Introduction: once upon a time …

Everyone tells stories. From a very early age we are introduced to stories and they accompany us from our childhood, through our teenage years to adulthood and, ultimately, to our death-bed. While the content of our stories may change from child- to adulthood, the *story* as a tool of expression and comprehension remains constant. This book is a story about the importance of stories for International Relations (IR). It holds that telling and listening to stories is a fundamental part of human existence and can be found in every culture in the world. Humans comprehend the social world around them in the form of stories, or rather narratives, from which they draw identities and which guide their actions (Sarbin 1986; White 1973, 1978, 1987). Narratives not only reflect the world but influence how it is understood and made. Narratives are an essential part of how we make sense of the environment around us. This holds true not only on the individual level but also on a collective and international political level.

The primary concern of the story told in this book is to show how political science and IR might benefit from adopting a narrative perspective taken from literary studies by indicating how certain understandings of the world become and remain dominant while others fail to have a significant impact. It illustrates a concept of narrative already used in some areas in the study of history, in particular by Hayden White, and shows that narratives are not only fundamental for human communication and cognition but that they play a major role in the comprehension of the world and the constitution of identity both on the individual as well as the community level. It is through narratives that humans make and comprehend the world and thereby they offer a means of understanding behaviour and action. The present book proposes a method of narrative analysis for the investigation of political phenomena which give us insights into how particular understandings gain dominance and others are marginalized.

In particular the research has two aims. *Firstly*, the book takes an interdisciplinary approach merging literary studies and history with political science and IR to show that narratives, as a sense-making, identity-constructing and behavioural guide, are essential not only on the individual and social level, but greatly influential on the international political level as well. The book introduces the study of narrative into IR by incorporating insights from literary studies and history and presenting what narrative analysis as a method has to offer for the analysis of international political phenomena and showing how particular understandings of the world become dominant while other are marginalized. So far the concept of a 'narrative' has been used extensively in IR. However, this has happened on a very superficial level, by using the term as synonym for discourse, rhetoric or simply for everything said, written, viewed or heard. There have been few attempts to go to the roots of narratives and see what the experts in the field of literary studies have to say and what these insights might bring into IR. The discipline of history and the insights provided by Hayden White (1973) are among the few exceptions where the social sciences and the humanities have made such an attempt. The book will build on these insights in history and outline a new method of narrative analysis useful for IR which concentrates on three fundamental elements of a narrative:

1. *Setting*: the location or surrounding environment in which the narrative is set.
2. *Characterization*: the description of the actors involved.
3. *Emplotment*: the way setting, characters and events are (temporally and causally) connected to each other.

Secondly, the book focuses on narratives about increasingly important private transnational actors including pirates in Somalia, rebel movements in Libya and private military companies (PMSCs) in Iraq and how a (attempted) narrative romanticization of transnational actors such as pirates, rebels and PMSCs found in the cultural, media and political discourses influences perceptions and ultimately political reactions to such actors in the UK, Germany and the US. In the case of pirates and rebels the book argues that romantic media images embedded in cultural narratives can also be found on the level of the political elite in parliamentary debates and speeches and that these widespread images influence our understanding of these actors and thereby frame what we believe pirates or rebels to be like. This romantic image of the poor former fisherman pirate or the freedom loving rebel prevents other highly negative narratives such as a link between terrorism and piracy in Somalia or human rights violations by rebels in Libya from gaining political and media dominance. In contrast, in the case of

PMSCs the absence of such culturally embedded romantic narratives makes it difficult for such actors to successfully narrate themselves as romantic heroes to the public.

The overall argument of the book is that narratives cannot be freely changed or manipulated by narrators, but that narratives have to conform or at least connect to or overlap with previously existing ones. While there is room for new narratives, and actors can tell new stories, their success in front of a public audience depends very much on narratives this audience has previously heard and is embedded within. The acceptance of narratives is contingent on the intertextuality of the narratives being told and those embedded amongst the audience. In order to be accepted, new narratives have to refer and link themselves to established narratives to some extent. There has to be some degree of intertextual narratability (Kristeva 1980; Bakhtin 1986; Hansen 2006).

