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If Foreign Policy Paradigms Were on the Research Agenda...

Abstract: The aim of the article is to develop a conceptual framework for the analysis of foreign policy paradigms. In order to develop such a framework, we review the wider literature on policy paradigms and adapt it to the field of foreign relations and diplomacy. Adaptation includes the explication of key concepts, such as identity, values, goals, means and principles. Importantly, we do not only explicate key concepts, but also, subsequently, outline methodological avenues for empirical research on foreign policy paradigms. In this fashion, the article offers a conceptual framework that analysts can apply in empirical studies of both national and transnational foreign policy paradigms, including the field of EU foreign policy.

Keywords: policy paradigms, EEAS, foreign policy, methodology, normative structures, principles, values

Introduction

This article is not about foreign policy, institutional settings or international relations and it does not offer an “outside-in” perspective (cf. Keuleers et al., 2016). Indeed, we feel tempted to rephrase George Kennan (1995) and claim that what

is needed is not more foreign policy analysis. What we need is increased attention to ideational structural factors that shape the politics of foreign policy-making, for instance by offering criteria for what counts as policy failures and successes. In the context of the well-known conceptual triptych “policy-polity-politics”, we focus in this article squarely on the latter, not because the first two are unimportant but because it seems to us that the latter is equally important. Our focus on politics implies a wider focus than narrow policy analysis and more attention to actors’ specification of (contested) problems to which they offer solutions, their (contested) legitimization strategies (or stated reasons for action) and their (contested) ideas about adequate means to achieve stated policy goals.

Furthermore, instead of repeating theoretical claims ad nauseam about the (in-)significance of ideational structural factors, the article explores the nature and dynamics of these factors. Such a task calls for a rigorous analysis of concepts typically characterized by taken for granted meanings that essentially function as obstacles for an upgraded understanding of the ideational structural factors. Our exploration helps us to develop a conceptual framework for the analysis of foreign policy paradigms. In order to develop such a framework, we review the wider literature on policy paradigms and cannot help but notice the glaring absence of foreign policy studies. Hence, we examine the degree to which it is necessary to adapt the wider literature to the field of foreign affairs. Adaptation includes the explication of key concepts, for instance identity, principles and values. Likewise, we analyse how key concepts within foreign policy analysis (FPA), for instance dispositional factors, can contribute to the conceptual framework.

Finally, we do not only explicate the key concepts in our conceptual framework but also outline four methodological avenues for empirical research on foreign policy paradigms, specifically critical discourse analysis, document analysis, ethnography and interviews. We do so because it is easy to argue that for instance principles are important but it is considerably more difficult to detect principles “at work” as well as in available empirical data and nothing less than analytically demanding to determine their significance, including their significance in terms of exactly what. Similar analytical challenges characterize analytical work on other key concepts such as identity and values, indeed the entire package of the stuff that make up foreign policy paradigms.

In the following section, we develop a conceptual framework that analysts can apply in empirical studies of both national and transnational policy paradigms, including the field of EU foreign policy. The aspiration is to construct a generic conceptual framework so that FPA can avoid developing 193+ conceptual frameworks, one for each state and the union of states that is called the European Union (EU).

Foreign policy paradigms: Towards a conceptual framework

The concept of policy paradigms has emerged as a popular, albeit contested concept across a broad array of studies. It can be argued that the attraction and metaphorical appeal of the word lies in its malleability; it can be used for different purposes by different people (Surel, 2000; Hogan and Howlett, 2015). In policy studies, the value of the concept primarily lies in its ability to illuminate the connection between ideas and policy change (Daigneault, 2014). Considering how policy paradigms have been used to investigate policies across virtually all policy areas – from agriculture to welfare state politics – it excels at its absence in foreign policy studies (Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011). Indeed, similar features characterize related concepts such as grand strategy, worldviews, schools of thought and foreign policy traditions, i.e. concepts that play a prominent role in the literature explaining how ideas influence foreign policy change (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Nau, 2008; Nau and Ollapally, 2012; Mead, 2001).

