.

News of the event first appeared on the front pages of British morning newspapers on the July 21. Coverage consisted mostly of the full text of Hitler's speech that was broadcast on German radio shortly after the attempt, plus some analysis and speculation on what might be happening inside Germany, and what it would mean for the war. Newspapers continued their coverage, commentary, and analysis of the attempt as more information trickled in from travellers in neutral countries, German prisoners of war in Allied camps, and official announcements on German radio.

The following analysis is taken from a sample of news stories that appeared in three London newspapers, covering this attempt on Hitler's life. These newspapers were selected as ideal subjects of analysis because they reached a broad national audience: *The News Chronicle* and *The Daily Telegraph* maintained extensive circulation throughout the war[7], and *The Times* had a strong reputation as a 'newspaper of record' (Luckhurst 2012, p. 109). The texts can thus be analysed as interacting with a broad national audience.

The sample includes stories published between July 21, with the first mention of the July 20 Plot and July 28, seven days after the attempt and when news and analysis began to decrease, in favour of more recent military developments in the war[8]. Sixty-nine articles were analysed, all taken from the news section: 14 from *The Times*, 36 from *The Daily Telegraph*, and 19 from *The News Chronicle*[9].

Analysis of these articles identified several general ideas recurring in the characterisation of Germany by British newspapers. Reportage on the assassination attempt was an indicator of the current state of Germany for British audiences. This Germany was characterised as in crisis, rife with disloyalty, full of barbarity and ruthlessness, and ruled by a tyrant with questionable sanity. The following section demonstrates how this depiction of Germany was established and supported by the

subject articles. I then examine the British societal norms that can be revealed through reading these articles as myth.

Germany in Chaos

A noticeable theme present in the articles examined was chaos. The word crisis was used often when describing not only the assassination attempt, but also Germany as a whole—society, military, and government—in *The News Chronicle* ('Ringleaders commit suicide', p. 1) and *The Times* ('Hitler "exterminating"' p. 4). Constant queries as to the current state of Germany peppered *The Daily Telegraph* coverage ('Attempt officers' plot' p. 6). These created an overall sense that the Nazi regime was in chaos.

One way a sense of chaos was highlighted was through labelling the urgent and frequent broadcasts from Hitler and his commanders as indication of a deep-seated disruption within the regime. *The News Chronicle* identified the late night broadcasts, 'at an hour when most Germans would be asleep', as a reflection of the 'gravity of the crisis within the Army' (Montgomery, 'Why Hitler' p. 1). The frequent and fervent German broadcasts were represented as an attempt to maintain an outward appearance of Hitler in charge, insinuating that, in reality, the opposite was true. *The Daily Telegraph* took a similar approach, labelling the speeches an attempt to mitigate and gloss over the seriousness of the situation ('Nazis called out troops' p. 6).

This idea of Germany in chaos was further indicated by the inclusion in reports of frequent claims from Hitler and other officials that the attack had come from a 'small clique' of resisters. This phrase, from Hitler's initial speech and subsequent speeches from German military leaders, was quoted frequently in the newspapers. The emphasis, correspondents claimed, was evidence of Nazi attempts to suppress a much larger rebellion. In the early days of coverage, information documenting the scale and seriousness of the attack was scarce, and speculation was extensive in the British news reports. Any official reports from German authorities were openly questioned in news items, as can be seen in *The Daily Telegraph* story on details released about the attempt:

In these versions, obviously suspect as to their truthfulness and their motives, the Nazis were at pains to emphasise that the revolt had been speedily suppressed and to belittle its extent ("Berlin a city" p. 1).

The term "civil war" was only used once, in *The Daily Telegraph*, on July 22 ('Morale blow' p. 1). Yet reporters maintained the possibility of an all-out revolt having occurred. *The Times* reported that travellers in Stockholm had described a 'state of revolt' in Germany, that 'something extraordinary was afoot', and that German leaders still had 'no idea of the magnitude of the situation' ('Hitler 'exterminating'' p. 4). *The News Chronicle* July 24 edition was headlined with a report of a 'major military collapse' within Germany. And *The Daily Telegraph* ran reports of 'siege like conditions', street fighting in Berlin, and often used the words revolt or rebellion to describe the attack:

Travellers from Berlin arriving last night at Malmoe, in Sweden, said that

large numbers of Gestapo men, armed with machine-guns, were patrolling

Berlin in motor-cars during the morning, and there were big detachments of

S.S. men in the streets. ('Gestapo's street patrol' p. 1)

Such speculation about unrest continued until speeches by German military commentator Kurt Dittmar on July 26, and Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels on July 27, which went into further detail, providing the official Nazi version of the events.