The following empirical chapters will apply the method of narrative analysis outlined in Chapter 1 and indicate this intertextuality in the German discourse on piracy, the British discourse on rebels and the US discourse on PMSCs through the extensive use of direct quotations from cultural, media, political and academic texts. As the reader will notice, rather than simply paraphrasing the content of the different articles, the suggested form of narrative analysis relies on the citation of numerous words (adjectives, verbs and nouns) and phrases in order to create a narrative collage structured by the three narrative elements of setting, characterization and emplotment. This, although at times hindering readability thanks to extensive endnotes, makes the presentation of the narrative elements transparent and verifiable. However, it is important to note that by creating a collage of a vast number of quotations, this book is itself a narrative. This narrative is inherently subjective. Yet through transparency and verifiability and by showing the extensiveness of the narrative elements, the book aims at making the subjective story intersubjective.

In the following paragraphs this introduction will briefly embed such a narrative analysis in a wider field of discursive approaches in IR, then elaborate on the role of the media and cultural artefacts in the articulation of stories in international politics and finally outline the structure of what is to follow in the remaining chapters.

Discourse analysis and the narrative turn

While discourse analysis was considered the realm of post-structuralists sitting at the fringes of IR in the 1990s, it has since then transgressed its marginal status

and has become an accepted method which can be found in most textbooks on methodological approaches in international politics (Klotz and Prakash 2009; Wiener and Diez 2004). While discourse analysis has become mainstream, at least in Europe, it is important to stress that there is no one method of discourse analysis but a vast range of very different perspectives (Milliken 1999; Holzscheiter 2014; Herschinger and Renner 2014).

This book will follow a tradition of discourse analysis which holds that discourse does not only reflect reality but actively takes part in its construction. Here the world, be it material, ideational or behavioural, gains meaning only through discourse. Rather than being simply a tool of communication with the purpose of seeking truth through the exchange of better arguments (Risse 2000; Deitelhoff 2009), discourse is understood as a 'structure of meaning-in-use' (Weldes and Saco 1996: 373) or a 'differential system of signification' (Milliken 1999: 231). It is therefore not so much interested in the truthfulness of discourse or if some articulations are better than others, but it concentrates on how discourse constitutes the world. As Nicholas Onuf (1998: 59) points out, 'saying is doing: talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world what it is'. Social reality is considered a discursive construction, and the central task of research is to find out how reality gets constructed in discourse. The book here argues that narratives play an essential part in the way discourse is structured. Narratives are a means of structuring discourse.

Correspondingly, the following empirical chapters on pirates, rebels and mercenaries are interested in the structural power of discourse. Drawing on Michel Foucault, the book shares an understanding of discourse that is 'above' individual discourse-participants. In contrast to many approaches used in critical discourse analysis, where there is extensive agency over discourse and where discourse is actively used by agents in pursuit of their interests (Fairclough 1992, 2003; Jackson 2005), this book argues that there is little agency over discourse and that power lies not in the agents but in discourse itself. Discourse constitutes actors and structures what they can meaningfully say or do. Rather than being able to use words intentionally and manipulate discourse to further the speaker's own purposes, the speaker and the audience are inextricably bound up with discourses that leave them little room for individuality. Discourse and its narrative structure limits what agents can meaningfully say and do rather than vice versa (Doty 1993; Campbell 1998a; Hansen 2006; Hülsse and Spencer 2008).

Despite the continuing rise of different discourse analytical approaches the concept of narrative is still viewed with some suspicion in large parts of political

science and IR as there is continued scepticism about how insights from literary studies are supposed to help answer important questions of (international) politics. As Margaret Somers points out, narrative analysis is not easily integrated into the social sciences as it 'has long fulfilled the role of social science's "epistemological other" – a *mode of representation* that was, apparently, discursive, rather than quantitative; non-explanatory, rather than conditionally propositional; and non-theoretical, rather than one of the theoretically-driven social sciences' (Somers 1994: 606).

