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# **CONSTRUCTING COUPS D'ETAT**

## **Discourse legitimisation in Thailand and Turkey**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction – Constructing Coups.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Research objectives.....	2
Methodology.....	4
Methodological challenges.....	7
Research structure.....	10
<b>Chapter 1 – The theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>11</b>
The theory of <i>coups</i> .....	11
<i>Coups</i> – Finding a definition.....	13
Causes and triggers of <i>coups</i> .....	15
A behavioural approach to <i>coups</i> .....	18
The role of discourse legitimisation.....	21
Political discourse – finding a definition.....	22
The practice of legitimisation.....	26
The legitimisation process.....	28
Key lemmas, logical structures and narratives.....	30
Legitimisation and key lemmas: proximization theory.....	32
Legitimisation and logical structures: Van Leeuwen and Reyes.....	37
Legitimisation and narratives: mythopoesis and metaphors.....	43
Conclusion.....	46
<b>Chapter 2 – Discourse legitimisation in the 2016 Turkish <i>coup</i>.....</b>	<b>50</b>
The role of the military in modern Turkey.....	51

The July 2016 <i>coup</i> .....	55
Discourse legitimisation.....	57
Key lemmas analysis – illocutionary acts.....	59
Key lemmas analysis – proximization.....	61
Key lemmas analysis – assertion and implicature.....	62
Logical structures analysis.....	66
Conclusion.....	71

**Chapter 3 – Discourse legitimisation in the 2014 Thai *coup*.....72**

The historical role of the military in Thailand.....	73
The May 2014 <i>coup</i> .....	78
Discourse legitimisation.....	80
Key lemmas analysis – illocutionary acts.....	83
Key lemmas analysis – proximization.....	85
Key lemmas analysis – assertion and implicature.....	85
Logical structures analysis.....	88
Conclusion.....	91

**Conclusion – A new perspective on *coups*.....93**

The theoretical framework.....	93
The case studies – research results.....	95
Future areas of research.....	99

**Bibliography.....102**

**Appendix A – Dissertation Privacy Notice.....110**

**TABLE OF FIGURES**

<b>Figure 1 – Graphic summary of the discourse legitimization theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 1.....</b>	<b>49</b>
--	-----------

**Figure 2** – Translated text of the 15 July 2016 coup declaration speech  
broadcasted live on the Turkish Radio and Television Company.....58

**Figure 2** - Translated text of the 22 May 2014 coup declaration speech  
broadcasted on the national television channel.....82



## ABSTRACT

Contemporary societies overwhelmingly chose to organise themselves politically in the form of states, social constructs within which different groups are expected to behave consistently with generally accepted norms. Social constructs, however, are not immutable. Groups' behaviours within the state are fluid and may cause fundamental changes in the polity's organisation. This is the case of *coups d'Etat*, when armies overtake the bureaucratically established executive and assume direct control of the state.

This research project adopts a new perspective towards the analysis of military *coups*. Based on a Constructivist approach to the dynamics occurring in the immediate aftermath of *golpes*, this research aims at improving our understanding of the phenomenon. Specifically, this paper will analyse how members of the army employ discourse legitimisation techniques to legitimise in front of the state's society their change of behaviour from law enforcement actors to policymakers.

This research analysed and collected the broader sociological and political research over discourse legitimisation practices, collating them into a coherent framework to be employed in the analysis of during- and post-*coups* discourses. According to this framework, discourse legitimisation techniques occur at three different levels. In the first one, carefully chosen words deliver moral judgements alongside objective descriptions of the reality. In the second, broader logical structures within a speech are used to justify and legitimise a specific course of actions. In the third, metaphors and overall narratives are employed to simplify the message and to create a strong connection between the speakers and their audience. The discourse legitimisation framework is then applied to two specific case studies – namely the attempted *coup*

in Turkey in 2016, and the successful 2014 *coup* in Thailand – to verify its effectiveness and to highlight eventual shortcomings of the theoretical research.

Although the theoretical model proved to be a highly effective tool in the analysis of discourse legitimisation techniques in the two case studies, it also shed new light on future areas of research which may greatly enrich our understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, the paper will also highlight how further research on the impact of expectations and on the role of the international community is needed to improve our knowledge on military *coups* beyond their over-surveyed material and structural characteristics.



## INTRODUCTION – CONSTRUCTING COUPS

According to the definition set out by the political scientist Max Weber in 1958, the majority of modern states are groups of individuals who rationally and voluntarily subject themselves to a commonly shared social construct regulated by legal norms and a bureaucratic system (Weber, 1958). The system ensures that individual and collective interests are balanced and protected, and that disputes are solved following a commonly shared legal framework. In modern states, power is invested in the institutions rather than in single individuals, and the use of force is monopolised by the state through its law-enforcement branches. However, everyday reality proves how this definition only partially describes the actual complexity of things. Since 1950, the international community witnessed over 377 attempted and successful *coups d'Etat*, transitions of power unregulated by the state's legal and bureaucratic system (Powell and Thyne, 2011). In most of these cases, power was seized by the polity's army, the organ embodying the state's monopoly on the use of force.

This research project aims at approaching the phenomenon of military *coups* from a new perspective, combining insights from constructivist and behavioural theories to shed new light on the strategies employed by military actors to legitimise their unconstitutional seizure of power and their new role within the polity.

## Research Objectives

The current academic literature regarding military *coups d'Etat* overwhelmingly focuses on attempts to trace back the structural causes of the phenomenon, and to focus on its practical implementation challenges. Material factors undeniably trigger and sustain *golpes*, but they are just part of a broader number of elements which encompass the whole phenomenon. This research project aims to take a different approach and explore military *coups* from a new viewpoint. Starting from the over-researched materialist causes and triggers of military *coups*, the research will then move towards a behavioural and constructivist approach to the event. This paper will thus bridge the gap between material factors and socio-political dynamics, creating a new theoretical framework to analyse the unfolding of *golpes* and opening the field of research to new behavioural approaches. Within the broader scope of the behavioural and constructivist theoretical frameworks of analysis, this research will analyse how norms and identities – which regulate the role each group is expected to perform within the state – are renegotiated through the practice of discourse legitimisation.

The aim of this paper is double-fold: create a widely applicable theoretical framework to analyse discourse legitimisation in the aftermath of *coups* and verify its efficacy by applying it to two separate case studies with multiple socio-historical similarities but different final outcomes. The first of these objectives will be achieved by drawing from

the broader literature regarding discourse legitimisation. Although this has been typically employed in the analysis of politicians' rhetoric when justifying the *war on terror* waged by the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Reyes, 2011), the multiple strategies and practices analysed in this context proved to be widely applicable in different socio-political contexts, including *golpes*. The creation of a general framework to approach the practice of discourse legitimisation will allow future researchers to better understand the behavioural components of military *coups* and to explore more in-depth the non-material dynamics associated with *coups*.

Following the creation of a general framework, the second objective of this paper is to prove its efficacy by applying it to real-world scenarios. This process offers valuable insights on at least two aspects of the general theory. First, it allows verifying whether the legitimisation theories highlighted in the academic literature can effectively be applied to the specific context of *coups*, or whether new primary research is needed to isolate and identify the techniques used in these specific circumstances. Second, if the general framework is applicable to *coups*, this approach will allow the researcher to test whether specific socio-cultural factors impact the choice of legitimisation strategies.

This objective will be addressed in the second and third chapters of this paper. The theoretical framework drawn from the current academic literature will prove to be useful for the analysis of post-*coup* speeches,

proving that discourse legitimisation strategies are largely shared both by political actors worldwide and in different institutional contexts. Additionally, it will also highlight how socio-cultural factors certainly play a role in the choice of words and strategies, but they do so in initially unexpected ways. For example, due to the frequent army interventions in both Turkey and Thailand to restore order in times of crisis, it would be reasonable to expect widespread use of historical examples during the legitimisation process. However, such historical role of the military is mentioned only once during the Turkish *golpe*, and it is not mentioned at all in the Thai case. Realising these differences offers the opportunity to further investigate the actual impact of cultural and historical elements and creates space for further studies on the subject.

## **Methodology**

In order to achieve the research objectives outlined above, this project employed a combination of methodologies aimed at drafting an effective theoretical framework first, and then verify its relevance. The starting point to create an effective theoretical framework has been reviewing the existing academic literature both on military *coups* and discourse legitimisation. As mentioned above, the former mainly focused on a realist and materialist approach to the phenomenon. Authors such as Hiroi (*et al.*, 2013) and Powell (2012) have focused their efforts on analysing institutional and economic dynamics and finding a correlation

between them and the likelihood of *coups* outbreak. By exploring their approach, among others, it has been possible to clearly identify the material factors impacting *coups*, and separate them from the realm of behavioural, cultural and historical factors which play a role in the legitimisation process.

The latter, however, proved more challenging to review. Current academic literature on discourse legitimisation is either highly focused on the context of the war against terrorism, or it has been derived from primary research on non-political settings, such as van Leeuwen (2007) work on legitimisation in educational practices. Only following extensive and in-depth research, it has been possible to separate context-specific analysis from those which could be broadly employed to analyse military *golpes*.

The literature review process was performed through a throughout research of primary and secondary data. Sources included books, peer-reviewed articles, official speech and direct accounts from those who actively participated or directly witnessed the *coups*. Materials were then organised according to the relevance of their content and grouped according to their overarching perspectives. This process allowed the identification of three major approaches to discourse legitimisation. The first one focuses on the specific value of single keywords within phrases. The second addressed a higher level of analysis, focusing on the logical structures of interconnected sets of statements within the same

discourse. The third and final approach analysed the presence of overarching narratives and metaphors, used recurrently across speeches and by different actors. Although the latter level of analysis appears to be used only in limited occasions during *coups*, all the three levels have been beneficial in constructing a sound theoretical approach for discourse legitimisation.

The second objective of this research – namely, proving the efficacy of the theoretical framework – was performed by researching and applying the concepts drawn from the literature review to two case studies. These were the attempted (and failed) *coup* in Turkey in July 2016, and the successful *coup* in Thailand in 2014. The choice of these two cases was based on multiple reasons. The first one is their recent occurrence. Due to their proximity in time, it was possible to collect a large amount of information from multiple sources, including visual media. A larger amount of information and perspectives allowed a less biased and more comprehensive approach to the events and mitigated the risk of mistakenly rely on single sources. Additionally, using visual media, it was possible to confront the written reports of *coup* declaration speeches with the actual words uttered by the actors.

The second reason lays in both the similarities and the striking differences between the two events. In terms of similarities, both countries have experienced multiple *golpes* throughout their history, and the military has frequently performed a prominent role in their

political landscapes. Additionally, both *coups* were reportedly initiated without external support or pressure, avoiding direct foreign influences which may have had impacted the rhetoric used by the military actors and the unfolding of the events during the upraise. More importantly, however, are the difference between the two countries. The most striking one is certainly associated with the outcome of the *coup* - which was successful only in Thailand - and with the different contexts in which the *coup* declaration speeches were announced. This was possibly the major element which informed the choice of words and legitimisation strategies. Other relevant differences include the cultural background of the country, the institutional arrangements and the role of the army in recent years.

The multiple social, historical and cultural differences in the two case studies offered the possibility to test the efficacy of theoretical framework over two different contexts. Additionally, the results of the analysis highlighted striking similarities and profound differences regarding the choice of strategies, potentially paving the way for further analysis in this specific direction.

### **Methodological challenges**

Both the literature review research and the study of the Turkish and Thai cases, however, presented relevant methodological challenges which cannot be ignored. Regarding the literature review, the main issue

regards ethnocentric bias. Given the prominence of English academic literature, the research is likely to be biased towards a Western-centric understanding of the legitimization discourse. The mere fact that earlier research over legitimisation discourse overwhelmingly focused on examples drawn from the United States *war on terror* adds an inherent layer of bias on the final framework. Although it has not been entirely possible to solve this issue, a major effort has been done to include academic sources from non-Western institutions. Authors such as Prasirtsuk, from the Thammasat University in Thailand, and Galetovic, from the Universidad de las Andes in Chile, proved to be highly useful to conceptualise issues under a different perspective. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this implicit bias, the theoretical framework produced proved reliable in the analysis of non-Western case studies. This may indicate that legitimisation practices are largely shared across cultures without being highly impacted by linguistic and historical differences.

Two additional issues emerged in the context of the case studies. The first one regarded access to primary sources, while the second is associated with linguistic barriers. Due to the different outcome of the two *coups* taken into consideration, access to primary sources was uneven. While in Thailand's case these were widely accessible, in the case of Turkey this was not an easy task. Virtually all primary sources regarding the *coup* declaration speech have been removed or censored, and the Turkish media proved to be extremely one-sided in describing the unfolding of the events. The full original *coup* declaration text was



found only through non-official sources. While its reliability was verified by comparing it with the partial versions published on Western news media in the immediate aftermath of the events, minor inaccuracies in the transcript cannot be fully ruled out.

The second issue regards the linguistic barriers experienced while researching and analysing the *coup* declaration speeches. As both speeches were mainly targeting an internal audience, none of them was officially translated into English by the military authorities, thus creating a problem of accessibility and a potential drawback in the discourse analysis process. To mitigate the impact of such barriers, both declarations were translated into English using professional translation services. Translations were reported as literal as possible to maintain both the original logical structures of the discourse and the values associated with specific lemmas. Translations were then compared with multiple reports of English news which provided partial translations of the speeches. This ensured that the full English translations provided were as objective and unbiased as possible.

Although the translation process inevitably led to a partial loss of information (especially in regard to the exact moral value attached to single lemmas), it nevertheless allowed an in-depth analysis of the legitimisation techniques employed by military actors, especially those regarding overall logical structures rather than single key lemmas.

## Research structure

The following dissertation is divided into three main chapters. The first one corresponds to the literature review section of the research. After briefly analysing the current academic knowledge associated with the causes and triggers of military *coups*, this chapter will set the common definitions which will be used throughout the research and which will outline the theoretical framework to perform discourse legitimisation analysis in the case of *golpes*.

The following two chapters will then be dedicated to the case studies. Both chapters will mirror each other: they will start by outlining the historical role of the military in the countries (with specific references to the multiple *coups* throughout their histories) and the specific unfolding of the events which led to the 2014 and 2016 *coups*. This will offer the reader a sound understanding of the social and historical context in which the *coups* occurred, and of its possible influence over the discourse legitimisation strategies. The chapters will then move to the core discourse analysis part, applying the three levels of the theoretical framework (key lemmas, logical structures and storytelling) to the *coup* declaration speeches uttered by the military actors.

A final, conclusive chapter will then review the theoretical framework, the main findings of the research and possible future areas of research.