Advocating the incorporation of the concept into the sphere of foreign policy analysis begs the question of how exactly foreign policy paradigms might extend the range of research questions that are pertinent to the field. Broadly speaking, foreign policy paradigms are ‘just’ another way to integrate coherent sets of ideas into foreign policy analysis. However, foreign policy paradigms matter precisely because they denote, not just loosely coupled ideas, but more or less coherent complexes of interrelated ideas encapsulated in interpretive frameworks. This way, they matter in foreign policy-making processes by providing road maps for foreign policy elites on how to act in the world (Weir, 1992; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). As Baumgartner (2014, p. 476) claims, policy paradigms are “ideas on steroids” and have the potential to define the universe of possibilities for action. In other words, foreign policy elites carrying out foreign policy, will ‘work within’ a set of interpretive frameworks that direct them towards engaging in the politics of defining problems, offering solutions and prioritizing some policies over others (Hall, 1993).

Numerous questions lend themselves to scrutiny through the analysis of foreign policy paradigms. Foreign policy elites find themselves embroiled in complex processes when addressing problems emerging on the foreign policy agenda. Foreign policy paradigms can help us understand the way in which these actors – whether it is governments, international organizations, NGOs – respond to foreign policy challenges. For instance, why do governments address some foreign policy issues while ignoring others? Why do different actors tend to engage in the same conflicts in very different ways? Why do we see the proliferation of specific policy means and buzzwords? Foreign policy paradigms is thus a welcome addition to foreign policy analysis, serving as a perspective for investigating the “normative and cognitive software” underlying foreign policy-making.

The concept of policy paradigms is also relevant in relation to the study of transnational policy paradigms (Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011). How is the configuration of foreign policy paradigms a transnational perspective and how does the configuration change over time? How do transnational paradigms, held and constructed by foreign policy elites, become unlocked in domestic contexts and vice versa? Specifically in an EU foreign policy context, the concept of paradigms can serve as a way to shift the focus from vertical EU-member states relations to horizontal transnational perspectives, meaning that the commonalities in foreign policy ideas shared across member states move to centre court. This opens up for the existence of a handful of distinct and competing foreign policy paradigms and how they organize the politics of foreign affairs in Europe (Jørgensen, 2013; Aarstad, 2015; Exadaktylos, 2015; Holman, 2015).

Towards a conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provides an overview of the composite parts of a policy paradigm and how it relates to the concept of identity. Thereby, identity is portrayed as an overarching category that highlights the role of policy paradigms in processes of identity-formation. Both are subject to change over time. Both display national and transnational characteristics. A given foreign policy elite represents or adopts an international identity by means of ‘colouring’ the normative and cognitive ideas, i.e. goals and means, principles and values.

In explicating the key concepts and how they relate to one another, we first turn the focus towards policy paradigms. Building on the wider literature on policy paradigms, the key distinction in the proposed conceptual framework is between normative and cognitive ideas (Surel, 2000; Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011). A foreign policy paradigm is thus conceptualized as “a set of cognitive and normative maps that orients an international actor within the foreign policy sphere” (see Bleich, 2002; Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011; Exadaktylos, 2015). Distinguishing between cognitive and normative dimensions as the constituent parts of a policy paradigm is not a novel innovation; it constitutes the common denominator in the literature. The internal structure of policy paradigms is commonly described along the dimensions of problem-solving and value-complex, background- and foreground dimensions and principled and causal beliefs capturing the same analytical distinctions (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Campbell, 1998; Carson et al., 2009). In the following paragraphs, we review and specify definitions of the key concepts, which all belong to the category of contested concepts. However, we aim at offering a conceptualization that will allow hands-on empirical research on foreign policy paradigms.

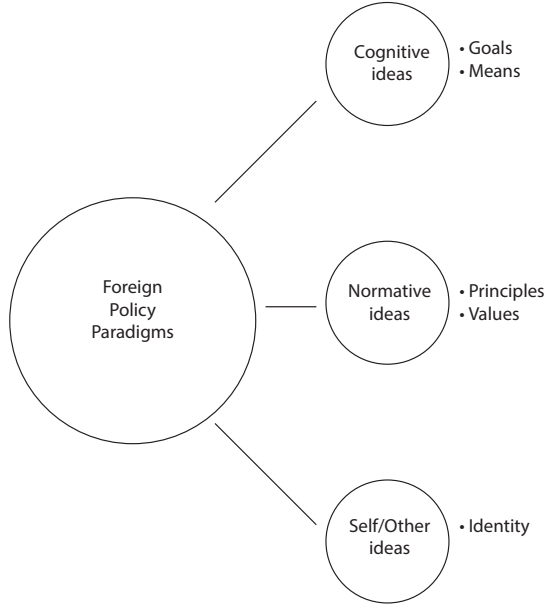


Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Foreign policy paradigms as a composite of five component parts