The British newspapers' focus on a possible internal conflict also placed emphasis on the fact that the attempt was a military operation. Much of the scale and seriousness of the attack lay in the fact that the culprits were members of the armed forces, both serving and retired. In a nation which was at the time notorious for its efficient, tightly controlled and brutally effective military, the possibility of discord and betrayal within its serving military had serious ramifications for Germany's international reputation as formidable. On July 22, it became apparent that the coup leaders had succeeded in getting unauthorised orders to the Eastern Front, and that some units had actually carried out these orders. *The Times* headlined its coverage that day with 'False orders' and 'Military units urged to revolt', highlighting that the discord and chaos ran deep into the military, and emphasising a lack of control of Hitler over his own army. Newspaper stories further stressed the significance of the military in German culture:

[Hitler and his closer lieutenants] would not lightly shatter...the prestige which

in Germany surrounds the confraternity of the generals. In the present condition

of Germany, they know that a long powder trail may be lit when the appeal is made: 'Choose you this day whom ye will serve' ('Hitler 'exterminating'" p. 4).

The above extract from *The Times* demonstrates the theme of disloyalty, and how it was felt primarily in the German military. Similar themes ran through *The News Chronicle* coverage that focused on the fact that many of the generals were on active service when they made their coup attempt. When the leaders were identified on July 21, and again when the Nazis released a full list of names of the conspirators on July 28, both *The Times* and *The News Chronicle* featured descriptions and military histories of several leaders of the plot, taking care to emphasise the fact they were on active service:

Gen. Freidrich Olbricht—who was court-marshalled and shot—"held all the threads of the conspiracy in his hands". He was 56, and was on active service; having taken part in the Polish Campaign, he became Chief of the General Army Office in the Supreme Command ('3 generals named' p. 1).

The News Chronicle also identified leaders of the plot, Colonels Beck and von Stauffenberg, as 'high ranking officers' ('Generals tried' p. 1), and described the prison cells of Berlin as 'full of seasoned soldiers' (p. 6). A small piece on Colonel Beck identified him as a military expansionist who had, somewhat paradoxically, retired in disgrace in 1938 for urging Hitler not to go to war immediately (p. 4). Emphasising the military clout of Beck draws attention to the magnitude of the conspiracy, and implies serious desperation in Germany in order for such a well-disciplined figure to betray his commanding officer.

Germany Rife With Disloyalty

The newspapers' emphasis on the military nature of the coup served to emphasise the state of crisis in Germany. It also highlighted how Germany was now characterised by widespread disloyalty towards the Nazi regime, chiefly and most importantly in the military, but also within the civilian population.

The theme of loyalty is returned to often in all three newspapers; in particular focus was on morale, both in serving soldiers and in German citizenry. The attack was

presented as synonymous with flagging support for the war among the German people. 'Nothing is more demoralising to troops than people at home not pulling their weight in the war effort', declared *The Daily Telegraph*, in highlighting the 'deterioration of morale on German soldiers', which was 'worse than Stalingrad' (Mundy 1944, p. 1). Around July 24, when official information coming out of the Reich waned, some reporters began canvassing opinions from German prisoners of war in Allied camps. One correspondent from *The Daily Telegraph* reported a prisoner 'dancing a jig' when he heard a rumour that Hitler had been assassinated (Buckley 1944, p. 6):

Reports show that nearly every possible point of view is being expressed by [the prisoners]. There are those who are shocked and horrified by the attempt and a very few who are incredulous. There are prisoners who think it a pity that revolt did not succeed, and those who think it never could have succeeded. Some believe it to be the beginning of the end (Buckley 1944, p. 6).

Descriptions such as the one above created the overall impression for the British newspaper audience that the Nazis lacked popular support and aligned the assassination attempt with a decline of morale in German troops and citizens.

German people subject to a ruthless government

The British press described the harsh living conditions of the German people in order to offer reasons as to why they might rebel against their leaders. German soldiers and citizens alike were depicted either as oppressed subjects longing to rise up, or as inhuman servants of the Reich 'with no revolutionary spirit' ('Guderian's belated call' p. 4). They were the 'miserable masses' of the other world (Lule 2001). 'They are never allowed to think', said one *Times* article on German prisoners of war, '[i]nstead of opinions, they have a blind, unquestioning acceptance of what is' ('Wehrmacht' p. 4).