## CHAPTER 1 – THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After having outlined the aims and the methodology of this research project, this chapter will survey the current literature in relation to political discourse legitimisation. To do so, the chapter will be articulated into three sections. The first one will start by focusing on the current literature regarding *cups d'Etat*. This first step will allow us to identify what is a *coup*, how it unfolds, and which are the main material determinants of its outbreak. The following two sections will then analyse the practices of discourse legitimisation, outlining the main strategies employed by actors to justify their narratives.

### **The theory of *coups***

Military *coups* are intrinsically a matter of power. Distribution of power – measured in terms of social and economic resources – is their primary trigger and, most of the times, the major variable determining their outcome (First, 1970). This is the reason why the current literature has overwhelmingly followed a Realist perspective to the phenomenon, analysing the ways in which different forms of power – social, political and economic – have been affecting military uprisings worldwide. Most of these writings also undertook a statistical approach. By collecting large amounts of variables from historical case-studies, the aim of the researchers has been to create models to predict the outbreak and the outcome of *coups* based on material features of the state. However, their

efforts were not necessarily successful. While there is a consensus that specific economic factors may indicate a deterioration of regime legitimacy in the eyes of the military and the population (Belkin and Schofer, 2003), the impact magnitude of these variables as well as their long-term implications continue being a matter of debate.

This Realist approach to *golpes* has at least two major consequences in relation to this research. The first one is that it allows to identify and isolate several concrete causal factors triggering *coups d'Etat*. It is undeniable that the distribution of power plays a central role in the unfolding of military uprisings. But being able to identify the features characterizing power distribution offer the opportunity to move forward with the research and analyse those socio-political factors (such as identity and discourse legitimisation) which – without playing a causal role – still influence the unfolding of the events. The second consequence is more academic. The predominance of the Realist approach in the analysis of *coups* creates the opportunity for researchers to explore other theoretical perspectives. In the case of this research, the phenomenon will be analysed under the broad theoretical lenses of the Constructivist approaches to politics and international relations.

## **Coups - Finding a definition**

It has been claimed that *coups d'Etat* cannot be studied systematically. They have been described as an endemic weakness of the polity, presenting a large variety of characteristics and triggering factors depending on the environment in which they develop (Zolberg, 1968). While this perspective may be partially accepted – *coups* do occur in a variety of different forms, and they are strongly influenced by the specific socio-culture features of the polity – it nevertheless fails to recognize the large body of statistical evidence that associate military *coups* with specific indicators. For this reason, although recognizing the importance of the polities' endemic characteristics, the following paper will assume that *coups* can be systematically studied through generally applicable theoretical framework being them based on Realist, Constructivist or other academic perspectives.

In order to develop an overarching framework to analyse the phenomenon, it is necessary to explore first *what* constitutes a *coup d'Etat*. Unsurprisingly, the concept is still contested. On the one hand, academics focus on its material characteristics; on the other, they focus on its inherent power relations. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *coups* are a “*sudden and great change of government, carried out violently or illegally*”. Here, they are defined by their material features and their specific consequences. This is the approach pursued by authors such as Edward Luttwak, who divides them into different

categories according to their material characteristics: *revolutions*, initiated by the masses; *civil wars*, in which the government confronts another major armed front; and *putsch*, during or post-war seizures of power by the military (Luttwak, 1969). Luttwak also builds on these concepts, identifying two common denominators of the phenomenon independently from its specific form. The first one is that it does not necessarily require the use of military force. Such perspective also mirrors the idea that military *coups* are generally characterized by low levels of violence (Galetovic and Sanhueza, 2000). The second feature is that *coups* are generally apolitical. They do not necessarily promote a specific political orientation and most of the times they do not aim to change the political structure of the country (Luttwak, 1969). This second consideration relates more closely to the perspective focusing on power relations. According to the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Institutions*, *coups* are “a seizure of power by a group using the permanent employees of the state [...] which do not aim to alter the social and political structures, but merely substitute one ruling group for another.” Here they are not defined by their material characteristics but rather by their influence over state power. Jens Bartelson expands on this perspective, focusing on the redistributive potential of *coups*. According to the author, *coups* create an exception in the polity by attempting to remove power from the ruling group, assigning it to a new one. In *coups*, power and legitimacy are thus redistributed among competing groups within a political institution (Bartelson, 1997).

## **Causes and triggers of *coups***

The current literature on military-led *coups* agrees that some specific structural features of a polity increase propensity for a military uprising. Statistical models developed by different authors have been isolating these features and have analysed their direct causal relationship with *coups*. In relation to this, two different and complementing variables are widely analysed. These are economic and political factors. On the one hand, economic factors contribute to the propensity of the outbreak of *coups* by creating mechanisms of greed and grievances which prompt actors within the state to actively seek a redistribution of power. On the other, specific political factors create structural weaknesses which increase the propensity for *coups* outbreak and success.

Economic factors have probably been the most surveyed aspect of *coups* outbreak. Marginalised groups within societies direct their frustration, greed and resentment against the polity's executive, and are likely to search a better redistribution of power and access to resources to improve their conditions. Armies which are experiencing low levels of funding for example are likely to seek a regime change to improve both their influence over the executive and their material disposable resources (Powell, 2012). Additionally, low-level of funding towards the army may reflect lower levels of training and professionalism, further increasing the likelihood of a break of the chain of command (Welch, 1976). Contrary to the hypothesis advanced by Quinlivan that high-

funded armies have more resources at their disposal for the success of the *coup* (Quinlivan, 1999), Powell demonstrates that well-funded militaries are in fact less prone rebel against the executive (Powell, 2012).

Income inequality as well affects the outbreak of elite-led *coups* within democratic regimes. According to Acemoglu and Robins (2006), in democracies the executive often reflects the interests of the median voter. In highly unequal societies however, the median voter represents the low-income substrata of the population rather than the interests of the high-income elites. This would eventually prompt the military elites to seek a redistribution of powers by gaining control of the polity's government. Other economic factors which have a direct impact on the likelihood of *coups* are low GDP per capita - often associated with high inequality (Barro, 2008); widespread poverty and recessions, generating a mechanism of grievances; and poor economic records of the executive, such as the presence of a neo-patrimonial administrative systems (DeMarco and Aidoo, 2009).

While economic factors are fundamental in the outbreak of *coups*, scholars also recognize the importance of specific political arrangements which create a favourable environment for the proliferation of the phenomenon. The most salient institutional feature in this sense is a lack of effective mechanisms for power redistribution (Hiroi and Omori, 2013). When countries lack constitutional mechanisms which grant real access to power also to groups initially excluded from it, they become prone to



*coups* attempts. In such environments, the overthrow of the executive appears to be the only way through which power can be redistributed. When access to power is not effectively regulated, polities are more likely to experience *golpes*. Also new and hybrid regimes (*i.e.* those regimes which do not show fully democratic nor fully authoritarian traits) present a lack of consolidated power redistribution practices making them more prone to experience *coups*. Additionally, the undefined or novel nature of the regime makes it more vulnerable to attacks by specific groups which may attempt to overthrow its constitutional order (Hiroi and Omori, 2013), (Little, 2017).

A further political feature incentivising the outbreak of *coups* is the presence of widespread social instabilities. These may be caused either by economic factors – poverty, inequality, poor policies – or by contested social arrangements – share of power between groups, presence of ethnic minorities. Social instabilities favour the outbreak of coups for two concurring reasons. On the one hand, they express discontent with the existing system of power, thus incentivizing groups to change it. On the other, discontent may weaken the regime and reduce its ability to retaliate if it is subjected to attacks. If large sections of the public system apparatus are deeply unsupportive of the government policies, they are less likely to oppose resistance if the executive is replaced through a *coup* (Luttwak, 1969).

### **A behavioural approach to *coups***

The behavioural approach to *coups* outbreak is a further stream of literature building on the structural causes described above and attempting to retrieve the logical mechanisms underlying the actors' decision to overthrow the executive. This approach considers two major theories within conflict studies: the first one is the greed and grievances theory advanced by Paul Collier (2004) in relation to civil wars; the second is a rational calculations model, presented by scholars such as Little and Powell to analyse military *coups* (Powell, 2012), (Little, 2017).

The greed and grievances theory is strictly connected with the economic features of the country. By analysing civil wars, Collier produced a statistical model highlighting the importance of social grievances and groups' greed in attempting to overthrow the constitutional order of the polity. As outlined above, the mechanism can work in two concurring ways. In the first case, poor economic conditions, high social inequalities and a falling GDP trigger several grievances within the population. If excluded from power – or if perceiving diffuse economic incompetence among the state's executive – masses are prompted to revolt (Londregan and Poole, 1990). This creates broad instabilities within the political system, generating a window of opportunity for an armed *coup*. If the army is among the groups experiencing declining economic standards, it is likely that it will use its capabilities to attempt to overthrow the regime (Powell, 2012).

In the second case, it is not grievances the trigger of the *coup*, but rather the greed of specific sub-groups within the society. If a group perceives to be permanently excluded from the state's power and resources – which are however deliberately used for personal interests by a neo-patrimonial regime – it is likely that it will attempt to access them through a violent revolt if there is lack of other constitutional means to challenge the established government. In Collier's model, greed and grievances are not separate categories but they often intertwine in a more complex picture. Within this model, both social and economic elements play a central role in the outbreak of the conflict. Among them there are indicators such as GDP per capita; inequality; reliance on primary resources (which can be easily traded in the international market to obtain economic resources either for the executive or for the *coupists*); and presence of a large young male population, whose grievances can be channelled to an armed confrontation (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004).

The rational calculations model instead focuses more on the window of opportunity and the evaluation of chances of success of a *coup*. This model is mostly connected with the political features of a country, which may encourage or dissuade groups to overthrow the executive. The nature of a *coup d'Etat* requires it to be organised in secret and involve only a small number of initial actors. Only when it unfolds, the plotters can effectively verify whether others will join their revolt, effectively giving momentum to the action. The decision to join plotters once events unfold is based on a rational calculation (Powell, 2012). Actors evaluate

the chances of success and perform a cost-benefit analysis deciding whether to intervene or not. According to Little (2017), members of the army will decide to join the *coup* only if they perceive good chances of success. The political features of the state play a relevant role in this rational analysis. As mentioned, new and hybrid regimes are perceived as weaker than fully consolidated democracies and autocracies. They can leverage less power among society, thus making retaliation against *golpists* more uncertain (Hiroi and Omori, 2013).

The rational calculation model indirectly highlights the importance of another central element: legitimacy. If actors base their decision to join a *coup* on its believed outcome, then also the legitimacy of the actions is considered. *Coups* deemed legitimate are likely to attract more followers, thus increasing their momentum and their perceived chances of success. This creates a positive feedback loop. The more legitimate a *coup* is perceived the more people will join. The more people will join, the higher the chances of success. The higher the chances of success, the more actors will be attracted to participate, further increasing the likelihoods of a successful outcome. Certainly, legitimacy alone is not enough. The multiple material factors outlined in this section which prompt the outbreak of the *coup* are also included in the cost-benefit analysis. If the economic and social variables are not conducive of a successful *coup*, then legitimacy alone will not suffice to mobilize a critical mass of participants. Nevertheless, once the material factors are in place, legitimacy does play a role in the unfolding of the events. Actors which

can leverage effective discourse legitimisation techniques, to promote their narratives vis-à-vis those presented by the established executive, will increase their chances of success. This is the concern of the upcoming two sections. By performing an in-depth analysis of the current literature on discourse legitimisation, they will set the definition of political discourse legitimisation and they will outline the most relevant strategies employed by actors to legitimise their chosen course of actions.

### **The role of discourse legitimisation**

Material factors are without doubts the main elements triggering the outbreak of *coups d'Etat*. As outlined in the previous section, a wide range of scholars agrees on the fundamental role that greed and grievances - combined with an uneven distribution of power – play in nurturing military uprisings. Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of *coups*, another important element emerges. Competing narratives between the legitimacy of the previous constitutional order and the need for the army's intervention fill the political discourse and attempt to gain legitimacy. Even if the realist and neorealist streams of literature addressed above are overly silent about this element, it does represent a fundamental step in the unfolding of *golpes*. According to Peter Katzenstein's research on national security cultures, citizens of a state share a collective understanding of *norms* which regulate the behaviour of groups of individuals (1996). These norms are socially constructed and

continuously renegotiated, but such process is not overtly visible. Except in the immediate aftermath of *coups*. During military *coups*, members of the army defy the norms regulating their role within the polity and quickly seek to renegotiate them. To do so, they rely on discourse legitimisation techniques to promote a change in the norms regulating their identities, transitioning from soldiers to policymakers.

Falling within the broader category of Critical Security studies, the theoretical framework which is going to be proposed in the following paragraphs will offer a valuable tool to evaluate these legitimisation techniques employed by the military to justify their new role within the state. The first two parts will define both what is intended by political discourse and by legitimisation. Successively, drawing on the current literature regarding discourse legitimisation, the different strategies of legitimisation in the broader political discourse will be highlighted.

### **Political discourse – Finding a definition**

Legitimisation theory and practices have been focusing on a multitude of sources comprising different social interactions. From online conversations to multimedia materials such as images and videos (van Leeuwen, 2008), modern societies have increasingly been finding new ways to address the political debate. At the basis of them, however, lays the ability of human beings to interact with each other through speech acts. At least in Western culture, there is a shared understanding that

politics and speech are interlinked. Aristotle himself stressed this connection by linking the political nature of men with their ability to talk, unique among all animals (Aristotle, 1932). Discourse in this sense is understood as a *speech act* performed by two subjects. Being it a *micro-level* interaction between single individuals, or a *macro-level* one among politicians and public figures, the simple act of uttering sounds creates a discourse (Chilton, 2004). Macro-level discourse is invested by a higher role. While micro-level interactions create meanings only among the few subjects actively involved in the speech, macro-level interactions can create intersubjective narratives - commonly shared sets of beliefs and values - connecting a speaker with a large audience (Bourdieu, 1991). In the case of political discourse, this audience is the whole nation-state.

It has been proposed that only politicians (*i.e.* people paid to perform political activities) performing their official functions can produce political discourse (van Dijk, 1997), but this definition appears to be an oversimplification of reality. Certainly, political discourse analysis has been focusing on the speech acts performed by official politicians, but in this way, it has also overlooked a large amount of discourse produced by other actors (Potter *et al.*, 1990). Additionally, such limited perspective could not be helpful for our research framework, as it would fail to identify the importance of political discourses uttered by non-political actors such as army chiefs during *golpes*.