Source: Conceptual configuration by the authors

Cognitive ideas

Cognitive ideas describe how the world works or respectively how the world is (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Thus, worldviews constitute a facet of cognitive ideas, yet the cognitive dimension also denotes how actors define problems, goals and the means for attaining them. This part of a paradigm has family resemblances with the notions of programmatic ideas and causal beliefs (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Weir, 1992), which are specific to the choice of policy means and can be conceived as causal ideas about how to realize policy goals and solve policy problems.

Identifying goals and the means as the main constituents of the cognitive dimension, they are defined as follows: Goals guide the policy in a certain field (Hall, 1993). In foreign policy, goals may be of geopolitical, cultural/political or institutional/diplomatic nature (Nau, 2012). An example of a geopolitical goal is hegemony (Nau, 2012, p. 13). Means designate the foreign policy instruments that are used to achieve these goals (Hall, 1993). Often these are divided into hard and soft tools, i.e., in military/economic (coercive) tools and cultural/diplomatic

tools (Nau, 2012). Following these definitions, goals can also be means and vice versa. For example, a country's aspiration to be a soft power can be a *goal* and means at the same time.

Goals and means serve as parameters for worldviews. Conceiving worldviews as “foreign policy schools of thought”, goals and means are central conceptual pillars for how foreign policy elites think about the world, how they perceive the world (Nau, 2012, p. 4). Accordingly, the way in which foreign policy actors perceive the world is related to (changing) goals and means (Nau, 2012). Hence, if a country changes its foreign policy goals from a nationalist to a global outlook, it changes its worldview. Thereby, worldviews can be both causes and consequences of foreign policy outcomes. It is the goals and means, packed in worldviews, upon which policy action is based. Hence, worldviews are part and parcel of paradigms.

Our distinction in goals and means as cognitive ideas intersects with Walter Carlsnaes' (1992) category of dispositional factors which are part of his tripartite analytical approach to explaining foreign policy action. At the dispositional level, he refers to cognitive and psychological factors that intentionally drive a foreign policy actor's behaviour. In concrete terms, Carlsnaes (1992, p. 255) subsumes perceptions and values (including norms) under the dispositional level. Values are understood as “belief systems’ which motivate foreign policy actors to pursue certain goals”, whereas, perceptions are related to ‘world-views’. However, the present conceptual framework assigns values to normative instead of cognitive ideas, specifically in order to show how normative ideas drive cognitive ideas, i.e., how values motivate goals.

Normative ideas

To Skogstad and Schmidt (2011) the normative component of policy paradigms denotes ideas about how the world *ought* to be. In other words, this component enables the creation of criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong and, unjust and just. Given that foreign policy aims at changing certain state of affairs to how they ought to be, normative ideas play a key role and the pluralist international order implies that we should be analytically agnostic about the substance of normative ideas. The existence of a pluralist order implies that what is seen as just in one part of the world might be seen as unjust in other parts. Normative ideas also relate to the ranking of foreign policy objectives, for instance concerning security, economic interests or milieu goals. In our conceptual framework, normative ideas comprise of principles and values. While foreign policy statements offer ubiquitous, yet often ambiguous, references to principles and values,

they do not offer much guidance about the meaning of these key concepts. We are therefore bound to engage in some conceptual explication.

Principles are perceived differently by different analysts. Some regard principles as “normative propositions that should be applied automatically by a given country in the conduct of its relations with other countries” (Lucarelli, 2006, p. 10). Studies adopting the definition will presumably conclude that principles have little impact, not least because automatic application is a high bar. Nonetheless, the understanding is widespread and according to Inis Claude, the master proposition is, “that states do not, but certainly should, consistently engage in principled behaviour in the international setting” (Claude, 1993, p. 215). Claude highlights an important additional feature of pleas for principled behaviour, “Praise of principles always entails an invisible possessive pronoun: my or our principles” (Claude, 1993, p. 217).