At first, criticism of narratives was widespread. For example, in the case of sociology Read Bain (1935: 486) claimed that a discipline which did not focus on statistics and numbers would be 'forever a bastard discipline' as it would be made up only of 'a hodgepodge of pretentious words, random observations, speculations, opinions, pious hopes and fears, attitudes, wishes, sophistical logic, and literary purple patches'. Yet, with the overall rise of post-structural ideas negating the existence of ultimate truth and knowledge, the analysis of narrative has reached a number of disciplines including history, psychology, anthropology, marketing, artificial intelligence and ludology (Kohler Riessman 1993; Ochs and Capps 2002; Zartman 2003; Bringsjord and Ferrucci 2000; Murray 1997). Together with the general post-structural trend, this turn has also reached political science and IR (Roe 1994; Browning 2008; Miskimmon *et al.* 2013). Some therefore talk of a 'narrative turn' (Ryan 2007: 22) or even a 'narratological industry' (Jahn and Nünning 1994: 300) in most disciplines including the humanities and social sciences as there is now a growing awareness that narratives are not only a literary phenomenon but 'a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change' (Herman 2009a: 2; Hyvärinen 2008a: 449). Narratives do not only offer alternatives to reality but actively take part in the constitution of reality. Narratives offer humans a way of comprehending our environment. Narratives are 'natural to human consciousness' (White 1987: 26) and are therefore essential as they not only form an important part of human communication, but are a vital pillar of creating societies (Shenhav 2005b: 315).

This book holds that narratives are a subtype or part of a discourse (Brockmeier and Harré 2001: 42). While discourse includes a vast number of different representations and it is unclear where to draw a line delimiting discourse, narratives include a number of key elements which offer anchor points for the empirical analysis. As the following chapter will elaborate in more detail, narratives are a 'mode of verbal representation' (White 1987: 26) that include the elements of setting, characterization and emplotment. The

analysis of narratives as 'a procedure of discovery' (Genette 1980: 265) or method can give us insights not only into the technical makeup of existing narratives but into the dominance of values, beliefs and ideologies in politics and how people and communities view the self in relation to the other. 'The narrative thus becomes an invaluable tool for political scientists concerned with how such issues as identity – group or individual – influence behavior' (Patterson and Renwick 1998: 317). Furthermore, although social narratives are very rarely single authored, the analysis of narratives can nevertheless be considered as an investigation into social action and agency. Some such as Somers have suggested

> that social life is itself *storied* and that narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*. Their research is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories … and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives. (Somers 1994: 613–614, emphasis in original)

It is important to stress that this book is not a story which seeks to outline the true nature of pirates, rebels or PMSCs. Narratives cannot establish universal truths. 'Narratives create the very events they reflect upon. In this sense, narratives are reflections *on* – not *of* – the world as it is known' (Denzin 2000: xiii). So some may reasonably ask why they should bother to continue reading this story. If there is no way of judging competing narratives, what is the point? The question such research is often confronted with is the question of 'how can we judge between competing interpretations?' (Campbell 1998a: 41) or 'how can a constructivist persuade his reader that his constructs are worth more than others?' (Palan 2000: 594). The point is not so much proving the correctness of one narrative over another but to empirically show the discursive struggle and the persistence of widely accepted, culturally embedded dominant narratives over marginalized ones (Browning 2008: 158–159).