While recognizing the prominent importance of public political figures in the performance of macro-level interactions, for the purpose of this research, political discourse will be defined as “*a speech act attempting to create shared intersubjective meanings between public figures and a national audience*”. Although functional for our purposes, this definition has several flaws which expose to sharp criticisms. By defining political discourse merely as a speech act, the definition excludes several other materials which are generally understood by the scholar community as macro-level political interactions, such as written laws or public national strategies (Greenhouse, 1989). These pieces of political discourse, however, are used to legitimise actions only in a limited number of occasions. In fact, they are the final product of discussions and bargains in which legitimisation practices have been employed and they came into being *after* the legitimisation act was performed. A second criticism could be moved towards the unclear definition of public figures. From movie stars to sport celebrities and journalists, all these figures can be considered public to different degrees. The vagueness of this definition is however compensated by its flexibility. Public figures in general – being them low-level ministerial officers or army chiefs – can still deliver their speeches to large audiences and create intersubjective meanings. In the case of *coups d’Etat*, when the legitimate state power is challenged, the power of politicians and their ability to utter political speeches is highly compromised. In this fragile social environment, every figure who can



access a wide enough audience gains the ability to share political ideas and to mobilise crowds (Pathmanand, 2008).

The proposed definition has the advantage of offering a sound starting point for our analysis, defining the means through which legitimisation is attempted (speech acts), the actors performing it (public figures, thus comprising members of the military and not merely paid politicians) and the audience receiving it (being it the entire population of a state, specific sub-groups, or other members of the army which need to be convinced to join the action). In this form, political discourse and its analysis find their position within two complementary approaches to security and international relations. On the one hand, they find their natural role in the Constructivist approach. The importance of the impact of speech acts over an audience has been emphasized by Thierry Balzacq in his revision of the *securitization theory*. Balzacq's framework further expands the early focus of the securitization process, highlighting the importance of the context and of the audience's reactions (Balzacq, 2005), elements which will later play a central role in the analysis of discourse legitimisation practices during *coups*.

On the other hand, political discourse analysis embraces the broader field of Critical Security Studies. Theories underneath this umbrella term are highly sceptical of the Realist-dominated perspective towards security issues and attempt to frame them under a broader and more critical perspective (Peoples *Et al.*, 2010). In relation to military *golpes*,

analysing the political discourse aims to drift the academic attention from the over-surveyed material causal factors of the phenomenon, promoting a more critical review of the ways in which actors attempt to legitimise their social behaviour by creating intersubjective narratives through macro-level interactions.

### **The practice of legitimisation**

Max Weber asserted that *“every system of authority attempts to establish and cultivate the belief in its legitimacy”* (Weber, 1964). Political discourse is certainly the most effective way to do so. The creation of intersubjective narratives between the speaker and the audience is a powerful tool to promote a specific system of beliefs or a determinate political choice (van Leeuwen, 2007). Nevertheless, in a complex social environment, the mere utterance of political discourse is not enough to ensure that the audience will prefer the speaker’s narrative above all the competing ones. Public figures performing political discourse must enrich them using specific linguistic tools to convince their audience of the superiority of their narrative.

Two concurring definitions have been proposed in the academic literature in relation to the political discourse legitimisation practice. The first one, advanced by Reyes, sees legitimisation as the mere practice to *“accredit or license a type of social behaviour”* (Reyes, 2011). The second, proposed by Berger and Luckmann, frame legitimisation as providing the

*“explanations and justifications of the salient elements of the institutional traditions”* (1966). Both definitions are problematic. The first definition considers discourse legitimisation as any practice of the speaker aimed at justifying a specific behaviour. It does not refer to the social context in which the political discourse is performed, nor to the logical techniques used by the speaker. Nevertheless, its broad approach acknowledges the fact that the speaker may be legitimizing *future* courses of action. The second definition is narrower in this sense. Berger and Luckmann outline the techniques used by the speaker (*i.e.* provide justifications and explanations, thus using verbal tools), but they also stress the *a posteriori* nature of discourse legitimisation. From their perspective, legitimisation is not employed to promote a specific narrative (or social behaviour) but it is used to justify the enduring existence of an institution. It is however possible to conciliate these diverging approaches by identifying a middle ground in which the most effective parts of each definition can be leveraged. For the purpose of the research, it is fundamental to maintain Reyes’ *a priori* view of legitimisation. As military golpes attempt to change the institutional tradition, the political discourse delivered in such contexts are unlikely to offer a justification for the existing institutions, but rather to legitimise the just-occurred actions and the future institutional arrangements. Similarly, as political discourse has been narrowed to the sole speech act, legitimisation should not focus on *any* technique used by the speaker, but it should rather follow Berger and Luckmann definition, which

considers only (verbal) explanations and justifications. Legitimation can thus be defined as *“the use of explanations and justifications to accredit or license a certain type of social behaviour”*. This new definition raises however an additional question: which kind of explanations and justifications are used in the legitimisation process?

While different actors recur to a multitude of different speech legitimisation practices to promote their preferred social behaviour, it is nevertheless possible to identify a limited number of broader techniques underneath which these practices fall. This is an important step, as it allows researchers to identify the actors’ preferred legitimisation techniques, and to evaluate them vis-a-vis those employed by political adversaries. The upcoming section will largely expand on the concept of political discourse legitimisation. It will survey the existing academic literature to provide a theoretical framework to be used while analysing political legitimisation techniques.

### **The Legitimation Process**

The previous section set the definitions to be used through the research when referring both to the political discourse and its legitimisation. This one will build upon this theoretical basis by presenting the different tools and techniques used to perform discourse legitimisation analysis, and the different macro-categories under which the major legitimisation strategies can be grouped.

Combining the two sets of definitions presented above, political discourse legitimisation can then be summarised as the “*use of explanations and justifications within a speech act performed for a large audience by a public figure with the objective of accrediting or licensing a certain narrative of social behaviours*”. Although this definition appears redundant, it nevertheless clearly defines the ground over which this research paper is built.

Having a working definition is a fundamental step to start the researching process. It should however be completed with a clear understanding of the theoretical framework to be employed. The current academic literature in the field of political discourse legitimisation is extremely poor. While many scholars such as Bourdieu (1991), Chilton (2004) and van Leeuwen (2007) have been applying discourse legitimization theory to the field of sociology, only a limited number of authors has been engaging with the proper category of political discourse. And those who have been doing so, such as Lakoff (1991), Cap (2008) and Reyes (2011), have been mainly concentrating on the study of the so-called *war on terror* waged by the United States since the terroristic attacks of the 9/11. The framework of the *war on terror* is particularly interesting. The strong psychological impact of the event offers a valuable base for politicians to appeal to the deepest emotions of their audience, leveraging on its hopes and fears. Concurrently, the controversy of the response to the terrorist threat (*i.e.* military intervention in the so-called *failed* states) incentivised politicians to recur to legitimisation techniques when

discussing their chosen course of actions. The following paragraphs will be largely based on the scholarly contributions in this specific context, but they will nevertheless offer a sound base to understand the actual functioning of discourse legitimisation. The first part will outline the three levels of analysis, and survey the theories associated with them. The research will then review in turn Cap's proximization theory, Van Leeuwen and Reyes theories of logical legitimisation and finally Lakoff framework to analyse metaphors and story-telling legitimisation techniques.

### ***Key lemmas, logical structures and narrative***

The process of discourse legitimisation occurs at three different, intertwined levels (Beaugrande, 1991). The lowest of them is the choice of key lemmas. These specific words attach additional meaning to the phrase and generate what Austin defined an illocutionary act (Austin, 1962). Illocutionary acts are speech acts which do not merely describe objective reality (in which case they would be defined as locutionary acts) but enrich it with additional meaning. The example below refers to the UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson statement before the UK Parliament in relation to the *putsch* occurred in Zimbabwe in November 2017:

(1) "*Nobody wants simply to see the transition from one unelected tyrant to a next.*"

(Boris Johnson, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017)

The locutionary act of this phrase simply describes the occurrence of a military revolt against the constitutional power of Zimbabwe. However, the use of the words “*unelected tyrant*” generates an illocutionary act. It conveys a negative moral judgement based on the European standards of democracy. By conveying additional illocutionary meaning to a phrase, key lemmas constitute the lowest stage of discourse legitimisation practices (Yule, 1996).

The second level regards the logical construct of the phrases. Instead of focusing only on single words, it is their *combination* what is invested in delivering additional meaning to the discourse. By appealing to an external authority, to moral values or to apparently rational goal-oriented actions, the speaker legitimises his narrative in the eyes of the audience (van Leeuwen, 2007).

The final level regards the general discourse and it is possibly the most difficult to analyse. Rather than just focusing on single words or logical structures, political narratives are legitimised within an overarching narrative of stories, recurring metaphors and hypothetical scenarios (Lakoff, 1991), (Chilton, 2004). Narratives are not necessarily bound to a specific time and place, they can recur through multiple discourses performed for different audiences at different times. Nevertheless, they are solidly rooted in the social culture of the country. Metaphors and narratives could not be fully understood without a good grasp of the social context in which they were developed (van Dijk, 2006). The

following paragraphs will explore the recurring legitimisation techniques associated with each level of analysis (from key lemmas to overarching narratives).

### **Legitimation and key lemmas: *Proximization Theory***

The first level which will be analysed is that of key lemmas. Both Chilton (2004) and Cap (2008) address this level when they analyse political actors' strategy of proximization. Proximization is the act of creating legitimacy for a specific choice of actions used to counteract remote events which are however depicted as directly affecting the audience (Cap, 2008). At the cornerstone of this strategy lays the idea that, if an audience feels directly affected by a given event, it will more likely support the course of actions engaging with such event (Wieczorek, 2008).

Proximization can occur in space, time and axiology. Spatial and temporal proximization are used to connect the audience with contemporary events occurring at distance (another region, country, continent...) or with events occurred in the past (being it close or remote). This kind of proximization is also used to re-interpret past and contemporary events framing them into a logical chain of interconnections which directly impacts the audience's present. Axiological proximization follows a different mechanism. Rather than drawing events closer in time and space, it locates them on the metaphysical level of values and ideologies.



It logically embodies specific phenomena into a collectively understood set of values (Cap, 2008).

According to Cap, the proximization strategy is made more effective through two concurring phenomena: *assertion* and *implicature*. Assertion refers to the propensity of the audience to accept a specific statement, if that has been preceded by generally accepted concepts either in the same speech or earlier in time (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1992). Thus, by proximising (*i.e.* depicting closer in time and space) generally accepted concepts, speakers can implicitly legitimise their consequent statements. An example of this technique is the anti-NATO communique signed in 1997 by Russia, Latvia, Ukraine and Belarus days before the NATO Summit in Madrid to which Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were officially invited to participate. In its premises, the document reports the following statements:

*(1) At the NATO Summit in Madrid, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic were officially invited to join NATO.*

*(2) At the same time the participants in the Summit have confirmed that they intend to continue the process of expansion of this military block to other countries of the European continent.*

*(3) This decision indicates that the USA which virtually control NATO as well as their closest allies have adopted a policy of the use of force or the threat thereof as the main factor of the international relations.*

(as reported in Cap, 2008)

Based on the initial verifiable and accepted facts, the third statement – which however makes assumptions on the future state of affairs – is legitimised. Proximization occurs as past events are merged with future scenarios in the same timeframe and are implicitly depicted as a threat to the audience through key lemmas such as “*military block*”, “*force*” and “*threat*”.

Proximization by assertion is particularly effective when combined with temporal and spatial proximization. Events occurring in past times or in other geographical areas are verifiable and usually commonly known by the audience, thus their objectivity can be used to support consequential statements. The following is an extract of President’s Bush speech at the American Enterprise Institute on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, just before the U.S. invasion of Iraq with the scope of removing Saddam Hussein government:

*“On a September morning (a), threats that had gathered for years, in secret and far away (b), led to murder in our country (c) on a massive scale. As a result, we must look at security in a new way, because our country is a battlefield in the first war of the 21st century. (d)”*

(as reported by Holland, 2013)

Here a combination of spatial and temporal proximization is at work. (a) and (b) outline past (the 9/11 terrorist attacks) and geographically remote events (*threats that had gathered [...] far away*) to proximize them together in (c). Past and distant events, which are objectively verifiable as historical facts, are then used to support (d), a prediction on

future states of affairs which seems to be a logical consequence of the previous statements. The audience is not instructed on *why* or *how* the United States could become a battlefield. The simple proximization of past and distant events suffices to legitimise the last statement.

The second phenomenon to be considered within the proximization model is that of *implicatures*. It is recognised that the audience is likely to scan speakers' assertions in search for incongruencies and active manipulation attempts (Axelrod, 1984), (Cosmides and Tooby, 1989) This process is performed by evaluating the logical connections between the premises and the consequences of a statement. The assertion mechanism outlined above is effective because it provides objective and verifiable information to draw consequences. However, the same process cannot be applied in those cases in which there is a lack of verifiable previous events or when the discourse involves values and ideologies which are not generally accepted by the audience. In these cases, political speakers avoid to openly state their premises, or state them in an unclear way. In doing so, the audience is prompted to infer the premises it prefers in order to make the argumentation legitimate.

Proximization by implicature is particularly efficient when applied to discourses referring to values and ideologies, which cannot necessarily be embodied in specific actions or events. Considering the following extract of George Bush to London Whitehall on November 19, 2003:

*“By advancing freedom in the greater Middle East (a), we help end a cycle of dictatorship and radicalism that brings millions of people to misery and brings danger to our own people (b). By struggling for justice in Iraq, Burma, in Sudan, and in Zimbabwe (a), we give hope to suffering people and improve the chances for stability and progress (c)”*

(as reported in Cap, 2008)

The actions of struggling for justice and advancing freedom in distant places are proximized in (b) by connecting them to the security of “*our own people*”. The appeal to values such as freedom and justice, and the protection of a country’s own citizens, are the basis for foreign intervention in the listed countries. However, the moral value of the consequential statement expressed in (c) – the fight for stability and progress – are not clearly supported by the premises. The audience is obliged to autonomously infer that stability and progress are related to the same set of values presented by (a) and (b), and that those are commonly accepted values within Western cultures. The audience is not offered objective and verifiable clauses before the introduction of statement (c), but it is hinted in the right direction by the reference to shared ideology.

The proximization model is an extremely interesting tool in outlining a first set of tactics used to add illocutionary meaning to the speech acts. By drawing closer events in space, time and ideology, speakers can legitimise their narratives in the eyes of the audience. This practice

leverages the techniques of assertions and implicatures, providing an effective political discourse legitimisation strategy. However, it is not the sole one. Illocutionary value is delivered also through a larger set of rhetoric which are not based on single key lemmas as for the proximization model, but rather rely on the logical and semantic construct of the discourse.

### **Legitimation and logical structures: *Van Leeuwen and Reyes***

The choice of words has an extreme impact on the legitimization of discourse through proximization.