Present in the three studied newspapers is a narrative of the German public and society that characterised them as subject to a ruthless and brutal regime. *The News Chronicle* went into great detail about the executions, arrests, and suicides following the attempt. Words like 'purge', 'extermination', and 'manhunt' pervaded headlines in early coverage. *The Daily Telegraph* drew parallels with the infamous 'Night of the

Long Knives' in 1934, in which Hitler gained absolute control of Germany through a bloody putsch:

Other Stockholm sources said that already the blood purge had far eclipsed the massacre of June 30, 1934, while the number of victims, mostly officers and former politicians, was growing hour by hour ('Himmler starts manhunt' p. 1).

Further, *The Times* published an ominous quote from Goebbels' speech of July 27, where he declared 'all those who had not yet been punished would get the punishment they deserved' ('Attempt on Hitler' p. 4).

By focusing on the strict control of information, the British newspapers also provided an image of a totalitarian Germany. *The Daily Telegraph* reported a 'heavy blanket of censorship' cast over the Reich, highlighting how little information had been released ('Morale blow' p. 1):

Telephone communications between Sweden and Germany, restored only during the night while the Nazi version of the Generals' revolt was being sent out to the world, was again cut this morning. A drastic purge, with numerous executions of officers, is believed to be in progress (Weaver 1944, p. 1).

The articles constructed an image of a tightly controlled dictatorship, in which freedom of the press was long extinct (contrasting starkly against the model of free press in which the British audiences read these articles). In this way, the German nation was presented as a tightly controlled society, in which any dissent or criticism was crushed with swift and efficient brutality.

Hitler's madness

Personifying Nazi German ruthlessness, efficiency, and brutality was SS leader Hienrich Himmler, who emerged from the Plot and the ensuing purge 'as the man of the hour' (Montgomery 1944, p. 1). After the attempt, Himmler was designated Commander in Chief of the German Home Army, essentially giving him control over the entire army within the Reich. Himmler was painted by the British press as the

terrifying culmination of Nazi brutality and power, ruthlessly exercising this power over both political and military life.

An overarching theme of the newspapers' coverage was Hitler's increasing fanaticism and madness. In stark contrast to Himmler, Hitler was to be pitied, feared perhaps, but only in the way that one fears a sick and angry animal. *The Daily Telegraph* described him as semi-hysterical in his broadcast on the night of the attack. 'Hitler knows his life is constantly endangered', a correspondent gleaned from new reports from Stockholm on July 24 ('Plot was hatching' p. 1). A day later, they added 'He believes himself infallible, almost omnipotent, and this feeling is growing stronger' (Mundy 1944, p. 6). The construction of Himmler and Hitler encapsulated two seemingly contradictory elements of Nazi Germany—its fanaticism and its ruthlessness—that were together seen to pose a threat to world order, and in so doing solidified Britain's place in it.

Hitler's madness and ambition were equally as terrifying as the ruthless efficiency with which Himmler crushed all dissent. The former, however, was what *The News Chronicle* seemed to emphasise as the thorn in the side of an otherwise terrifyingly well-oiled machine, set on expansion and domination. British Minister Eden was quoted as labelling Hitler 'a symbol for the German lust for power' ('They saw writing' p. 4). Together, the two figures of Hitler and Himmler represented two intrinsic characteristics of the German nation, as present in British wartime discourse.

Britain as a community imagined through mythic news covering Germany

This depiction of Germany in British newspapers fulfils the same social role as that of the other world myth. The shared knowledge of British citizens imagining themselves is reflected in the attributes present in news coverage of Germany. The other world mythological structure is used to establish a societal norm in Britain, against Germany's evolving chaos.

Below is a set of interrelated, and often contradictory, traits of the British nation that presuppose the above characterisation of Germany. The aim of this analysis is not to point out the falsity of these claims about Britain in relation to social and political realities of 1944, nor is it to eradicate or disprove beliefs featured in the text. Rather than an evaluation of news accuracy or objectivity, in applying an understanding of

news as myth to the analysis, the task is to appraise the values and beliefs the news implies.

Nicholas Cull (quoted in Calder 1995) outlines the amalgamation of the image of 'embattled England' and a Germany created by both American journalists and 'English propagandists' during the Second World War (pp. 59-60). A mythological knowledge system was reflected in news content, which Calder (1995) noted as establishing the two belligerent countries as existing in opposition to one another (see Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Britain and Germany in wartime papers.

Britain	Germany
Freedom	Tyranny
Improvisation	Calculation
Volunteer spirit	Drilling
Friendliness	Brutality
Tolerance	Persecution
Timeless landscape	Mechanisation
Patience	Aggression
Calm	Frenzy
'A thousand years of peace'	'The Thousand Year Reich' dedicated to war

Source: Calder (1995) page 60.