In contrast to the automatic application theorem, some scholars are more inclined towards pragmatism and define a principle as, “a general rule of conduct by which a given country chooses to abide in the conduct of its relations with other countries” (Kennan, 1995, p. 118). In this definition, the option of choice replaces the imperative of automatic application. Hence, as a general rule of conduct, principles leave foreign policy elites with dilemmas concerning principled or pragmatic action.

In a third conception, principles are “beliefs of fact, causation, and rectitude” (Krasner, 1983) and play a key role, together with the concepts of norms, rules and procedures, in a popular definition of international regimes. Kratochwil and Ruggie describe how the concepts connect, “[t]he principle that liberalized trade is good for global welfare and international peace was readily translated by states into such norms as nondiscrimination, which in turn suggested the most-favored-nation rule, all of which led to negotiated tariff reductions based on reciprocal concessions” (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986, p. 769). However, Kratochwil and Ruggie also highlight that a second script characterizes the GATT regime and this leaves a degree of ambiguity, potentially useful in diplomacy yet highly uncomfortable for many academic analysts.

In public policy declarations and think-tank policy-briefs, values go pop (become ever more popular yet also shallow) so, seemingly, foreign policy has become values-based. However, according to advocacy groups’ policy critique, foreign policy is not but should be based on values. Joris Voorhoeve (1979, p. 308) writes about the, “idealistic, well-informed, and active groups which would like to turn foreign policy mainly into advocacy of values, give less emphasis to the defence of interests, and often neglect practical considerations of effectiveness”. In theoretical orientations, values also play a key role, for instance among English School pluralists, “there are many groups in world politics, each with different values, or different versions of the same value, which are distinctive to

themselves” (Jackson, 2000, p. 179; cf. also Wight, 1966). Given these contending perspectives, how do we conceptualize ‘values’?

In the first place, we note that values can be connected to principles, as in Kenneth Thompson’s (1992, p. 135) characterization of a moralist, “the moralist inflates the place of values by sanctifying short-term and parochial interests, absolutizing higher goals into rigid principles that obstruct the political process, and raising moral formulations to the level of irrelevance”. However, given that we aim at conceptualizing foreign policy paradigms as intersubjective social structures that organize the politics of foreign policy, we do not have an interest in representing the moralist. Likewise, we do not have an interest in an abstract definition of ‘values’. By contrast, we do have an interest in the values (and principles) that foreign policy elites employ, including how they understand values in the context of the other component parts of foreign policy paradigms. In other words, we are bound to enable examinations of the meaning values (and principles) have for elites in distinct foreign policy networks. Do they enact particularistic or universal values? Does the former sometimes masquerade as the latter? It is for empirical analysis to answer such questions.

Identity as ideas of Self/Other

With the arrival of constructivist perspectives, the concept of identity became a cornerstone in analytical frameworks. However, arguing that identity incorporates foreign policy paradigms is in itself unhelpful. Identity is such a rich concept that it can be part of numerous scholarly perspectives. Hence, in the present context of building an analytical framework for the study of foreign policy paradigms, it seems to us that identity plays a key role in embodying distinct, substantive configurations of principles, values, goals and means.

Identity is about feelings of belonging, similarity and unity, connected with memories, metaphors and symbols (Risse, 2012, p. 88). Its Latin root “idem” has a two-fold meaning, so while it suggests sameness or identical, it also refers to the distinctiveness of the self, a feature that assumes consistency over time. Thus, the concept of identity is not only about perceptions of similarity, but also about the sense of difference. As Richard Jenkins puts it, “(it) is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). In short, identity encompasses the duality of “self/we/us” versus the “other/they/them”. Identity simply summarizes self-images, images of others and images of a world in which co-habitation by self and other(s) is a condition. It follows that we in the context of foreign policy paradigms have a strong interest in examining how actors answer questions like the following: What are our values and principles and what are the principles and values of others? With whom do

we share principles and values? And. Not to forget, how do we shape the world in the image of our preferences, that is, to the degree such shaping is possible, that it is our goal and, that we can or are willing to employ suitable means. In this context, how do others see us, assuming that they actually do see us and/or recognize us for what we prefer to be recognized as.