Words such *our country, our people, at home* are combined with temporarily, geographically and ideologically distant events to raise a sense of threat and immediateness into the audience. However, this specific mechanism only relies on key lemmas rather than on the overall construction of the phrases. More articulated – and thus more relevant in the framework of our research - are those legitimisation strategies which employ broader semantic and logical structures to validate a specific course of actions. The main theoretical framework for these dialogic processes has been advanced by Theo Van Leeuwen in his 2007 article "*Legitimation in discourse and communication*". By analysing multiple written and oral pieces of literature (both academic and mundane) referring to the schooling and educational system, Van Leeuwen identified four key legitimisation categories widely adopted by

authors. His framework was then reviewed and broadened in 2011 by Antonio Reyes, who specifically applied it to the political discourse adopted in the United States in the framework of the *war on terror*.

The first category introduced by Van Leeuwen is that of *legitimation through rationality*. In this case, discourse is legitimised by referring to the desired goals of a specific action, or through institutionalised social actions. This category can be divided between *instrumental rationalisation* and *theoretical rationalisation*. In the first instance, the discourse outlines the desired objectives of a specific course of actions, drawing a logical consequential connection between the action at stake and the desired consequences as in (1).

(1) *"The children use specific apparatus and movements to promote muscular coordination and agility."*

A second form of rational legitimisation is the *theoretical* one. Here the legitimacy of the action derives by some proved *truths* which are considered as accepted and known by the audience.

(2) *"After consultations with our allies, I then announced a strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe havens in Pakistan."*

(Barack Obama, 1 December 2009 – in Reyes, 2011)

In (2) the process of consulting with the US allies is perceived by the audience as a rational and adequate step to undertake before announcing a new strategy to counteract Afghan extremists and Pakistani safe heavens (Reyes, 2011).

The second category highlighted by Van Leeuwen is that of *legitimation through authorization*. Within this strategy lay those discourse structures which validate a social behaviour by referring to a specific form of authority. Authorization is distinguished into four different sub-categories depending on the nature of authority. *Personal authority* derives from the role of a specific individual within an institution. *Expert* and *role-models authority* derive from the experience of the speaker (or of the individuals the speaker is referring to) acquired through studies and practices, as in (3).

(3) “Our new commander in Afghanistan – General McChrystal – has reported that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated.”

(Obama, 1 December 2009)

Other forms of authority derive from *impersonal authority* - granted by existing laws, regulations and institutions – and the *authority of tradition*. This last one is particularly important in the case of military *golpes*. Coupists usually refer to the role of the military in forming and preserving the nation-state, and their investitures as *guardians of the Constitution*

(Wiking, 1983). Referring to the power of traditions has a double advantage. It invests a specific course of actions with the authority of customary practices, and it adds a veil of moral value by appealing to the practices of previous generations – often perceived in a positive light by the broader society (Singh, 1998). While Reyes seems to converge authority of expertise and authority of traditions into a single legitimisation technique, it is necessary to mark a clear boundary between the two. Appealing to the authority of traditions allows also unexperienced speakers to gain legitimacy for their actions, which they could not have gained by appealing to specific expertise (*e.g.* while the military can claim its historical role in the preservation of the Constitutional order, it cannot find any convincing appeal to its ability or expertise in current affairs management or economic development).

Morality is at the base of the third category of legitimisation practices. By referring to the moral power of traditions (*moral abstractions legitimisation*) or to a general set of commonly shared moral values (*legitimation through moral evaluation*), speakers can claim legitimacy for their narratives vis-à-vis those of their contenders. A particularly moral value outlined by Reyes in the legitimisation process is *altruism* (Reyes, 2011). This strategy circumvents accusations of selfishness by the speakers while promoting the ethical morality of a specific behaviour. Again, this form of legitimisation has a prominent role in the occurrence of military *coups*. While taking the power, the military often justifies its



actions as undertaken for the wellbeing of the country and the population, rather than for greed of social and economic power (Galetovic and Sanhueza, 2000).

The practice of moral legitimisation by Van Leeuwen triggers a further elaboration by Reyes. Building on the idea that morality is accepted as justification for specific actions because it is perceived as generating positive and pleasant feelings in the audience, the author advances the proposition that legitimisation could also be performed through *emotions* only. The manipulation of emotions is used by political actors to achieve specific goals within the political agenda. And among the wide range of emotions to be used, *fear* appears to be the most effective.

(4) *“It’s easy to forget that when this war began, we were united – bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack, and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear.”*

(Obama, 1 December 2009)

In (4) Obama reminds the audience of the terrorist attack of 9/11, recalling the emotions of fear, loss, but also of national unity and determination. The leverage of fears bounds this legitimisation practice with the proximization model discussed above. The sense of urgency and threat triggered by proximization practices awakens the fears of the audience, overcoming its ability to rationally verify the logical

connections between the speaker's premises and the actions under legitimisation.

Finally, the last category of legitimisation strategies presented by Van Leeuwen is that of *mythopoesis*. Legitimisation is achieved through storytelling which combines rational, moral and authority's legitimisation to create a cohesive narrative aiming at convincing the audience (van Leeuwen, 2007). Reyes identifies this practice in the presentation of hypothetical futures. To promote specific courses of actions – or to discard opposing narratives – political actors often rely on the representation of hypothetical futures describing the consequences of their choices.

While the mythopoesis framework appears to be the most comprehensive and challenging one to be analysed – as it combines a multitude of different legitimisation techniques – both Reyes and Van Leeuwen only partially address its nature and structures. One reason behind this choice is that the mythopoesis legitimisation practice is not based on the construction of lemmas and phrases. It is conveyed through the creation of *ad hoc* metaphors and meta-narratives, closely intertwined with collective values, social practices and the audience's interpretation of a specific event (Cap, 2008). The upcoming section will attempt to clarify the major narratives employed by the mythopoesis framework.

### **Legitimation and narratives: *Mythopoesis and Metaphors***

As stressed in both Van Leeuwen and Reyes work, mythopoesis as a legitimation technique involves the use of complex discourse structures which combine a wide range of other legitimation strategies. They merge moral, rational and authority legitimation creating a cohesive story to be presented to the audience. The advantage of using this specific legitimation mechanism is double-fold. First, the use of stories and grand metaphors to describe political narratives simplifies current events, making them accessible for non-specialized audiences (Mio, 1997). Simplification also allows both the use of the assertion and implicatures techniques described in the proximization model. Second, storytelling appears to be a more effective way to engage with the audience and to trigger desired emotions (Kovecses, 2000). Through mythopoesis, speakers can not only perform moral, authority and rational legitimations, but they can also recur to the practice of legitimation through emotions. This combination of reasons makes the process of legitimation through mythopoesis arguably the most efficient one to be employed by policy-makers. However, this also makes it the most difficult to study. Stories can develop through time and different speech acts; they can refer to socio-cultural factors of a specific time and place, and they are often adjusted to the audience. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify commonly shared mechanisms which appear to recurrently surface among political actors' speeches.

In his 1991 article “*Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System used to Justify the War in the Gulf*”, George Lakoff identified three recurring mythopoesis strategies employed by U.S. policy-makers to legitimise their decision to intervene for the liberation of Kuwait. While these stories may appear to be excessively bound to that specific time and place, they could still offer important hints for their generalisation and their application to military *golpes*.

The first metaphor identified by Lakoff is that of *war as politics*. It is deeply embedded in Western strategic thinking that war and politics are two faces of the same coin. This idea derives from Clausewitz milestone in strategic thinking “*On War*”, in which war is defined as “*the continuation of politics by other means*” (Clausewitz, 1984, 87). The perception of war – or conflict more generally – as an integral part of politics stresses not only its inevitability, but also its necessity for the advancement of political interests. This same metaphor is used also in the case of *coups d’Etat*. The ranks of the military taking power have been seen to claim their willingness to restore the constitutional order or to promote the economic advancement of the country after years of stagnation (Wiking, 1983). In such cases as well, the *golpe* is depicted as a complementary part of the political process rather than an exceptional condition which should be avoided.

The second metaphor pictures the *state as a person*. States are individuals interacting with each other in the international community. States have inherent characteristics which are the heritage of the country's history. As humans, states should be healthy, which is measured in economic terms (Lakoff, 1991). The reference to medical lemmas in this type of mythopoesis adds to the states as a person's own narrative. As an individual should be cured through surgical interventions if she is affected by some diseases, so the military should intervene if the state is not functioning properly. Two further aspects are fundamental to this metaphor. The first one is that, by portraying a state as an individual with inherent characteristics, it is possible to assign it a role typical of children's stories: either a hero or a villain. In the case of the First Gulf War, Iraq was clearly the villain, Kuwait the innocent victim and the United States the intervening hero (Lakoff, 1991). Being an internal issue of the state, military *golpes* twist this specific narrative recurring to the second characteristic of the metaphor: in the case of *coups*, the military can portray the state's leadership as the "unhealthy" part of the country, which must be removed to preserve the state survival (Luttwak, 1968).

The final metaphor, less important for our research but still relevant in the broader framework of political discourse analysis, is that of the *causal-commerce system*. In this narrative, the specific course of actions promoted by the speaker is presented in commercial terms: "the effort

*of pursuing this action will produce the following revenues*". In this mythopoesis, legitimisation through instrumental rationalisation is at work to convince the audience. The sacrifice of waging war will produce desirable results. It is thus worth to engage in such conflict.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the creation of a theoretical framework to analyse the application of political discourse legitimisation practices to the phenomenon of military *coups d'Etat*. After surveying the existing literature on the materialistic causes of *golpes*, it focused more in-depth on the linguistic theories of legitimisation advanced in other sociological fields outlining the major strategies employed by political actors in order to justify their chosen course of actions or to promote their specific narratives vis-à-vis those of competing speakers. The initial part of this section briefly analysed the terms political discourse and legitimisation to elaborate a coherent definition to be used throughout the research. The focus of the literature surveyed then moved specifically to the process of legitimisation. This process operates at three different levels: key lemmas, logical structures and narratives.

In the case of the proximization theory, the attention of the literature was focused on keywords attempting to convince the audience of the ideological, spatial or temporal proximity of determinate events. The sense of urge and threat caused by such proximization would prompt the

audience to accept the speaker's narrative. In the proximization case, speakers could also use assertions and implicatures to further increase the likelihood of legitimisation for her positions.

Logical structures are at the base of the more traditional approach to political discourse legitimisation. By combining specific words and logical connectors, speakers leverage a multitude of strategies to legitimise their discourse. Both Antonio Reyes and Thomas Van Leeuwen – who have analysed the issue in-depth – agree on the existence of four major legitimisation strategies (through *authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation and mythopoesis*), although Reyes underlines the importance of emotions such as altruism, fear and compassion, as a fifth technique.

Mythopoesis, or storytelling, is based on the overall discourse narrative employed by the speaker and represents a higher level of legitimisation technique. By combining different logical structures and legitimisation practices, speakers can create engaging and resounding stories. These simplify matters and make them more accessible to the public. They have a stronger impact on the audience and are more likely to successfully legitimise a specific course of actions. Mythopoesis are however difficult to study for their complex nature. They are not necessarily limited to a single speech act, but they develop across separated utterances. Furthermore, they are influenced by both time, location and audience. The impact of this multitude of variables is particularly evident in the

story-telling process, but it is also deeply affecting the logical structures, and even the interpretation of key lemmas in a given language.

The chapter explored a wide range of issues and techniques which can be used to analyse at different levels (key lemmas, structures and broader narratives) the techniques which actors would employ to justify their course of actions. In particular, the techniques outlined assume specific importance during *coups*. When sub-groups within the polity have the material resources to seize power, they also need to legitimise their actions to ensure that the bureaucratic apparatus of the country and the population will accept the new status quo and will not impair the functioning of the state. While the aim of this chapter was to create a general framework to be employed in the analysis of any military *coup*, the upcoming two chapters will take a more practical approach. By focusing on two case study, they will draw on these theoretical foundations to highlight how the process works in practice. The different outcome of the cases presented – the 2014 successful *coup* in Thailand, and the attempted 2016 *golpe* in Turkey – will also offer the opportunity to verify if specific differences in the discourse legitimisation practices and in the security culture of the country have affected the unfolding of the events following the seizure of power.



<b>DISCOURSE LEGITIMISATION STRATEGIES</b>		
<b>KEY LEMMAS</b>	<b>LOGICAL STRUCTURES</b>	<b>NARRATIVES</b>
<p><b>Illocutionary Acts</b> Enrich words with non-objective judgements</p>	<p><b>Rationality</b> Focuses on the desired goals</p> <p><b>Instrumental</b> Describes a specific course of actions</p> <p><b>Theoretical</b> Describes actions perceived as logical and rational by the audience</p>	<p><b>Mythopoesis</b> Story-telling and narratives merging multiple strategies in a longer chain of statements</p>
<p><b>Proximization</b> Creates a connection between the audience and remote events</p> <p><b>Implicature</b> The audience is prompted to autonomously infer the legitimacy of the argument</p> <p><b>Assertion</b> Verifiable statements support non-verifiable ones</p>	<p><b>Authorization</b> Focuses on the authority of an individual or of a social group</p> <p><b>Personal</b> Derives from an individual's role within an institution</p> <p><b>Expert</b> Derives from an individual's expertise or its past achievements</p> <p><b>Traditions</b> Derives from social customs</p> <p><b>Morality</b> Focuses on socially constructed and shared moral values (e.g. <i>altruism</i>)</p> <p><b>Emotions</b> Focuses on the audience's emotions (e.g. <i>fear</i> or <i>anger</i>)</p>	<p><b>Metaphors</b> Simplify complex narratives using widely understandable concepts</p> <p><b>War as politics</b></p> <p><b>The state as a person</b></p> <p><b>Causal-Commerce system</b></p>

Figure 1 – Graphic summary of the discourse legitimization theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 1

## CHAPTER TWO – DISCOURSE LEGITIMISATION IN THE 2016 TURKISH COUP D'ETAT

The previous chapter set the basis for a general framework to analyse political discourse legitimisation practices. By surveying the current academic literature and applying it more closely to the political field, it highlighted a range of strategies and techniques employed by actors to justify and promote their narratives *vis-a-vis* those of their competitors. The objective of the following two chapters will be to apply these concepts to two case-study of military *coups*. Both chapters will follow the same structure. They will start with an overview of the country's recent history, to underline the course of events which led to the *golpes* as well as the role of the military within the states' dynamics. This is extremely important for two concurring reasons. The first one regard the general security culture of the country, while the second regards the process of discourse legitimisation.

In relation to the general security culture, analysing a country's recent history and the role played by the army allows us to better understand the choice of narrative employed by the speakers. It also allows us to understand part of the underlying material factors which triggered the *coup*, which play a fundamental role in the course of the events as outlined in the initial section for the previous chapter (Hiroi and Omori, 2013). Regarding discourse legitimisation, it has previously been highlighted how the choice of legitimisation techniques and the actual use of specific words and narratives are deeply intertwined with both the socio-cultural characteristics of the

speaker and those of the audience (Kaldor, 2018). A historical overview of the state's recent history better positions the researcher and the readers to understand more accurately the implications of specific key lemmas, logical structures and narratives employed during the political discourse.