The analysed articles reveal central beliefs and traditions in the British national psyche of 1944, evidenced in the depiction of Germany as the other world. These British beliefs include a small, dispersed power structure; solidarity and horizontal camaraderie between all classes; a dedication to democracy and the personal freedoms associated with it; and a reverence for military discipline, hierarchy, and authority (diffused through civilian life). These traits are indicative of the type of nation being imagined through print news coverage on the July 20 Plot, and are explored below.

Uniting these traits is an underlying respect for a particular established social order, and an unwavering faith that this order will persevere through any hardship[10]. I contend that this social order has been elevated to a mythological status through repetition and naturalisation[11], occurring, in this instance, through daily news coverage.

An integral part of the British social order was the military. Perhaps no institution better exemplifies an unwavering obedience to, and respect for, hierarchical power structures as the military. Continual references to military rank in the subject articles

condemn the plotters for breaking ranks and rising up against their leader[12]. Respect for military discipline is at the heart of the nation being imagined in these articles. British faith in the military establishment presupposes the condemnation of the German generals who led the coup attempt for betraying their commanding officers.

In contrast to a rebellion that goes right to the heart of the German serving army, British political culture was defined in the articles studied by loyal civic militarism (Hedetoft 1993, p. 285). Ulf Hedetoft (1993) observes that this civic militarism was typical of wartime Britain, and that it was a distinctly unifying force among the civilian population. 'The ideal British soldier', he identifies from the propaganda, speeches, and discussions of the time, 'is a civilian in uniform' (Hedetoft 1993 p. 285). Condemnation of a military rebellion reveals a deeply entrenched respect for military discipline and loyalty that is symptomatic of the British love of established hierarchy (Leventhal 2005, p. 510).

The conventional image of Britain that was fostered by the British during the war was of a united civilian population, often sacrificing comfort in order to support their military (Calder 1995, pp. 56-57). Despite this, an engrained military culture presupposes a national identity based on 'harmony and handed down homogeneity between state and people' (Hedetoft 1993, p. 285).

Through a condemnation of a military uprising, the subject articles align with a social norm of civic militarism, depicting Germany's military turmoil as transience from that norm. Hedetof also points out the seemingly contradictory notions of discipline and freedom that characterised the British national imagination (p. 284). Britons saw themselves as united in war, divided in peace, he says. 'Or, perhaps, epigrammatically, 'peace in war, war in peace''" (1993, p. 284). Individual freedoms, freedom of the press, room for dissent and debate; these are all ideas that presuppose the condemnation of the ruthless and brutal government that the British reader found in the news articles about Germany. The mythological norm of military discipline in the British imagination allowed for dissent to occur in social and political aspects of life. While military loyalty, solidarity and unity pervaded all British civilian life, the democratic ideals of freedom and fairness also featured in the characterisation of the British nation. This adherence to democratic ideals further established wartime British national identity in direct opposition to that of Nazi Germany. Calder highlights this well:

The British during the war had praised themselves for being less efficient—because less ruthless—than their German enemies.... Deep into the post-war peril, "carrying on" and "muddling through", as the British were held to have done during the Blitz, continued to seem morally superior to "Continental" rationality (1995, p. 59).

Both British unity and British loyalty are imagined as opposite and superior to their continental counterparts, because they are freely available under a democratic power structure.

Underlying the unity in war rhetoric is recognition of the importance of solidarity between British citizens and their leaders. The depiction of Hitler as a maniacal dictator is necessitated by a respect for a small, dispersed power structure of government. Depicting Hitler as a raving madman losing control of his country would, on the surface, appear to be a condemnation of a nation built around a centralised power structure. In her exploration of the role of empire in the Second World War, however, Sonya Rose (2001) points out that the royal family was central to the British national image of a paternalistic, protective, but essentially imperial, presence during the war (p. 220). Britain was seen as the last remaining resister against a Europe characterised by revolt against empires and brutal totalitarian socialism. The strength of empire 'was expressed as Britain's special contribution to the world—what made Britain, unlike Nazi Germany, a virtual model for world order' (Rose 2001, p. 221). Underlying the depiction by the British press of Hitler as a maniacal emperor was *not* a condemnation of empire. Rather, there was a notion that the British Empire was superior to any German one, in that Britain's was distinguished by an egalitarian camaraderie between rich and poor, citizens and leaders, civilians and soldiers, who 'all had to pull their weight' (Calder 1995, pp. 56-57). Calder demonstrates:

When Buckingham Palace was bombed in September 1940 just a few days after the Luftwaffe had set the London docks alight, the Queen remarked, "I'm glad we've been bombed. It makes me feel like I can look the East End in the face" (1995, p. 58).