Political elite, media narratives and the role of culture

This book is not only interested in culturally embedded narratives and their implications in general but has a fascination with the romantic. After all,

'[n]obody would walk into a book-store and ask for "a narrative," because what matters to us are individual narrative genres' (Ryan 2007: 32), such as tragedy, comedy or in this case romance. To show the intertextuality and persistence or relative absence of narratives and in particular romantic narratives, the empirical chapters of this book will focus on three realms of political narrative in Germany, Britain and the United States of America. This will include the narratives told by the political elite in parliamentary debates and speeches, media narratives found in print news media as well as cultural literary texts and films. While the analysis of the narratives of the elite and the media are common, as their importance for and interconnectedness with politics is widely accepted, the relevance of cultural artefacts such as poems, novels, movies and video games is in comparison less well established.

However, with the rise of constructivism and acceptance of ideas, identities, norms and language as important elements of IR and in particular with the cultural turn in IR, the analysis of cultural texts, practices and symbols has become increasingly widespread. This interest in (pop) culture in IR has included diverse studies on traditional IR topics such as war, security, foreign policy and political economy as well as research on ideology, identity constructions and gender roles (Weber 2006b; Weldes 2003a; Dodds 2008; Hall 2011; Engelkamp and Offermann 2012; Spencer *et al.* 2011; Unger and Sunderland 2007).

Despite the diverse range of empirical topics as well as diverse cultural sources ranging from poems, songs, literature, TV series, movies and video games (Bleiker and Hundt 2010; Franklin 2005; Holden 2003; Erikson 2008; Weber 2006a; Engert and Spencer 2009; Robinson 2012), most are in agreement that culture can be understood as a realm which gives meaning to experiences and behaviour and helps people make sense of the worlds in which they live (Tomlinson 1991). For the narrative analysis which is to follow in the next couple of chapters, 'cultural texts and images are seen as storage places for meaning in a particular society' (Neumann and Nexon 2006: 13). Therefore the analysis of cultural representations is important for IR, as it not only offers reflections of world politics but it actively takes part in its constitution. Culture is not separate from politics but culture is fundamentally political (Der Derian 2001; Shapiro 1999, 2008; Weber 2006b; Weldes 2003a). The 'low data' of culture provides the background of meaning in front of which narrative struggles and the constitution of politics unfolds (Weldes 2006) and culture is itself political as 'it is here that we make sense of the world by producing coherent narratives, which in turn serve as the basis for any sense of community and political action' (Bronfen 2006: 21–23). Culture is a site of political struggle 'where

power, ideology and identity are constituted, produced and/or materialised'
(Grayson *et al.* 2009: 155–156).

While some hold that there is no fundamental difference between politics
and culture or between the analysis of political speeches by President Obama
and cultural treasures such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*, this book holds that it is
important to look both at 'high' and 'low data' (Weldes 2006) or what Neumann
and Nexon (2006: 7) refer to as first- and second-order representations. The
book aims to incorporate both the analysis of first-order representations such
as speeches by the political elite and media news reporting which make explicit
claims to real-world truths as well as second-order representations such as
poems, novels and films which make no such claim of authenticity.

By starting with second-order narratives the following empirical chapters want
to illustrate that much of the first-order narratives gain prominence only through
their references to the second order. The underlying questions of morality, legiti-
macy and identity are shaped not only by the narratives told by the political elite
and by the media but are influenced by an underlying, embedded cultural story. This
story makes certain understandings and behaviours appropriate while marginalizing
others, in other words it reflects and creates a common sense (Weldes 1999; Debrix
2008). It is within this culture 'that morality is shaped, identities are produced and
transformed, and effective analogies and narratives are constructed and altered'
(Neumann and Nexon 2006: 6). The empirical chapters will not so much talk about
cultural narratives causing certain policy or state behaviour but will argue that they
provide common knowledge which is resorted to when considering political issues.
They produce a joint moral grammar (Weber 2006b) and provide recognizable
and plausible narrative elements on which political narratives have to be based to
be able to gain dominance over other stories. These embedded cultural narratives
are needed for acceptance of political narratives. For political or media narratives to
gain dominance there has to be a certain level of intertextuality so that there is no
fundamental break with the known. 'Political speeches are full of allusions to narra-
tives already known to the public. By relying on familiar narratives, politicians draw
analogies that make their positions intuitively plausible to their audience' (Neumann
and Nexon 2006: 18). As Jutta Weldes argues with regard to the link between culture
and (international) politics and the importance of intertextuality:

> Official representations thus depend on the cultural resources of a society. So too
> do the ways in which they are understood. The plausibility of official representa-
> tions depends on the ways in which publics understand world politics and the
> locations and role of their own and other states and actors in it.… Plausibility

comes, at least in part, from the structural congruence between official representations and people's everyday experiences. This explicitly implicates popular culture in providing a background of meanings that help to constitute public images in world politics and foreign policy. (Weldes 2003b: 7)

Structure of the book

In the following chapters the book will indicate this intertextuality by elaborating in particular on culturally embedded romantic stories. The book focuses on the three non-state actors of pirates, rebels and PMSCs in Germany, the UK and the US, as these are among the most important non-state actors which show elements of (attempted) romanticization in these countries. While the focus on Germany, the UK and the US is down to the cultural and linguistic embeddedness of the author in these countries, which greatly aids the process of analysing cultural, media and political narratives, the combination of the state and the non-state actor (Germany and pirates; UK and rebels; US and PMSCs) is due to the level of engagement with the actor and the relative size of the narratives found on the empirical level. The US employs by far the most PMSCs in Iraq; the UK was one of the most active players in the rebellion in Libya; and Germany, while not involved in Iraq or Libya, has taken on an active role against piracy in Somalia.

Specifically, the story this book tells will unfold as follows: Chapter 1 outlines in detail a method of narrative analysis which is to be employed in the following three empirical chapters on pirates, rebels and PMSCs. It begins by reflecting on the concept of narrative in literary studies and narratology, the theory of narrative, and outlines some of the key elements which distinguish a narrative from other forms of representation. This includes the notion of a setting in which the story unfolds, the characterization of actors in the story and the idea of temporal and most importantly causal emplotment which elaborates on how events, settings and characters are connected to each other. The chapter then considers how these understandings have been incorporated into other disciplines such as psychology and history by outlining the overlap of cognitive narratology and narrative psychology as well as the insights gained in narrative history by Hayden White with regard to (hi-)story telling in the form of different genres, such as tragedy or romance. From this, the chapter moves on to the role of narratives in political science and IR and draws out, based on the insights of psychology and history, two key reasons for the importance of narratives in (international) politics: the cognitive importance of narratives for the human thought process

and the cultural importance of narratives in community identity building. The chapter then embeds the narrative elements of setting, characterization and emplotment into key constructivist theoretical foundations including the social construction of reality (setting), the constitution of identity (characterization) and the co-constitution of agents and structure (emplotment). Following this, Chapter 1 reflects on the consequences of narratives and deeper question of causality as well as the reasons for narrative dominance and marginalization, including the importance of intertextual narratability in which narratives have to link to previously existing ones in order to be able to gain acceptance. The final part of the chapter turns to the genre of romance and, from the existing literature on romanticism, indicates some of the narrative elements of a typically romantic story, including an exotic and emotional setting, a brave, heroic yet human character and an adventure emplotted as a struggle for an ideal in an asymmetrical conflict against a more powerful and unjust order.

Chapter 2 analyses German narratives of the pirate in Somalia. It sets off by tracing the historical romantic stories about pirates from the early eighteenth century and the golden age of piracy to current history writing on piracy, including references to the democratic and egalitarian setting of pirate society, the frightful yet courageous character of pirates and their emplotment in an a struggle against the exploitation of the poor and downtrodden by the rising capitalist system. The chapter goes on to show that these early romantic elements persist into Byron's poem 'The Corsair', Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island* and pop-cultural understandings of the pirate in representations such as the film *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The following section shows that this dominant Western popular image of the romantic pirate, visible also in public opinion, persists in the reporting of contemporary piracy in the German news media. Employing the method of narrative analysis the chapter retells a romantic story of the pirate in Somalia set in an exotic location and revolving around brave pirates who are forced into piracy not of their own free will but because of circumstances beyond their control such as illegal fishing or the dumping of toxic waste by more powerful Western companies and states. The next part turns to alternative stories told by some scholars and think tanks which try and tell a very different, highly negative, narrative which links piracy and terrorism by pointing to similarities between the two, the potential of cooperation, the use of pirate tactics by terrorists and political nature of piracy. The chapter finally illustrates the marginalization of this story despite the potential truthfulness and the persistence of the romantic story in both the German media and elite political discourse found in parliamentary debates on Somalia.