The following sections of each chapter will then focus more specifically on the discourse legitimisation process. They will analyse the *coup* declaration speeches uttered by the military in the immediate aftermath of the events (or, in the case of Turkey, while the events were still unfolding). The analysis will cover the three levels of discourse legitimisation outlined above, highlighting similarities and differences with the framework presented in the previous chapter.

### **The role of the military in modern Turkey**

The military played a fundamental role since the outset of modern Turkey. In 1920, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during World War I and the signature of the treaty of Sevres, the country was brought virtually under the full control of Western powers (Kent, 1996). British, French, Italian and Greek troops began dismantling the Ottoman Empire into multiple areas of influence (Gingeras, 2016). Power was still formally invested in the hands of the Sultan Mehmed VI and his parliament, but the *de facto* control of the country was in the hands of foreign states (Kent, 1996). During this period, the country started experiencing its first wave of nationalist sentiments. Boosted by the frustration or the lost war and the humiliation of foreign domination, multiple strata of

societies began searching for a new national identity, freed from the constraint of the Ottoman Sultanate and of its Western adversaries (Cucu, 2014). Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a field marshal who distinguished himself during the 1915 Battle of Gallipoli, took the lead of this movement. While officially encharged to reorganise the Ottoman Army after its defeat and maintain stability during the foreign occupation, he led the Turkish Nationalist Movement to establish a parallel government in Ankara (Foss, 2014). While the movement gained momentum, it effectively countered foreign occupational forces expelling Greek, Armenian and French troops by late 1922. This allowed Kemal's provisional Government of the Grand National Assembly to *de facto* substitute the still existing Ottoman government and to begin the transition of the country into modern-days Turkey (Gawrych, 1988). Mustafa Kemal became the first president of the new country and promoted several legislations to forge a secular nation-state, broaden social reforms and to create a Turkish national identity (Foss, 2014). Kemal Ataturk's role was fundamental in the creation of the current state. His role as founder of the country continues unchallenged in present-days Turkey. The Turkish army inherited this legacy, perceiving itself as a guardian of the nation (Kandil, 2016). This is the reason why in the subsequent years the military played a central role in national politics.

In 1960 the country was experiencing a prolonged period of economic hardship and socio-political turmoil. While President Adnan Menderes was leading a transition towards multiparty democracy causing strong frictions within the political elites (Harris, 1970), the national economy was entering a period of stagnation due to the reduction of funds deriving from the US-sponsored

Marshall Plan and Truman doctrine (Ustun, 1997). Leveraging these social grievances and the elites' fear of seeing their power reduced due to a broadening of the political class, Alparslan Turkes – a leading politician and founder of the Nationalist Movement Party – orchestrated a *coup d'Etat* with the support of the army. On 20 May 1960, General Cemal Gursel executed it, suspending the constitutional elected bodies and establishing a military junta. The immediate aftermath of the *coup* saw a purge of the government, the army and larger social institutions such as universities and tribunals. A new Constitution was approved through a referendum in 1962, turning the country into a bicameral state and granting members of the *putsch* organising committee several seats in the senate upon presidential appointment (Daldal, 2004).

Further military *golpes* occurred regularly following 1961. In 1971, the army replaced the Turkish government amid a climate of widespread social tensions. An enduring economic crisis (whose roots were emerging already in 1960) had led the country to an almost anarchical situation. Universities countrywide had stopped functioning, as young students organised themselves into guerrilla groups mirroring those in Latin America. Strikes and labour demonstrations occurred almost daily across the country often escalating into riots and violence. The political situation was also extremely unstable. Political assassination was becoming a widespread practice and the ruling party was experiencing multiple dissent and defections among its members. Islamic organisations were resourcing. In the upcoming two years, the military-backed executive undertook severe reforms, banning students' union, limiting the

right of protests and establishing martial law across multiple provinces (Kadercan and Kadercan, 2016). By 1973, a new Constitutional reform was passed strengthening state powers against the civil society, and the army reduced its footprint over daily politics (Nye, 1977).

Tensions however were not resolved but just temporarily suspended. Political turmoil increased again in late 1970, with left-wing militants and pro-Western right-wing members of the political elites bitterly fighting. This was accompanied by severe economic hardship. Unemployment was rampant, inflation had reached 120% in 1979/1980, and the country was on the edge of bankruptcy (Telatar and Kazdagli, 1998). On September 1980, the army stepped in again with the stated objective to restore order and to prevent the state from collapsing. Multiple pieces of legislation were passed in the following two years to further strengthen the state's control over society. These were combined with severe purges of all strata of the population until 1982, when power was slowly transferred again to civilian elected bodies (Dagi, 1996).

A final *coup* in the Turkish modern history was staged in 1997. Its motivations closely resemble those used to justify the attempted *coup* of 2016 which will be presented in the upcoming paragraph. A subgroup within the army did not accept Prime Minister's Necmettin Erbakan Islamic government, seeing it as a threat to the secularism of Turkish society. They issued a memorandum against him, prompting his government to resign without the dissolution of the parliament nor the suspension of the constitution (Heper, 2002).

### **The July 2016 *coup***

Given the multiple *coups* experienced by Turkey in its recent history, it is not surprising that in 2016 a group of army officials attempted to overthrow the government of President Recep Erdogan, whose Islamic-inspired views were seen again as a threat to the state's secularism (Milan, 2016). The president, in office since 2014, had promoted several legislations pointing in that direction: Islamic compulsory education was reintroduced in schools, education and justice systems were purged of their members not aligned with the executive's policies, and in early July 2016 a new law increased the power of the Turkish government to appoint judges and magistrates (Bayulgen *et al.*, 2018).

Following this mounting pressure against Ataturk's legacy – which the military perceived as its duty to protect – a group within the army calling itself the Peace at Home Council staged a *coup* with the objective to overthrow the regime and draft a new constitution. On 15 July 2016, members of the council seized strategic areas such as Istanbul's Ataturk Airport, the Fatih Sultan Mehmet and Bosphorus bridges, Taksim Square and the building of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) from which a *coup* declaration was broadcasted to the country with the aim of legitimising the Council's actions. The Chief of the General Staff, the commanders of the Land and Air Forces and several other high-ranking army officials were abducted, and a nation-wide curfew was imposed (Ataman, 2017).

Concurrently, an anti-coup operation was initiated through the army's regular chain of command. Within a few hours, the *putschist* attempt was rebuffed.

Regular forces gained again control of the strategic locations seized at the outbreak of the rebellions, while president Erdogan – who was not in the capital during the incident – call the Turkish people to violate the *coupists'* curfew and take the streets to demonstrate against the *putschists*. At 11.51 am of July 16 eight *coupists* landed in Greece on a military helicopter, requesting political asylum (Daily Sabah Centre, 2016). Just twelve hours after its beginning, the *golpe* was rebuffed. In the hours and days which followed, the Turkish executive purged universities, tribunals and public institutions of possible political opponents, it strengthened its power over civil society and lead the country in a prolonged state of emergency granting president Erdogan heightened powers (Bayulgen *et al.*, 2018).

Materials factors undeniably played a pivotal role in the outbreak and in the outcome of the *coup*. Social and historical grievances against religiously-oriented governments had been a common trigger for military uprisings, as in the 1997 *golpe*. Additionally, the lack of success of the *putschists* was also determined by their limited numbers, resources and organisation (Jacoby, 2016). Allegedly, the Turkish army had already received information from the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) of a possible *coup* attempt the same day, and it had deployed preventive measure such as temporarily prohibiting military activities and inspecting the Army Aviation Academy (Daily Sabah Centre, 2016). Nevertheless, the *coupists* declaration broadcasted on live television, offers a valuable piece of political discourse to analyse the implementation of the legitimisation techniques addressed in the previous chapter.



## Discourse Legitimation

The following text is the transcription and translation of the *coup* declaration broadcasted live on the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) on 15 July. Since the speech was broadcasted while the events were still unfolding, it aimed at achieving a double objective. On the one hand, the speech is mainly targeted to an internal audience. By referring to socio-cultural elements, the *coupists* attempted to gain legitimacy for their actions. As the *golpe* was still unfolding, the declaration aimed at convincing both the public and other members of the military to join and support the rebellion. On the other hand, a smaller part of the speech was targeting the international audience. In a time of uncertainty, the *putschists* wanted to ensure a lack of retaliation from the international community.

*Publishing this text in All the channels of the Republic of Turkey is a request and an order given by the Turkish Armed Forces. Esteemed citizens of the Republic of Turkey, in a systematic manner sustained Constitution and Law violations are important with regards to the state's basic attributes and vital institutions, it has become a threat to all the institutions of the state, including Turkish Armed Forces as they have been started to be designed with ideological motives, and thus, they are made unable to perform their duties.*

*The secular and democratic legal order is virtually eliminated which is based on the separation of destructed powers and the fundamental rights and freedoms made by the President and the governmental powers who are in disgrace, offense and even treachery. Our state has been transformed into a country which has lost its deserved reputation in the international environment and is governed by a fear-based autocracy in which universal fundamental human rights are ignored. Inaccurate fight-back decision made by the political administration against terrorism has cost the lives of many innocent citizens and our security staff against terrorists. Corruption and theft in the bureaucracy have reached serious dimensions. In the country, the legal system to combat this issue has been rendered inoperable.*

*Under these circumstances, the Turkish Armed Forces, the founder of our Republic which was founded and brought into today by our nation with extraordinary sacrifices under the leadership of exalted Atatürk, have seized the power in order to continue the indivisible unity of the homeland, the survival of the nation and the state with the principle of Peace in the Fatherland and Peace in the World; to eliminate the dangers faced by the achievements of our Republic; to eliminate the actual obstacles to the state of law; to prevent corruption that has become a national security threat; to open the path of effective struggle with terrorism and all forms of terror; to make basic universal human rights valid for all citizens regardless of discrimination and ethnicity; to restore the Constitutional (Anayasa) order based on the principle of secular, democratic and social law state; to regain the lost international reputation of our state and our nation; to establish a stronger relationship and cooperation for the procurement of peace, stability and tranquility in the international environment.*

*The administration of the state will be undertaken by the Peace Council at the established House. The Peace Council at House has taken all kinds of measures to fulfill its obligations with the UN, NATO and all other international organizations.*

*The political power which lost its legitimacy was deposed from office.*

*Fig. 2 - Translated text of the 15 July 2016 coup declaration speech broadcasted live on the Turkish Radio and Television Company*

### ***Key lemmas analysis – illocutionary acts***

The initial and lowest level of analysis regarding discourse legitimisation is the one connected with key lemmas. In the previous chapter, it has been analysed the illocutionary value of specific words. By carefully choosing a determinate lexicon over another, the drafter of the speech attempted to deliver an additional value which goes beyond the objective description of the facts that have been occurring (Austin, 1962). The choice of specific words allowed the actors to deliver four key concepts: the strength of the *coupists*; a sense of national shame for Turkey's political situation; a sense of urgency and threat upon the state; and the presence of an ideological bias in the current government's policies.

The strength of the *coupists* is highlighted since the initial sentence of the speech. The broadcast of the declaration is a "*request and order*" by the *putschists*. The specific use of the word "*order*" conveys a sense of discipline and power which impregnates the entire text. The use of "*request and order*" has been accurately chosen to deliver a sense of control and superiority, which the *coupists* were keen to showcase to convince their audience of the success of their actions (Vullers and Schwarz, 2018). Later in the text, the strength and superiority of the army are stressed again using the words "*extraordinary sacrifice*" to describe the efforts of the army to forge modern Turkey. This passage is particularly important as it connects multiple levels of discourse analysis, and it will be presented again in the following sections of this chapter.

The sense of national shame is the second aspect stressed in the declaration. Describing the constitutional powers as “*destroyed*” and the country fallen in “*disgrace*” in the eye of its people and of the international community is a powerful appeal to the audience to accept the *coup* as a positive change against the vile present created by the Turkish government. The illocutionary meaning of these words is further stressed by the reference to the widespread “*corruption and theft*” of the executive’s administration. Rather than plainly describing an objective situation, these lemmas attempt to draw an extremely negative moral judgement of present Turkey. This is further supported by the ideological aspect. The declaration specifically refers to “*ideological motives*” behind the decadence of the country. Although neither these motives nor the exact nature of the ideology are described, these words convey a negative value, especially when compared with the “*secular, democratic and social law state*” later described in the text.

Finally, the sense of fear and urgency. This aspect will also be highlighted when presenting the logical structures of this discourse, but it must nevertheless be mentioned here in relation to the illocutionary values of the words used. Again, rather than plainly describing an objective situation, the speaker uses words as “*threat*”, “*fear-based*”, “*survival*” and “*national security threat*” to describe the Turkish government. The importance of these action lays in the negative values attached to these words, which further boost the need for the population to accept and welcome the military uprising.

### ***Key lemmas analysis – proximization***

The proximization technique is not used throughout the text as much as it would have been expected. Given the historical role of the military in Turkey, the declaration was expected to have more references to the importance of the army, and its recurring involvement into politics in a time of political crisis. No reference is made to proximize the multiple *golpes* in the history of modern Turkey. This choice is likely to have occurred for two reasons. The first one is historical. The latest *coups* performed in Turkey in 1980 and 1997 did not produce the expected results. Rather than restoring political orders, they merely turned into systems of oppression which temporarily froze the ongoing societal issues and grievances in the Turkish society, but little they did to effectively address and solve them (Heper, 2002). The second one is stylistic. The strength and the importance of the military are already highlighted through the key lemmas presented in the previous section. Further proximization would have not added more value, and it would have just made the declaration longer and more complex, while at the time what was needed was speed and clarity, to ensure that the audience agreed and legitimised the army actions. Proximization does nevertheless occur in at least two passages of the speech. In relation to terrorism and in relation to the founding of modern Turkey.

In relation to terrorism, the speech refers to the fight against both the Islamic State (IS) and the Kurdish independentist movement in the Eastern regions of the country. The spillover of Islamist militias from Syria towards the Turkish

border regions, counteracted by the armament of the Kurdish independent militias, has been posing a relevant threat for the unity and the stability of the country (Nimni and Aktoprak, 2018). While governmental policies attempted to mitigate the escalation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the failure of peace talks in 2015 further destabilised the situation (Pope, 2015). By clearly referring to this situation (*“terrorism has cost the lives of many innocent citizens”*) the speech aimed at proximize events geographically distant from the life in the capital and to turn them into an immediate life-threatening challenge for the Turkish population. While it is undeniable that the ongoing conflict in Eastern Turkey represents a threat for the state, this proximization strategy aims at intertwining these events with the reasons leading to the *coup*.