This 'horizontal solidarity' was often deliberately cultivated through government propaganda, events, and speeches[13]. It can also be found in the British free press, here as the dualistic opposite to a centralised, tyrannical system reigning in Germany. The direct references to Hitler's lust for power presume a system of democratic government that is superior. Appearing in a British newspaper alongside coverage of civilised debate in the House of Commons, and tales of the royal family suffering in solidarity with London's East End, these references demonstrate Britons imagining their nation as a democratic government superior to Germany through news, specifically that covering the July 20 assassination attempt.

If read as myth, the subject news articles are a reflection of intrinsic traditions and beliefs of the British citizenry during the final years of the war. The characterisation of Germany in chaos, rife with disloyalty, ruled by a ruthless regime and lead by a tyrannical maniac are presupposed by deeply engrained belief systems upheld and perpetuated by the publication and reading of British newspapers. These beliefs were identified, established and reinforced by everyday news coverage through narratives that aligned with an other world myth.

This analysis establishes international news as a site of a nation imagining itself as a community, and outlines how this is done mythologically. It adds to those studies that demonstrate a focus on news as text and its relationship with an audience that moves away from a study of propaganda, both historiographically and in regard to the role of news in contemporary societies. Reading news as myth has the potential to be not only a fruitful method of analysis, but to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role news plays in the formation, and reformation, of nations.

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Endnotes

[1] Anderson also identifies the alignment of national consciousness with two cultural concepts losing their 'axiomatic grip on men's minds': the idea that 'a particular script language offered privileged access to ontological truth', and 'the belief that society was naturally organised around and under high centres' (p. 36).

[2] See Knight and Dean's (1982) interpretation of the way ideology becomes manifest in society: 'Through ideology, society appropriates and intellectualises nature in order to deny its own existence as something distinct and self-produced' (p. 146).

[3] There were legislative implications for this conflation. In 1939 *The Daily Mirror* was temporarily shut down for printing commentary that Churchill condemned as 'subversive to unity', 'rocking the boat', and 'shak[ing] the confidence of the country in its ministers' (quoted in Goldman 1997, p. 147).

[4] Maaka and Andersen (2006) similarly explore early European concepts of the Orient as Edward Said's concept of "Other" in early 17th century discourse. While not organised by national confines, conceptualisations of Asia as Other reinforced geographical and cognitive boundaries between the Orient and Europe (p. 169). The knowledge produced in discourse about the Orient became formative for European identity (p. 173).

[5] From a psychological perspective, for example, Joseph Campbell (1993) deigns the other world as reflections of suppressed subconscious content, 'reflected back against the individual and his society in forms suggesting threats of violence and fancied delight' (p. 79).

[6] Valkyrie was a preapproved plan for mobilising the German reserve army in response to any internal unrest. The Plotters planned to initiate Valkyrie in response to the explosion, which they would blame on a group of putschists within the Nazi Party, thus installing martial law and deposing Hitler's administration (Kershaw, 2009, p. 33).

[7] *The News Chronicle* was 'the dominant liberal daily' with a circulation of 1,298,757 in the last Audit Bureau of Circulations report before the war. *The Telegraph* lagged in 1939 with 737,000, but increased during the war years to reach 1,015,000 in 1948 (Jeffery & McClelland, 1987, p. 29).

[8] The newspapers used in this analysis did not go to print on Sundays, so no coverage from July 23 has been included. *The Chronicle* and *The Times* had Sunday 'sister' papers, but since they were editorially and proprietary independent, subjecting them to analysis would be akin to including two completely different newspapers with only one edition.

[9] Because they were often pulled directly from news wires (for example Reuters), news stories at the time were often published without a by-line. Unless they were filed from a special correspondent, articles in the analysis are therefore referenced according to their title, and these titles are occasionally abbreviated.

[10] Often called the 'Blitz Spirit', this quintessentially British identity was forged in the 1940-41 carpet bombing of London by the Germans. It is well known to have social and rhetorical reverberations across the second half of the 20th century (Kelsey, 2013, p. 88).

[11] See Knight and Dean's (1982) exploration of naturalisation of ideology (p. 146).

[12] Paradoxically, the plotters were later lauded by the British press for having seen the inevitability of a German defeat at the hands of the Allies.

[13] See Calder (1995) for an extensive discussion of the cultivation of the idea that the Second World War was Britain's 'good war'.

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