Identity plays a crucial role in foreign policy paradigms, not least because the boundaries around a given polity can be represented between us and them. Fredrik Barth claims that instead of a shared culture, the cultural differences among groups are the main denominator of boundaries between identities. In other words, pre-existing identities do not produce the boundaries; they are the outcome of contacting with other identities (Barth, 1969), or put differently, identity is mainly constructed by asking “what is not it?”, rather than “what is?” (Derrida, 1976, p. 47). As a result, the relational features of identities make identity not only constitute its others, but is also constituted by them.

Constructivist theory emphasizes the situational structure of identities vis-à-vis its other (Wendt, 1992; 1994; 1999; Hopf, 2002; Neumann, 1999). National identity, as one of the important categories of collective identity, is constructed along these boundaries separating the state-nation from other state-nations, ethnic groups or polities. The other does not only represent an alternative identity or a mere presence of the different; rather, the other plays an active role in demarcating the self. Eminent studies of American (Nau, 2002), Russian (Hopf, 2002), Indian (Chacko, 2013) foreign policy as well as studies of national security cultures (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996) demonstrate how identity works as the epicentre in processes of the formation and reproduction of foreign policy paradigms.

Self-images are not static or coherent social structures, but the outcome of a multiplicity of discourses emerging from interaction with “others”. While the self’s interaction with the others – foreign relations – are ever-changing with the conditions of national, regional and global politics, its identity is also changing, redefining itself in a relational context. In other words, identity and foreign policy tend to develop a harmony that will keep the internal and external dynamics of states in balance by constantly shaping, changing and reconstructing each other.

In summary, policy paradigms are shared by a group of people; they are intersubjectively held (Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011). Viewing politics as an arena in which actors face continual uncertainties about their interests and how to maximize them, the need for policy paradigms to function as road maps becomes apparent. Foreign policy paradigms serve the purpose of guiding or legitimizing behaviour under conditions of uncertainty by stipulating causal patterns or by providing ethical or moral motivations for actions. With the conceptual framework we opt for the social intersubjective ontology of principles and values

and as demonstrated in the following section on methodological avenues, we focus on relevant epistemological procedures.

Four methodological avenues

Intuitively a research agenda on foreign policy paradigms looks promising. After all, why opt for the small splash of distinct policy studies when a research agenda on policy paradigms and paradigmatic shifts offers a bigger splash? In the previous section, we highlighted five foundational components of foreign policy paradigms and explicated the key concepts that characterize the building blocks. The objective was to get a better grasp of the nature and dynamics of foreign policy paradigms, including their essential role in organizing the *politics* of policy-making. The present section aims at pointing to ways in which the building blocks can be analysed, that is, analysed in concrete research. After all, it is one thing to argue that principles, values and identities are phenomena worthwhile analysing and, it is a different thing to actually demonstrate how they matter. That is, to get on the methodological avenues that enable and enrich foreign policy paradigms studies, including the management of evidence in its different forms. Given the limited space available, we focus on just four methodological avenues and within each we concentrate on just a few historical and contemporary examples that in our opinion can be seen as best practice. Each of the avenues offers procedures for examining the relative significance of the five key concepts, for encounters between concepts and data as well as the production of data. Finally, we should emphasize that in this section why and how questions concern the methodological avenues and thus not explanatory or interpretive theoretical templates.

The avenue of critical discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is not a mainstream method in foreign policy analysis. However, when analyzing foreign policy paradigms, it is necessary to interpret normative and cognitive ideas of foreign policy elites not only vis-à-vis material reality, but especially within the context of the social structures we call discourses. Hence, discourse analysis is a relevant avenue and critical discourse analysis (CDA) a suitable choice.

Why? While David Campbell describes what discourse analysis questions, namely the logic of cataloguing, calculating or specifying “real causes” which are seen as the manifestation of one mode of representation over another (Campbell, 1993, pp. 7–8), others explain what discourses are. According to Jennifer

Milliken, “discourses operate as background capacities for persons to differentiate and identify things, giving them taken-for-granted qualities and attributes, and relating them to other objects” (Milliken, 1999, p. 231). In general, discourse is a multilayered concept, including (a) meaning-making as a constituent part of social process; (b) the language associated with a specific social field or practice; (c) a particular social perspective to interpret the aspects of the world (Fairclough, 2013, p. 11). Besides reproducing status quo, discourses are socially constitutive, which means that they are not only shaped by social structures, they also shape and transform them (Wodak, 2014, p. 303).