The second act of proximization is performed later in the speech, by drawing a parallel between the present army and the members of the Turkish forces which, led by Ataturk, gave birth to modern Turkey. Those fighters are proximized and identified with the current military, as to give *coupists* higher moral authority and legitimacy to intervene for the protection of the state that they directly helped to build.

### ***Key lemmas analysis – assertion and implicature***

Assertion and implicature are techniques often used together with a proximization strategy. Although the *coup* declaration does not make abundant use of this strategy, it certainly relies on these additional techniques. This is particularly interesting, as it demonstrates how actual political discourse

does not necessarily fit strictly with the framework outlined in the previous chapter. Actors do combine techniques in multiple and different ways, with the objective of maximising their impact over the relevant audience (Reyes, 2011).

Assertion is used to draw non-immediately verifiable consequences from objective and verifiable statements (Cap, 2008). Such strategy is used at the beginning of the declaration to introduce the discourse. Thus, actors may use assertion only to establish a sense of validity in their words, without necessarily repeat it through the entire discourse. Once the legitimacy of their words is established, the subsequent statements are equally likely to be supported without the need for further outlining objective and verifiable realities. In the case of the Turkish *coup*, assertion occurs in the initial phrases of the discourse. *Coupists* refer to “*sustained constitution and law violations*” performed by the executive. This is an objective and acknowledged reality. Turkish public discourse has frequently addressed the issue of dubious constitutionality of new laws promulgated by Erdogan’s government (Karaveli, 2016). This verifiable incipit is however used to support the final statement of the first paragraph, declaring that the army has been made “*unable to perform their duties*”. This latter statement is both vague and unverifiable. Given the distance between the general public and army operations, it is unlikely that the audience can have an insight over the impact of legislation over the actual functioning of the military’s mechanisms. Additionally, the speaker fails to address the exact connection between the two, without outlining in which way new legislation is impacting the military performance. Nevertheless, these

intertwined statements prompt the audience to believe the factuality of the events and create a sound base for the use of the implicature technique in the rest of the speech.

Implicature is the technique used to legitimise ideological statements (Cap, 2008). Rather than providing the audience with sound premises as when recurring to assertion, implicatures entail a vaguer approach towards the statement, leaving the audience with the task to decipher both the validity of the facts presented, and their positive value. In the declaration above, implicature is used over two major sets of concepts: the functioning of the state and the wellbeing of its citizens.

The functioning of the state was already addressed earlier in the analysis of illocutionary words. The description of a sense of national shame was closely connected with the malfunctioning of the polity. From the implicature perspective, the military refers to the *“separation of destructed powers”*, the inoperability of the legal system and the need to *“restore the constitutional order based on the principle of secular, democratic and social law state”*. These are however highly ideological statements and are not supported by objective evidence. The inoperability of the legal system and the lack of powers separations is mentioned but not described in the speech. Additionally, the audience is prompted to autonomously infer the negativity of lack of powers separations based on a Western-centric understanding of the ideal state as described by Montesquieu (Zang and Sun, 2018). No further explanation is



given concerning the negative consequences of this situation. This strategic decision is however well-placed. Further description of these statements would have a double negative effect. On the one hand, it would have broken the fluidity of the speech, turning it into a burdensome reading on political theory. On the other, it would have drawn the audience attention to the contradiction embedded in the speech itself. By staging a military uprising, the army *de facto* violated the separation of powers. And by suspending the constitution, it further broke the constitutional order. A reflection on both these aspects would have severely impacted the legitimising capability of the speech, thus impairing its initial objectives.

The wellbeing of citizens is a second theme supported by the implicature technique. *Coupists* declare that “*fundamental human rights are ignored*” and that the “*indivisibility of the homeland must be preserved*”. These powerful statements are however both left unsupported and unexplained. The audience is led to believe that both these concepts are closely connected with the idea of “*peace, stability and tranquillity*” described below, but the connection is not overtly nor logically stated.

This first level of analysis already highlights the multiplicity of discourse legitimisation techniques employed in a short piece of text. Given the highly symbolic value of a *coup* declaration, legitimisation strategies must be effectively employed to ensure their impact on the audience is both effective and long-lasting. The following two sections will address the two remaining

levels of analysis. Given the length of the speech, little space is given to overarching metaphors like the ones described by Lakoff. Nevertheless, logical structures are invested in a central role, especially those leveraging legitimisation on the emotion of fear.

### ***Logical structures analysis***

To analyse the use of logical structures in discourse legitimisation, the following paragraphs will refer to the theoretical frameworks set out by Reyes and van Leuven presented earlier. In particular, four different legitimisation structures can be observed in the *coup* declaration. These are *legitimation through rationality*, *legitimation through authority*, *legitimation through morality*, and *legitimation through emotions*. These strategies have been built on the key lemmas outlined in the previous section, to maximise their efficiency.

Legitimation through rationality occurs when actors describe the consequences of their actions. By outlining the desired outcome of their social behaviours, speakers attempt to justify it in the eyes of the receiving audience, offering a logical explanation for *why* they have chosen that specific course of actions (van Leeuwen, 2007). Legitimation through rationality is semantically constructed in English using the preposition *to*, which introduces a consequential statement connected to the previous one. The presence of such logical construct recurs multiple times in the second half of the declaration. *Coupists* justify their actions stating that they are intended to “*continue the*

*indivisible unity of the homeland*"; *"to eliminate the dangers"* faced by the Republic; *"to eliminate the actual obstacles to the state of law"*; *"to prevent corruption"*; *"to open the path of effective struggle with terrorism"* ; *"to restore the constitutional order"*; *"to regain the lost international reputation"*. Interestingly, this form of rationalisation closely fit with the concept of *theoretical rationalisation*. The outcomes outlined are desirable not for some specifically mentioned concrete reasons (*i.e.* they do not describe specific beneficial consequences of these goals) but rather for their *theoretical* value. As Van Leuven described in his work, the outcomes described should be accepted as they fit with some generally accepted *truths* (*i.e.* the outcome are inherently good in society's collective imagination) (Coombe, 2017).

Legitimation through rationalisation, in this case, is also closely connected with legitimation through morality. The last statement for theoretical rationalisation (*"to establish a stronger relationship and cooperation for the procurement of peace, stability and tranquillity in the international environment"*) contains a moral judgement used as a legitimation statement by the speakers: the reference to peace, stability and tranquillity. These values are undoubtedly moral, as they are likely to be perceived as positive attributes by the entire audience. Although a *coup d'Etat* may not be perceived as an ideal course of actions, the reference to these moral values is intended to make it more acceptable to the larger population. Morality also intervenes in a more subtle way in the first half of the declaration. *Coupists* refer to the fact *that "corruption and theft in the bureaucracy have reached serious dimensions"*.

This description implicitly serves to justify the uprising, as it depicts one of the triggering factors of the *golpe*. Undeniably, corruption and theft are universally accepted as negative traits, that should be eliminated, thus providing a legitimisation ground for the army's actions.

The use of moral legitimisation is particularly interesting in this specific case study. As described in the previous chapter, moral legitimisation would be expected to play a primary role during *coups*, as the army attempts to justify its behaviour on moral and ideological grounds (Galetovic and Sanhueza, 2000). Nevertheless, the Turkish example demonstrates that legitimisation through rationalisation plays a much larger role, and it is only supported by moral legitimisation which serves as introducing statement (presenting the challenges of theft and corruption) and as a conclusive one (recalling the moral value of peace, stability and tranquillity, which will be achieved after the success of the *coup*).

Legitimisation through authority also plays a role in the 15 July speech. While the army cannot refer to its expertise in managing the state's affairs, it nevertheless claims its authority by referring to its role in the founding of modern Turkey. In the clause "*the Turkish Armed Forces, the founder of our Republic which was founded and brought into today [...] with extraordinary sacrifice*" the *coupists* highlight their role as founders of the state, and thus as its protectors. It has already been mentioned how proximization plays an important role in this passage. Furthermore, by claiming their role as founder of the nation, the *coupists* declare their right of intervention to protect it from

the challenges it may face. These challenges are not only internal, but they may also stem from a corrupt administration.

The last logical structure employed in the speech is that of *legitimisation through emotions*, as presented by Reyes (2011). In the section above, it has been stated how key lemmas are used to trigger the emotion of fear in the audience. Moving sentiments is an extremely effective way to convey a message (Koschut, 2018), and this strategy is thus used at the beginning of the declaration, to capture the attention of the audience and to prepare it for the following statements of morality, rationalisation and authority. In the first paragraph, law and constitutional violations have become “*a threat to all the institutions of the state*”. This reference to a threat aims at creating an immediate sense of danger and urgency, which should then be mitigated by the next statements delineating a course of action and desired results. This is further stressed when referring to Erdogan’s executive as a “*fear-based autocracy in which universal fundamental human rights are ignored*”. Additionally, emotions are manipulated also by defining governmental powers as “*in disgrace, offense and even treachery*”. The objective of this statement is to combine the sense of danger and urgency with a feeling of disdain and regret for the ongoing situation.

An important technique missing from the *coupists* speech is that of mythopoesis, or legitimisation through narrative. This is particularly relevant for at least three reasons. The first one is that it outlines the urgency of the speech. The declaration was issued while the *golpe* had not yet been fully

carried out. *Putschists* had to prioritize specific meanings (*i.e.* the moral value of their actions, as well as their objectives) over more complex narratives. The second one regards the previous performances of the army following *coups* in Turkey. While they had been occurring frequently since the independence of the country following World War I, most of the times they did not produce the desired outcomes, rather creating periods of repression and economic mismanagement which further deepened the socio-economic problems of the country (Kandil, 2016). Including in the declaration a reference to the previous involvement of the military with the country's administration would have been highly unproductive at least. Finally, the third reason is more practical. The mythopoesis technique (including also the description of hypothetical futures as outlined by Reyes) is highly used by politicians as it often entails creating narratives across different speeches and occasions, separate in time and space. Given the uncertainty of the rebellion's outcome, and the lack of precedents in recent years, *coupists* could not indulge in this kind of strategy. Describing hypothetical futures would have entailed describing a scenario in which the *coup* was not successful. A decision which would have impaired the credibility of the *putschist* actions.

The lack of the mythopoesis technique also impairs our ability to analyse the third and broadest level of discourse legitimisation analysis, that of recurring narratives. In this case, discourse legitimisation occurred as a single event, rather than among a continuum of speeches and declarations. The need for communicative immediateness led the authors of the declaration to prioritise

immediate meanings over the more effective – but more time consuming – strategies entailing metaphors and scenarios building.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analysed how discourse legitimisation practices permeate the 15 July *coup* declaration issued by some members of the Turkish military during the unfolding of their events. It showed how key lemmas and logical structures are combined to support one another and maximise the impact the words have on the audience. It also showed how the authors of the declaration had to prioritise specific strategies over others. The limited use of legitimisation through authority and of moral legitimisation clearly outline the limits of these strategies in contexts of high uncertainties and of strict time-constraints. This applies also to the broader techniques of mythopoesis and metaphors, which cannot be performed in limited time, but necessitate to be reiterated through different speeches across space and time.

The following chapter will now move to analyse a second *coup* declaration, occurred in very different circumstances. That of the Thai successful *coup* in 2014.

### CHAPTER 3 – DISCOURSE LEGITIMISATION IN THE 2014 THAI COUP D'ETAT

The second case-study which will be analysed in this research is that of the 2014 *coup d'Etat* which was carried out by the Thai army with the tacit consent of Thailand's king (Baker, 2016). Compared to the Turkish *golpe*, Thailand's event presents several different features which are worth pointing out. The first and most prominent is the outcome. While the Turkish government in 2016 has been effectively able to retain power and to prevent the situation to escalate, *de facto* stopping the attempted rebellion, the Thai case unfolded differently. Thailand's executive has not been able to prevent the military from acting. Additionally, the tacit support of the king highly endorsed military actions.

The second difference lays in the *modus operandi* of the *coup*. While in Turkey *coupists* actively engaged with other groups of the security forces in open clashes, in Thailand the *coup* unfolded quickly and neatly. There were no clashes within the military, and the government was promptly removed and substituted with a military junta (Prasirtsuk, 2015). By the time Thailand's population realised the constitutional violation, the *coup* was already completed, and the new chain of command established. These differences in tactics also reflect in the speech which was uttered in the aftermath of the *coup* to legitimise the *putschists* actions. While in Turkey the *coup* declaration was broadcasted while the events were still unfolding, and its objective was to convince the population, the rest of the military and the international



community of the legitimacy of the *golpe*, the case of Thailand was significantly different. The *coup* declaration speech was issued after the action was completed, and its objective was merely to acknowledge the events and to convince the population both of its necessity and of the need to avoid large-scale contestation. As it will be later outlined more in detail, the speech presents fewer legitimisation strategies and more descriptive statements.

The following chapter will mirror chapter two in its structure. It will start by outlining the main landmarks of civilian-military relationships in Thailand. As in the Turkish case, armed forces played a fundamental role in the creation of the modern state and intervened multiple times during its recent history to assert their political influence. The following section will then specifically focus on the 2014 *coup*, tracing its roots and short-term consequences. Finally, the third section of this chapter will analyse the legitimisation techniques employed by the army chief in the aftermath of the *golpe*. A short conclusion will complete the analysis, leading the way to the fourth and last chapter of this research paper.

### **The historical role of the military in Thailand**

Modern Thailand like modern Turkey was forged by the army through a *coup d'Etat*. Historically, Thailand was a centuries-old absolute monarchy, the only

reign in South-East Asian to maintain its independence from the colonising powers (Ferrara, 2015).

In the early years of the XX Century, the monarchy had started a broad range of reforms to modernise its society and include commoners in the ruling process of the country (Suzdaleva and Fedorov, 2018), (Ferrara, 2015). The regime, however, assumed an authoritarian turn following an attempted army coup in 1912 aiming at transforming the country into a constitutional democracy (Reynolds, 2005). Commoners were removed from the civil service and replaced with members of the nobility. This favoured the emergence of a neo-patrimonial regime which severely impacted the country's modernisation process (Kesbooncho Mead, 2014). Concurrently, to prevent future military rebellions, the monarchy also limited the funds available to the army. As outlined in the first chapter of this research, neo-patrimonial regimes, poorly founded armies and mounting economic grievances, which in Thailand started in 1930 following the U.S. financial crisis (Elliott, 1978), are key causal elements in the outbreak of *coups* (Hiroi and Omori, 2013). On 24 June 1932, the Thai army under the military leadership of Colonel Phraya Phahol Pholpayuhasena moved to conquer the royal palace in Bangkok, arresting most of the noble members of the civil service. The entire process lasted less than 24 hours (Farrelly, 2013). The king was not in the capital during the events, but upon his return on 26 June, he accepted the army's action and approved the constitution previously drafted by the Pridi Panomyong, the father of the nationalist movement and the mastermind of the rebellion (Suwhannathat-

Pian, 1996). The new constitution highly restricted the monarchy's powers, turning the country into a constitutional monarchy (Ferrara, 2015).