Chapter 3 examines British narratives of the rebel in Libya during the conflict in 2011. It begins by outlining the interconnectedness of rebellion, revolution and romance not only historically but within political and literary writing. Referring to cultural narratives found in the work of poets such as Byron and Shelley it shows how much of romanticism is rebellious and revolutionary and how rebels and revolutions are frequently romantic. It stresses, however, that not all stories of rebellion and revolution have to be told romantically, but holds that they *can* be told that way. Continuing from these classic romantic narratives of rebellion the chapter further emphasizes the ambiguous nature of the rebel story by turning to the portrayal of the orientalist and romantic Arab in pop-cultural representations including the film *Lawrence of Arabia* and focusing on the narrative element of setting, characterization and emplotment. Part three of the chapter then engages with the media narrative of the rebel in the Libyan conflict found in British newspapers between February and October 2011. Employing the method of narrative analysis outlined in Chapter 1, it shows a predominantly romantic story of the rebel in Libya in which one encounters an emotional setting, unprofessional, brave and young rebels emplotted to be fighting for the ideal of freedom and democracy in an asymmetrical conflict against a brutal and unjust Gaddafi. These findings are mirrored in part four, which examines the narratives on rebellion in Libya of the political elite found in parliamentary debates and speeches by leading politicians. The final part of the chapter examines marginalized narratives which do not fit the story of the romantic rebel such as crimes, human rights violations and a linkage between rebels and al-Qaeda terrorists. One does encounter some media and political elite narratives which elaborate on these highly negative stories to some extent. However, the romantic stories remain the most prominent, as counter-stories, despite their potential plausibility, are marginalized by being silenced, relativized, ridiculed, explicitly refuted or portrayed as morally justified and understandable.

Chapter 4 investigates US narratives about PMSCs in Iraq. In contrast to the previous chapters on pirates and rebels this chapter will indicate the cultural absence of romantic stories about PMSCs. The first part retraces the historical development of the anti-mercenary narrative from Machiavelli via Clausewitz, Rousseau and the American Declaration of Independence to representation of mercenaries in international law texts, such as the Geneva Convention. The persistence of this anti-mercenary narrative is then shown in literary texts on mercenaries by examining Sir Walter Scott's novel *A Legend of Montrose* and Frederick Forsyth's novel *The Dogs of War*. The second part of the chapter turns to the US media narratives on PMSCs and shows the

persistence of these negative elements found in the previous anti-mercenary narratives in which the PMSC is constituted as a reckless mercenary working in an unregulated and chaotic setting in which his monetary motivation is considered morally illegitimate. The third part of the chapter engages with romantic stories PMSCs tell about themselves. By examining the narratives found on the websites of PMSCs, the chapter illustrates how these actors try to tell a romantic story by constituting themselves as brave patriots and noble humanitarians. The final part of the chapter then illustrates the narrative struggle and the marginalized status of these romantic stories and the persistence of the highly negative anti-mercenary narratives by examining the story told in US print news media, among the political elite in both the Senate and in the House of Representatives, in international institutions as well as in pop-cultural representations in films and video games.

The conclusion of the book summarizes the main findings and reflects on some of the marginalized stories not mentioned throughout the book, including the role of the narrator for the process of dominance and marginalization of narratives. Furthermore, it contemplates some potential avenues for future research on other narratives genres in international politics beyond romance.