How? In the field of foreign policy, normative and cognitive ideas appear as distinct discourses. However, do discourses consist solely of verbal and written expressions or do they include meaningful practices, such as flag hoisting or handshaking (Diez, 2014, p. 320). The intriguing question shows that it is important for us to understand the ambiguity of what discourse exactly means. While discourses represent different positions or perspectives of different social actors, discourses do not exist on their own; rather, they need to be generated and actualized by people as language practices in the relational world of different identities.

With its comprehensive approach and critical features, CDA highlights the critical dimension and represents a suitable method. It enables studies of the particular ways in which ideology, identity and inequality are reproduced through texts, which are produced in distinct social and political contexts (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). It requires an “account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 253). The method aims at understanding the semiotic modalities of the discursive representations of social structures, processes, actions and experiences, i.e. the material and cognitive aspects of the world.

The avenue of document analysis

The principles, values, goals and means that constitute foreign policy paradigms are omnipresent in documents, making documents a potentially rich source of data and document analysis an excellent choice of a methodological avenue, itself branching out into several lanes. We consider document analysis a generic (umbrella) term that focuses on documents (in contrast to e.g. behaviour or surveys). The analysis involves textual interpretation and comprises several research techniques, including content analysis, discourse analysis and semiotics. Document analysis on policy paradigms includes what, where and how questions.

What? What are we looking for? Policy paradigms have striking similarities with public philosophies, defined by Margaret Weir as “broad concepts that are tied to values and moral principles and that can be represented in political

debate in symbols and rhetoric” (Weir, 1992, p. 207). Accordingly, we should look for symbols and rhetoric in political debates. Moreover, John Kane makes an important and relevant argument about myths, emphasizing how the, “domain of myth is not empirical reality but imagination, and the source of its sustenance is not reason but faith. One of the functions of myth is to provide people with a deeper story, a narrative that can encompass their own individual stories and give them meaning, worth, and hope, connected by something more than mere contingency” (Kane, 2008, p. 5). In short, how we think about policy paradigms fundamentally shapes what we look for; what we look for obviously has an effect on what we find. Both Weir and Kane highlight that we are squarely in the domain of normative and cognitive reasoning, in the case of Kane analysing the persistent tension between American foreign policy and the normative superstructure of American identity.

Where? Where do we look, which documents? According to Glenn A. Bowen (2009), three types of documents are relevant: public records, personal records and physical evidence. In this context, we should keep in mind that foreign policy paradigms tend to be of medium- or long-term significance. Hence, we should think and do research in terms of decades, not years, months or distinct case studies. By contrast, paradigm shifts can occur as a rupture but might also have process characteristics. In any case, we share Margaret Weir’s interest in “an approach that is fundamentally historical, which looks for connections among policies over time” (Weir, 1992, p. 192).

How? How do we do the analysis? The functions of policy paradigms are to be found in political reasoning, in justifications for decisions made (or not made), in processes of identity-formation and, in the narratives mentioned by Kane. Hence, while counting techniques (cf. O’Leary, 2014) should not be completely dismissed, document analysis on policy paradigms needs to be closer to methods employed within political theory, not least interpretation of social facts and institutions (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986; Ball, 1995). In the present context, document analysis is not so much about what principles and values are, their ontology. Instead, it is about the meaning principles and values have for actors involved in the production and reproduction of foreign policy paradigms. Best practice examples of document analysis on foreign policy paradigms include Henry Nau (2002), John Kane (2008) and Walter R. Mead (2001).

The avenue of ethnography

The third methodological avenue put forward is the one of ethnography, understood as “immersion in a community, a cohort, a locale, or a cluster of related subject positions” (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). The overarching premise undergirding political ethnography is hereby that researchers must be “neck-deep” in their

contexts of interest to generate knowledge relevant for that context (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). Ethnography builds on ontological and epistemological commitments that lead to the methodology of *interpretivism*, hereby presenting a new methodological avenue for investigating different questions related to foreign policy paradigms (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013).

Why? Whereas document- and text analysis enable answering questions about the substantial content of a foreign policy paradigm, ethnographic insights provide answers to how particular contexts and structures facilitate and constrain action, how ideas flow within specific groups and ultimately how specific decisions are arrived at. In this sense, paradigms are not only interesting in what they contain, but also what they do on the “ground”. Providing insights of the kind that tell us how actors “ground their ideas in everyday practices and administrative routines” (Wedeen, 2009, p. 85), ethnography is the key to open the door to how paradigms manifest themselves on the micro-level and how actors work with and around values, principles, etc.