The new constitution led to the creation of a people's assembly and of a civilian government under a single-party system ruled by the People's Party. The arrangement was a compromise between full democracy and the preservation of the Thai elite's interests. This attempt, however, proved to be short-lived. By the end of 1932, under the leadership of appointed Prime Minister Phraya Mano, the new government had turned into an authoritarian regime under the dictatorship of the People's Party (Dressel, 2010). In 1933, Pridi Panomyong, who had been nominated minister of the new government, published a report calling for broader economic reform to improve the social and economic situation of the country. The report, which was specifically focused on wealth redistribution policies, and the dismantlement of the feudal system still widely used in the country, triggered a political crisis (Reynolds, 2006). The ruling class was virtually split between those in favour of such radical changes, and the members of the nobility fearing to lose their wealth and influence. Prime minister Phraya Mano decided to side with the elites, accusing Pridi Panomyong of communist propaganda. Harsh repression followed but was rapidly interrupted by the intervention of the army. On 15 June, Colonel and government's minister Phraya Phahol Pholpayuhasena (the same man who lead the 1932 *coup*) ordered the army to arrest all the members of the government. He then appointed himself Prime Minister with the approval of the king (Kesbooncho Mead, 2014).

The years following the 1933 *golpe* proved to be relatively stable. The new government, which was later renewed through relatively free and fair elections, found itself in the position of Westernizing the national economy, increasing Thailand's education base and starting redistributive economic reforms (Falkus, 1991). In the following years – witnessing the Japanese Empire expansion in East Asia – the country decided to adopt a politics of neutrality. In 1941 however, it was conquered by Japan, and was forced to sign a treaty of alliance to the Japanese Empire which was fighting both in China and in the Pacific against the United States (Gruhl, 2006). In August 1944, however, pro-Japanese Thai Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram was forced to resign, creating a period of political uncertainty. The country leadership was *de facto* left in the hands of Pridi Panomyong, who appointed pro-American Seni Pramot as prime minister (Suwhannathat-Pian, 1996). His government lasted two years and was followed by a new political crisis. Mounting economic grievances, rampant inflation and the sudden death of the king (allegedly murdered by his brother (Anderson, 1990)) created an unbearable pressure over the government (Falkus, 1991). On 7 November 1947, a group of military men guided by Lieutenant General Phin Choonhavan assaulted the government's palace, arrested the new prime minister Thamrong and declared the suspension of the constitution. Pridi was forced to flee the country while his family was arrested (Ferrara, 2015).

In the immediate aftermath of the *putsch* a new constitution was signed, and by January 1948 a new civilian government under the leadership of Khuang

Aphaiwong (one of the former proteges of Pridi) took office. The 1947 *coup* marked the end of the tumultuous transition of Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one. It also signed the temporary end of the army's direct involvement in politics. Although periodically members of the military would continue both to access political power and put pressure on the government, it would take other six decades before the country would experience a new military *coup*.

In 2006, Thailand was experiencing a new and complex political crisis. Under the leadership of prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra the government was increasingly undertaking authoritarian policies, fostering corruption and a renewed neo-patrimonial system which favoured the country's political elites (Hewison, 2010). This environment constituted a fertile ground for a *golpe* outbreak. Concurrently, the role of the king was increasingly being questioned, creating attrition between the executive and the royal family (Pathmanand, 2008). Over an impending political crisis and a possible change of government, the military decided to intervene. Leveraging the disdain of king Rama IX towards his government, General Prem Tinsulanonda decided to overthrow the country's executive. On the evening of 19 September 2006, the army invaded the premises of the government, suspended the constitution and declared martial law across the country. At that time, prime minister Thaksin was in New York delivering a speech for the annual inauguration of the United Nations general assembly. Citing political instability, corruption and a violation of royal prerogatives, the army seized control of the state and imposed strict

control over the media. In the weeks following the *coup*, citizens were prohibited to demonstrate, and local media could not report any political news (Pathmanand, 2008). The months which followed witnessed extreme censorship and violent repercussion and human rights violations against those who would condemn the incident. The army created a transitory *Council for Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarchy* (CDRM) and on 26 September promulgated an interim constitution, claiming that civilian power would be restored by October of the following year (Connors, 2008). In August 2007, a new constitution was approved by referendum and entered into force, dismantling the CDRM and allowing the resumption of civilian government.

### **The May 2014 *coup***

The 2006 *coup* closely resembled the 2014 one, which is the main focus of this research. Political instabilities and a rising concern over the government's performances, combined with widespread popular protests against the executive, created the ideal conditions for the military uprising. Additionally, the prominence of the king's support for the army, which has been recurring since the 1932 *putsch*, constituted a further factor incentivizing the military to seize power and suspend the civilian governments.

In 2011, Yingluck Shinawatra and his Pheu Thai Party (PTP) overwhelmingly won the country's legislative elections, creating a new government which was

described as populist by both the opposition and multiple intellectual figures in the country (Warr, 2014). In November 2013, however, a number of mass protests erupted across the country. They originated from a complex combination of socio-economic grievances – triggered by the perceived poor economic performances of the new government – and the fear that the party was paving the way for the return in the country of former prime minister Thaksin, whose authoritarian policies had triggered the 2006 *coup*. Opposition parties seized the chance to exploit the demonstrations in their favour, extending their support to the protesters. They created a *People's Democratic Reform Committee* (PDRC), an informal and unelected watchdog overseeing the economic reforms implemented by the government. The combination of mass rallies and the pressure exercised by the PDRC against the government prompted the dissolution of the parliament and the scheduling of legislative elections for February 2014. Polls took place in a climate of tensions and violence, and their results were annulled by the Constitutional Council in March over claims of irregularities (Hewison, 2015). On 20 May 2014, through a royal decree, the king requested the army to impose martial law across the country to stop the violence and the protests which had been increasing in the weeks following the annulment of the elections. General Prayut Chan-o-Chan dissolved the *Centre for Administration of Peace and Order* – created by the interim government to solve the political crisis – and appointed himself as the head of a new *Peace and Order Maintaining Command* (POMC), with the objective to restore stability in the country. While at this stage power had already *de facto* passed to the hands of the military, civilian institutions still

retained formal independence and autonomy, and the constitutional was still formally in place. On 22 May, upon the failure of the POMC talks to restore stability, General Prayut decided to follow a more drastic approach. With the support of the king and of its army, Prayut formally seized power, dissolving the parliament and the senate, and repealing the national constitution. Members of the interim cabinet were arrested, and power was transferred to a six-members junta led by Prayut himself (Boonmuang *et al.*, 2014). By 26 May, the king formally endorsed General Prayut leadership, appointing him as the new prime minister of the country. Although contestation and media censorship followed in the next months, the royal endorsement granted the military junta a shade of legitimacy in the eyes of the population (Srisod and Abbott, 2017). General Prayut maintained his grip on power until March 2019, when the country witnessed his first general elections with a newly drafted constitution and a smooth passage of power from military to civilian rule.

### **Discourse legitimisation**

The piece of speech analysed below is the one uttered by General Prayut on the eve of 22 May, to inform the civilian population and the international community of the *coup* and the new power arrangement. Interestingly, compared to the Turkish *coup* declaration, several relevant differences emerge. The first and most striking one is the practice-oriented focus of the Thai declaration. Rather than focusing on complex legitimisation structures, the



speech uses straightforward phrases to highlight the actions to be taken in the upcoming months. It clearly sets out the reasons for intervention, the desired consequences, and the rules to be followed by both civilian and army personnel. This difference in attitude derives from the fact that the Thai *golpe* was announced after it was already carried out. General Prayut was aware that he had the support of the king and of the army, and that seizing power was only a matter of formality (martial law had already been announced two days earlier). This is a striking difference from the Turkish *coup*, in which *coupists* still had to convince both the population and the remaining ranks of the army in joining the rebellion.

An interesting similitude, however, is that both declarations include a relatively large section (approximately 10% of the declaration in the Turkish case, 15% in the Thai one) to address an international audience. They stress that the new regime will undertake the obligations under international law signed by the previous executives, hinting that the events will not significantly impact foreign interests. This move is likely undertaken to ensure continuity and economic stability. As both countries are well-integrated in the global economic system, any sanction from the international community to the new regime would prove highly disruptive for the national economies and would have the potential to trigger internal instabilities and demonstrations against the regime (Radetzki and Warell, 2016).

As for the previous chapter, the following paragraphs will, in turn, analyse the text of the *coup* declaration from a key lemmas' perspective, a logical structure

one, and they will attempt to identify eventual mythopoesis strategies and broader metaphors employed by the military council.

*We have seen the situation of violence occurred in the Bangkok metropolitan area and in various areas of the country, which resulted in the death and the injury of innocent people; the continuous damages to private properties; the risk of such events to expand leading to a serious incident affecting national security and the lives and properties of our people as a whole.*

*In order for the situation to normalise as soon as possible, and for the people of the nation to have the same love and unity as in the past, and to reform the social structure economically, socially and in other ways, and to create equality for everybody and every side, the Peace and Order Maintaining Command composed by the Royal Thai Army, the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, the Royal Thai Air Force and the Royal Thai Police, has to take control of the power to administrate the country from 22 May 2014 at 16.30 onwards*

*All people are safe. Life will continue as normal and all government ministries, departments, and offices will perform their duties in accordance with their official regulations as they use to do.*

*For military officers, police, volunteers and government officials possessing weapons for their civil service duties, they should not carry them or attempt to gain power, unless ordered to do so solely by the head of the Peace and Order Maintaining Command*

*For the diplomatic corps, consulates, international organizations and foreigners residing in the Kingdom of Thailand the Peace and Order Maintaining Command will protect you. And I confirm that all international agreements including the relations between the Kingdom of Thailand with various international organizations will continue as usual. Following to the previous government action the Peace and Order Maintaining Command will maintain its loyalty to the monarchy, which is above all conflicts and in the mind and hearts of the Thai people.*

*Announced on 22 May 2014*

*General Prayut Chan-ocha, the  
leader of the National Peacekeeping Council*

***Fig. 3 - Translated text of the 22 May 2014 coup declaration speech  
broadcasted on the national television channel***

### ***Key lemmas analysis – illocutionary act***

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the initial and lowest level of analysis is the one regarding key lemmas, words which are specifically used to attach moral and personal meanings to an objective reality (Austin, 1962). An effective analysis of key lemmas in this case is particularly hindered by the difficulties in translation outlined in the methodological introduction of this research. Thai is a language with syntactical constructs extremely different from those of its European counterparts. While both Thai and Turkish are not strictly considered Indo-European languages, Turkish still benefitted from the influence of European languages and developed syntactical structures closer to its European counterparts (Gething, 1972).

Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify three major groups of lemmas which attach additional meaning to the objective description of the military uprising. These refer in turn to the threats to national security, the safety of the people, and the high moral standards of the army.

The threat to national security closely mirrors the fear-based lemmas used in the Turkish speech. Here words such as “*serious incident*” and “*affecting national security*” in the first paragraph aim at prompting in the audience a sense of threat and immediateness. Again, the reference to national security automatically entails a change of paradigm, shifting the action of the executive actors from the realm of politics to the one of security (Buzan *et al.*, 1998). By mentioning the challenges to national security that the ongoing political crisis

had created, General Prayut justifies his decision to take power and to dissolve the democratically elected bodies of the state. These references to national security will also emerge later in the logical structures' analysis.

In relation to the safety of the people, this is seen as a positive and achievable outcome of the military intervention. Specifically mentioning the words "*normalise*" and "*all people are safe*" further legitimise the army actions: following the *golpe* the safety of the Thai people is preserved. These key lemmas are also used in the second and third paragraphs, and follow a logical connection with the first one, which described the negative impact of the political crisis, and the risks for both people and properties.

Lastly, the third group of key lemmas with an illocutionary value refers to the high moral standards of the army. This is in net contrast with the Turkish speech, where the army was closely associated with its power and strength, and only through proximization was it associated to sacrifice and high morality. In the second paragraph of the speech, the Thai army is described as *super partes* and as bringing "*equality*" between the different political contenders and the Thai people. This moral attribute of the army is further iterated later in the conclusion of the speech, when General Prayut stresses its "*loyalty*" to the institution of the monarchy, which is highly regarded in Thailand.

### ***Key lemmas analysis – proximization***

Proximization is not used as often as expected. The army appears to be cautious in mentioning its past interventions in the state's political life, and it does not mention its role in the forging of modern Thailand. A possible answer for this lack of proximization is the existence of the monarchy. While in Turkey the army broke the power of the Ottoman Sultan, in Thailand the monarchy remains in place and continues to exercise high influence over the population (Unaldi, 2016). Every reference to the army's previous involvement in reducing the monarchy's prominence in public life is likely to draw more contentious than sympathy.

Proximization, however, does occur in a less evident and more secondary way in the second paragraph. General Prayut refers to the need for re-establishing "*the same love and unity as in the past*". It is unclear to which past he is referring to. However, he is comparing an idealised and undefined past with the ongoing struggle for political stability in the country. The two situations, distant and highly stylised are merged together and compared with each other in the General's speech.

### ***Key lemmas analysis – assertion and implicature***

Assertion and implicature recur at least one time each in the *coup's* declaration. As mentioned earlier, assertion involves supporting a statement whose

truthfulness is unclear with generally accepted statements (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1992), (Cap, 2008). This technique occurs immediately at the beginning of the speech. The declaration opens with a series of objective statements outlining the situation in the country during the political crisis. Four statements emerge:

- (1) There have been episodes of violence in the capital and rural areas of the country.
- (2) Civilians were injured and killed during these incidents.
- (3) Private properties were damaged during these incidents
- (4) These incidents will expand affecting national security

While statements (1)-(3) are undeniably true, as they refer to the ongoing demonstrations across the country, statement (4) cannot be empirically demonstrated. It is an assumption on future events, and the logical connection between the objective statements and their hypothetical consequences is not clearly outlined. In which way protests and demonstrations affect national security? Which is the role played by damages to private properties? The assertion technique is then used to legitimise the army's uprising, without however clearly highlighting its benefits.

Concurrently, the *coup* declaration also recurs to the use of the implicature technique. As it was outlined in the first chapter of this research, through the use of the implicature strategy speakers refrain from outlining the premises of

their statements, prompting the audience to infer them (Axelrod, 1984), (Cosmides and Tooby, 1989). This vagueness allows every member of the audience to autonomously elaborate the premises that best fit with the stated consequence, thus making the argument more sound in his or her mind. The use of the implicature technique in the case of the Thai speech is not as evident as the use of assertion, but it nevertheless emerges in the second last paragraph.