This builds on the assumption that it is the actors embedded in communities within governments or international organizations that has to make sense of the worldviews and normative ideas dominating international relations and make paradigms work in negotiations, informal conversations or even on Twitter. How do actors understand and talk about the central concepts embedded within a foreign policy paradigm – for instance justice, freedom or democracy? How does the struggle between different paradigms and normative contestation play out? How are paradigms and diplomatic practices connected? What happens when abstract policy ideals meet a complex and often demanding context? These are the type of questions that can be engaged with micro-level insights of the sort that ethnography provides and bring us closer to the importance of the worldviews that actors subscribe to in diplomatic practice (Solomon and Steele, 2017; Nair, 2021).

How? Approaching policy paradigms through ethnography might seem like an odd venture. Used almost exclusively within the scholarly community, the concept of foreign policy paradigms can be characterized as an experience-distant concept (Geertz, 1974). Such concepts are (generally) less adequate to be investigated through ethnographic work, because they do not capture the concepts that people use to make sense of their world (Geertz, 1974). Nonetheless, the proposed conceptual framework leaves plenty of room to investigate the so-called experience-near concepts making up foreign policy paradigms such as principles, values and goals.

Operationally speaking, ethnographic fieldwork present numerous challenges, because it requires access to foreign policy elites and immersion in foreign policy communities within “gated bureaucracies” (Nair, 2021). Iver B. Neumann’s (2012) ethnography within the Norwegian Foreign Ministry is often highlighted as a natural starting point. Inspired by Neumann and informed by

the so-called practice-turn, Christian Lequesne (2017), used direct observation as a method to understand how the French state behaves as a diplomatic actor. His ethnography conducted within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and French embassies, serves as another starting point. Lequesne has furthermore published his reflexions about access, his role as a researcher in a diplomatic environment and note-taking techniques during meetings, thereby providing a roadmap for similar studies (Lequesne, 2019). However, it is not always possible to obtain this type of access. Nair (2021) argues that such constraints can be addressed through a strategy of “hanging out”. Here, the researcher immerses herself in the field by “being there” and hanging out with actors close to the relevant research context. This strategy is thus another way to, eventually, gain access to diplomatic settings.

In sum, ethnographic insights can inform the study of foreign policy paradigms, in the capacity that it allows the researcher to see differently, to move beyond mainstream perspective and to complement discursive analysis (Schatz, 2009, p. 11). It furthermore opens up for the possibility that actors are not just passively implementing or drawing on fixed frameworks, but additionally create their own structures of meaning around their everyday practices and ideas.

The avenue of interviews

Interviews are central in foreign policy analysis (Potter, 2010). Using interviews means to subscribe to an ontological position that attributes importance to people’s knowledge, actor’s views and understanding, their interpretations and experiences of certain social or political phenomena (Mason, 2018). Since we are interested in the cognitive, normative and identity ideas that guide foreign policy actors in their behaviour, interviews present an important methodological avenue for researching foreign policy paradigms.

Why? Qualitative interviews are a meaningful way of generating data by talking to or interacting with people. Constituting “conversations with a purpose” (Mason, 2018, p. 115), interviews provide an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the meaning that foreign policy elites attach to the values and principles that they employ, and how these values and principles drive goals and means. Thereby, the aim of (qualitative) interviews is never to establish an abstract ‘truth’, but to gain a true insight into the mind-set of an actor (Richards, 1996, p. 200). For instance, interviews provide access to authors of documents, e.g., public or personal records, that one might want to analyse, or to personalities that have been involved in foreign policy-making processes (Richards, 1996). They are a useful tool to gain information that has not been recorded or made available yet. The full strength of interviews in researching foreign policy paradigms unfolds in combination with other qualitative and quantitative

methods. Interviews might be combined with ethnographic research to bridge the gap between what foreign policy makers say they do and what they do (see Adler-Nissen, 2014).