Here, General Prayut reminds armed civilians and members of the military not to carry their weapons nor to use them to gain power, unless specifically instructed to do so. However, the premises of this statement are not outlined anywhere in the text. Why should armed citizens avoid carrying their weapons in such an uncertain moment? The use of implicature prompts every member of the audience to find a valid answer to this question. Civilians may infer that this statement is intended to prevent the outbreak of chaos and anarchy. Army officers may interpret it as a threat, with General Prayut implicitly suggesting that the junta's grip of power is already consolidated, and that any attempt to gain power from other actors will be crushed. This vagueness is essential for the legitimisation process. The statement inferred by civilians may give legitimacy to the military junta as it shows that they do care about the stability of the country. Alternatively, the premises inferred by an army officer gives legitimacy as it shows that the junta has firm control of power and that the crisis is unlikely to exacerbate.

### ***Logical structures analysis***

To analyse the logical structures fostering legitimisation we will again refer to the theoretical frameworks set out by Reyes (2011) and van Leeuwen (2007). While the key lemmas used earlier offered a granular analysis of the legitimisation technique, logical structures are those which create an overall legitimising narrative which permeates the declaration. In the case of the Thai 2014 *putsch*, we can identify the use of four logical structures: *legitimation through rationalisation*, *legitimation through authority*, *legitimation through moral evaluation* and *legitimation through mythopoesis*.

Legitimation through rationalisation is the most widespread form of legitimisation, which had been recurring also in the 2016 Turkish *golpe* declaration. The objective of this technique is to rationally describe the reasons and the desired consequences of a certain course of action. In General Prayut declaration, these reasons and consequences emerge since the beginning of his speech: “*in order for the situation to normalise”; “to have the same love and unity as in the past”; “to reform the social structure”; “to create love and unity for everybody”.*

Connected to legitimisation through rationalisation there is also a veil of moral legitimisation. This emerges when the General specifically refers to “*the same love and unity as in the past*”. This idealised situation is undeniably morally preferable to the ongoing period of political crisis and violent demonstrations.



It legitimises the military uprising on a moral ground, highlighting how their intervention would lead to a morally superior outcome.

The third group of logical structures are those creating legitimisation through authority. Legitimacy in this sense does not derive from an openly stated rational approach to the problem, but rather by the degree of power or expertise – *authority* – of those choosing a specific course of actions (van Leeuwen, 2007). In this case, authority is stressed in two different sections of the declaration. Initially, authority assumes the form of authority of expertise. General Prayut outlines the composition of the *Peace and Order Maintaining Command* “composed by the Royal Thai Army, the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, the Royal Thai Air Force and the Royal Thai Police” stressing its power and authority within the country. The new military junta is not presented as a small group of revolutionary officials, but rather has a powerful and well-established institution, supported by multiple strata of the armed forces. This authority of expertise is then combined later with what Van Leeuwen described as the *authority of traditions*. The junta declares that it will “maintain its loyalty to the monarchy, which is above all conflicts and in the mind and hearts of the Thai people”. Appealing to the support given to and by the monarchy, the junta recurs to the authority of long-standing traditions to justify its *putsch*.

Lastly, mythopoesis. As mentioned earlier in this research, the use of mythopoesis requires the creation of more comprehensive narratives, which deliver the audience more complex legitimisation structures appealing to the

audience collective understanding of reality and events. In their most basic form, outlined by Reyes, this is presented as the description of a hypothetical future. In the 2014 declaration, the hypothetical future closely overlaps with the assertion technique described above. At the conclusion of the first paragraph, General Prayut describes the consequences for the Thai people's safety and for the national security if the situation is not brought under control by an external actor (the army). Although this logical structure is only limitedly used, it nevertheless hints at the importance of mythopoesis and hypothetical futures in the framework of political discourse legitimisation during *coups d'Etat*.

In this speech as well, as in the Turkish declaration, the use of broader narratives and metaphors as those suggest by Lakoff and previously outlined appears to be missing. Although the Thai junta had already performed the *golpe* and was not finding itself constrained by the time and the situation as the Turkish officers staging the *putsch*, it nevertheless decided not to recur to this legitimisation technique. This decision further highlights an important characteristic of *coups'* declarations. They must be quick and effective. Due to the chaotic and intense nature of a *coup*, speakers cannot waste time resources in delivering long speeches. Information needs to be communicated quickly, legitimisation techniques need to be straightforward and directly reaching the audience. And the situation needs to be rapidly clarified. For this reason, broader metaphors cannot be used as often as in other political speeches, as they would hinder the efficacy of the declaration.

## Conclusion

The Thai speech offers valuable insights on the similarities – and differences – in legitimisation strategies adopted by military actors during *coups*. Since the balance of power and resources was in favour of the Thai armed forces, the language used by *coupists* was more focused in legitimising the actions in the eyes of the domestic and international audience, rather than in the eyes of the rest of the army. The speech presented a practical and straightforward approach, highlighting the reasons for intervention and its immediate consequences (“*All people are safe*”, “*For military officers, police, volunteers and government officials possessing weapons for their civil service duties, they should not carry them or attempt to gain power*”). Following this first speech, the military junta led by General Prayut also issued a multitude of additional communiqué clearly highlighting the new institutional arrangement and the future steps to be undertaken by the provisional government.

Rational legitimisation was employed throughout the declaration to stress the practical and technocratic approach of the junta leadership, compared with the chaotic and semi-anarchic situation generated by the competing political parties. Rationality, in this case, overwhelms both the practices of rationalisation through emotions (fear) and proximization, which were largely employed in the Turkish case. The striking contrast between the two speeches will be better outlined in the following chapter, concluding this research project. The chapter will stress differences and similarities in the techniques employed, exploring which material conditions and security cultures

characteristics contributed to such differences. It will then conclude by outlining future areas of research for the field of discourse legitimisation and *coups d'Etat*, suggesting in particular a broader comparative approach both in terms of the historical periods and of communication means used.

## CONCLUSION – A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON COUPS

The previous three chapters have outlined the framework for a new theoretical approach to the phenomenon of military *coups*. Starting from the realisation that the current academic literature is overwhelmingly characterised by a realist and materialist approach, the aim of the paper has been to pave the road for a Constructivist approach to the issue, focusing on its social and behavioural aspects. The following section will conclude this research, summarising its main results and offering some reflections on the future areas of research associated with this approach. It will initially review the features of the general discourse legitimisation theoretical framework proposed in the first chapter and its application to the case studies. Secondly, it will move towards analysing similarities and differences highlighted by the analysis of the Turkish and Thai *coup* declaration speeches, offering several general remarks which should be considered for any future research undertaking this approach. Finally, the last paragraphs will outline the future areas of research in the field.

### **The theoretical framework**

The first chapter of the research focused on the creation of a theoretical framework to analyse the application of political discourse legitimisation practices to the broad phenomenon of *coups d'Etat*. Combining previous academics works on the legitimisation practice, such as those associated with the *war on terror* (Holland, 2013), (Reyes, 2011) and the

legitimation of the education practices (Chilton, 2004) the chapter distilled a number of general analytical concepts which can be effectively applied to analyse how different political actors promote their narratives vis-à-vis those of competing speakers. As during *coups* the constitutional legitimacy of power is temporarily suspended and the military attempts to change its socially perceived role in a short period of time, the study of legitimisation strategies assumes primary importance.

Through the review of the current academic literature, three levels of discourse analysis were outlined. The first one regards the use of key lemmas to enrich speeches with a moral and symbolic value. At this level, actors widely used proximization strategies to convince the audience of the ideological, spatial or temporal proximity of determinate events. At the second level, actors focus on the use of specific logical structures to convey the morality, rationality or authority of their actions. Finally, at the third and broader level – rarely used during *coups* due to its complexity and longer-term focus – actors can recur to metaphors or broader storytelling techniques to legitimise their actions.

Except for the third level of analysis, which appeared not to be prominently used during *golpes*, both case studies highlighted multiple and clear instances of discourse legitimisation techniques both at the key lemmas and at the logical structures' levels. Legitimation practices played a central role both in the Turkish 15 July *coup* as well as in the Thai 22 May one. Notwithstanding the relevant circumstantial and

materialistic differences between the two cases, both scenarios proved the general applicability of the theoretical framework, and its versatility in analysing different scenarios.

### **The case studies - Research results**

The use of case studies also offered the opportunity to explore more in-depth similarities and differences over the choice of discourse legitimisation practices. While many of them were imposed by the circumstances (such as the different balance of power between the country's executive and the *putschists*) rather than to specific socio-historical factors, it is nevertheless possible to identify several interesting insights.

Both the Turkish and the Thai military relied heavily on the use of illocutionary acts, belonging to the realm of key lemmas and logical structures analysis. The authority of the army was highlighted multiple times in both cases, using specific words referring to their strength and their role in the protection of national security (especially in the case of Thailand). The advantage of recurring to illocutionary acts lays in their immediateness and efficacy. Specifically chosen words deliver complex meanings without recurring to long explanations or complex logical structures. When the Turkish military "*requests and orders*" the broadcast of the *coup* declaration, the audience is led to assume the army's strength and power much more effectively than if the words used

were “*asks and suggests*”. In terms of key lemmas, both the Turkish and the Thai military combined in their speech assertion and implicature strategies. This is particularly interesting as according to the theoretical framework these strategies are used in different contexts and are unlikely to be found together in the same speech. It thus demonstrates how actual political discourse does not necessarily fit strictly with the proposed theoretical framework but maintains a certain degree of flexibility which is used by actors to maximise their impact over the relevant audience.

The logical structures used feature interesting similarities. In both cases, the speakers relied heavily on the use of rationality to legitimise their actions and only partially on emotions (as in the case of Turkey) or authority and morality (as in the Thai case). Rationality thus appears to be the preferred legitimisation tool to advance the actors’ narratives, independently from the actual material factors such as the forces on the ground, or the context in which the *coups* occurred (being them unfolding, as in Turkey in 2016, or *de facto* accomplished, as in Thailand).

A final relevant similarity regards the engagement of an international audience. Although *golpes* are generally viewed as an internal phenomenon of the polity, their international resonance appears to be carefully considered by the different actors. In a globalised and interconnected world, ensuring the support of the international



community is a fundamental step to reduce the risks of a *coup* failure in the short to medium term.

The differences emerging from the two speeches appear to be dictated mostly by the different circumstances in which the two events occurred. While both widely used illocutionary acts, the Thai army preferred to stress mostly its strength while the Turkish military-focused more extensively on emotions, prompting a sentiment of shame for the elected government among the population. The Turkish *putschists* also focused more extensively on the morality of their actions rather than on their legitimate authority or expertise in the management of state affairs. Additionally, while the Thai military used the mythopoesis techniques and a proximization strategy to restore in the country “*the same level of unity as in the past*”, proximization is only briefly used in the Turkish speech to recall the role of Ataturk in the formation of the modern state. This lack of proximization and mythopoesis is justified by the context in which the Turkish *coupists* operated. The broadcast of the speech was an essential move to ensure that other ranks of the army would follow in the mutiny. While the government army was already regaining control of the strategic points seized by the *putschists*, the speakers did not have the time to recall the past role of the military, or to engage in complex metaphors and storytelling. The message had to be delivered quickly, convincingly and effectively.

From a broader perspective, future research employing this framework of analysis should focus more specifically on the context in which *coups* take place. While cultural and historical factors certainly affect the wording style and the legitimisation strategies used in the *coup* declaration speeches, the Turkish and Thai cases highlighted how the most striking differences were caused by circumstantial factors rather than cultural ones. Except for the Thai reference to the monarchy and the Turkish mention of Atatürk, the majority of the statements contained in the declarations do not bear any specific cultural marks. The *golpe* context offers a more accurate key to analyse the rationale behind the use of specific techniques and illocutionary acts. A deeper focus on the context, would then offer a better and more comprehensive understanding of the case-specific discourse legitimisation practices.

Additionally, researchers should acknowledge the flexibility of the framework itself. As the concurring presence of assertion and implicatures techniques in both speeches highlighted, actual discourse legitimisation practices are more complex and flexible than the strict theoretical guidelines outlined in the first chapter. The framework presented in this research to analyse discourse legitimisation practices should be taken as a general set of guidelines to better understand the legitimisation dynamics in place during the phenomenon, rather than a strict checklist for researchers.

## **Future areas of research**

Certainly, the application of behavioural and constructivist concepts to the realist-dominated field of military *coups* paves the road for a wide range of future research on the issue. Constructivist theorists should continue to explore this field, focusing on the ways in which *coups* are socially constructed and the decision-making mechanisms which lead military actors to challenge a polity's constitutional power. Promising research in this direction has already been undertaken by Andrew Little (2017) who explored the connection between success expectations and the likelihood of other soldiers to join the *coup*.

Directly linked to this research paper, however, there are two issues which should be raised regarding future areas of research. The first is associated with the theoretical framework itself, while the second regards a broader study of international relations dynamics. Regarding the theoretical framework, it has already been mentioned above how it should be intended as a flexible guideline for the analysis of discourse legitimisation during *coups*, rather than a strict set of rules. Due to the lack of academic sources focusing on legitimisation during *golpes*, further research based on case-studies is needed. A systematic analysis of *coups* declarations with a broader scope (both geographical and historical) would offer a better understanding of eventual patterns in the use of legitimisation techniques and would allow a better understanding of the legitimisation process. New information could then be incorporated back

into the theoretical framework, enriching it and further increasing its relevance.

Regarding the broader study of international relations dynamics, the case studies analysed in the research raised a relevant issue: the presence of an international audience. The theoretical framework did not specifically consider the presence of an international audience, focusing on the legitimisation of a specific narrative in the eye of the internal population of the polity. However, both case studies proved not only that *coups* have also an international dimension, but that such dimension is relevant enough to prompt speakers to invest their limited time in the declaration to directly address it. While several authors such as Megan Shannon (2015) have surveyed the impact of foreign influence in the outbreak of a *golpe* (especially in Latin America), only a limited number of papers directly addressed the impact of foreign actors in the medium and long-term success of such events. Further research in this direction would enrich our understanding of the phenomenon and would lead to new studies addressing the international dimension of domestic issues in a globalised world.

Finally, this paper aims to be an invitation to broaden the horizons of academic research and to approach issues from new perspectives. While behavioural and constructivist approaches have entered the academic world approximately 30 years ago (Onuf, 1989), they continue to be relegated to marginal research and their used to understand political and

security dynamics remains limited. Today, more than ever, the academic community has a duty to exploit the potential of new communication technologies and widespread access to information to share ideas and build new approaches. We should aim to use these tools to enrich our research and open it to new perspectives and ideas, rather than continue finding shelter and comfort in centuries-old realist approaches.

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