How? In his study on the welfare reform of the Saskatchewan's Building Independence (Canada), Daigneault (2015, p. 162) uses in-depth interviews "to probe what [policy makers] think and believe". In doing so, he is able to disclose the underlying ideas of a social policy reform, and shows how these ideas relate to different paradigms of social assistance. Looking at the European Union's (EU) regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), Skogstad (Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011, pp. 104–105) draws on interviews with European policy-makers, environmental and consumer organizations to reveal "shifts in discursive strategies" that occurred during policy deliberations, and as a result of the social learning. In this way, Skogstad (Skogstad and Schmidt, 2011) is able to show how epistemic controversies shape transnational paradigm construction and development.

In the field of EU foreign policy, interviews are frequently used in the study of European diplomacy to investigate actors' attitudes, roles, (shared) beliefs and values (e.g. Juncos and Pomorska, 2013; 2014; Carta, 2011), or the development of diplomatic practices (e.g. Adler-Nissen, 2014; Cornut, 2015). Thereby, authors refer to different types of interviews, such as elite interviews (e.g. Morgenstern-Pomorski, 2018) and expert interviews (e.g. Trueb, 2014) in foreign policy studies. Being interested in foreign policy elites, the distinction between expert and elites might be very helpful. Lilleker (2003, p. 207) depicts elite actors as having "close proximity to power or policymaking". Elites are said to have formative power, while experts have interpretative power, i.e. the power to "provide and establish significant terms and concepts for interpreting a certain phenomenon" (Littig, 2009, p. 107). Richards (1996) and Lilleker (2003) provide hands-on advice on how to conduct elite interviews.

In summary, the four methodological avenues are clearly not mutually exclusive and each might have several distinct lanes. Moreover, analysts might choose methodological triangulation as a fruitful way forward that potentially would allow bolder conclusions to be drawn about the significance of principles, values, goals, means and identity and, thereby about the relative strength of a given paradigm in organizing the politics of foreign policy-making. While for any analysis, the eventual choice of avenue or set of avenues should be informed by the research question and conceptual framework, unfortunately, research practice shows many examples of scholars who marry one avenue and subsequently impose it on all research questions. A similar concern informs our reluctance to etch in stone how the five components hang together, indeed we offer a suggestive not a conclusive framework, believing such a framework will be more useful for researchers who might find it inspiring.

Conclusion

While the article examines a big question – if foreign policy paradigms were on the research agenda...? – our conclusion will be brief. Instead of reproducing academic path dependencies and inertia – i.e., remain focused on aspects of *polity* and *policy* – we make a plea to extend the research agenda to focus on the *politics* of foreign policy and in this context, specifically the role of foreign policy paradigms. We firmly believe that both the field of foreign policy studies and the wider field of public policy studies will greatly benefit from an increased attention to the role of foreign policy paradigms. Instead of the perpetual rationalization of the (changing) foreign policy directions of a given polity, whether informed by appraising or critical intentions, studies would pay increased attention to the contending perspectives on foreign relations, including societal competition to define the identity of the actor, the environment in which the actor is situated as well as the perceived options for action. Instead of focusing entirely on scholarly contested *causes* of foreign policy action, studies would pay increased attention to *reasons* for action, i.e. to the processes of legitimizing foreign policy action.

We have demonstrated that research on the politics of foreign policy can benefit from bridging the literatures on policy paradigms and foreign policy respectively. Each literature has produced important insights and our analytical conceptual framework shows how the two literatures contain complementary aspects. Due to our focus on foreign policy paradigms, we bring identity into the quotation. By means of disaggregating policy paradigms into five conceptual cornerstones we offer a pre-theoretical conceptual framework that help us to better understand the social ontology of foreign policy paradigms. Indeed, we argue that understandings of foreign policy paradigms can be improved by means of making a priority of the characteristics of the explanandum before releasing the explanans, characterized as they always are by all sorts of propositions.

Furthermore, we conclude that theoretical propositions might have unintended consequences in terms of either prompting a neglect of research on foreign policy paradigms (frequently characterized as inconsequential window dressing) or prompting irrelevant research questions, for instance about the empirical reality of myths, the degree to which policy paradigms direct policies or the real balance between material interests and values/principles. Likewise, we conclude that research methods might trigger misleading conclusions, for instance when quantitative research techniques are employed to determine the meaning of a given principle. Hence, our small selection of available research techniques reflects a priority given to actors, including their self-images, mind-sets, identities and worldviews, features that are embedded in the

social ideational structures we call foreign policy paradigms and which the actors shape and are shaped by.

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