


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why declare independence? Observing, believing, and performing the ritual

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Abstract

Declarations of independence continue to be commonplace in international affairs, yet their efficacy as means towards statehood remains disputed in traditional international legal and political thinking and conduct. Consequently, recent scholarship on state recognition and emerging statehood suggests that the international persistence of such declarations should be understood in the context of broader international processes, narratives, and assemblages of state creation. Such suggestions, however, risk reifying declarations' effectiveness more in relation to international structure(s) than to independence movement's own agency. This article, therefore, calls for a reframing of declarations of independence as a ritual in international relations. It argues that participating in the international ritual of independence declaration forms an attempt to 'fuse' the movement's political practice with international recognition, serves to express an internal belief in 'redemption' through the 'ascension' into the 'celestial' existence of recognised statehood, and offers an opportunity to internally bolster political community through political performance. Ritual theory, thus, uncovers how the global persistence of independence declarations cannot be explained merely through discrete oppositions of non-recognition versus recognition, belief versus reality, and/or non-state versus state community, and instead opens up new space for understanding the contradictions characterising the international political (in)significance and persistence of statehood declarations.

Keywords: Declarations of Independence; Ritual Theory; State Emergence; State Recognition

Introduction

Over the last few years, quite a number of independence movements have come to global prominence through their intentions to separate from an existing state. These intentions have been underscored not only by overt secessionist conflict, but also by (un)official referenda on independence and/or proclamations of statehood. Such declarations of independence remain a common signifier for the continued desire of people around the globe for self-governance in one's own political entity¹ – even if it is difficult to ascertain a unitary defining characteristic for the international variety of separatist guerrillas, statehood-seeking autonomous governments, and/or unrecognised states that may proclaim them.²

¹Although, notably, not all secessionist groups declare independence. See Tanisha Fazal, *Wars of Law: Unintended Consequences in the Regulation of Armed Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 165.

²For an attempt at delineating the different types of communities within the larger universe of non-state political actors that may declare independence, see Adrian Florea, 'De facto states in international politics (1945–2011): A new data set', *International Interactions*, 40:5 (2014), pp. 788–811. Additionally, a raft of social groups, families, and individuals have 'declared independence' without being taken seriously internationally. See John Ryan, George Dunford, and Simon Sellars, *Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Homemade Nations* (London, UK: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006). This article concerns itself primarily with declarations made by relatively established independence movements, with

Whereas the origins of such communities' broader wish for international political independence have been given ample scholarly attention, the tenacity of *declaring* that independence seems to be interpretable as an international normative and historical contingency, rather than as a self-evident or easily identifiable necessity. As this piece will premise, one of the most puzzling conundrums of independence declarations' apparent international staying power is that an independence declaration does not seem to effectuate 'real' statehood *per se*. Not only are most endeavours towards new state creation generally 'doomed to fail',³ the odds of securing actual statehood through declarations are also disputed across a wide range of (international) legal and political theories and practices.⁴

In light of this discrepancy between the ubiquity and ostensible inefficacy of declarations of independence, a less limited consideration of these declarations' effective agency seems warranted. Indeed, communities may declare statehood in service of aims beside or beyond the actual creation of a state. Moreover, recent scholarship on state recognition and emerging statehood⁵ contends that states are not so much created through international 'great power' *realpolitik* or singular international legal acts, but mainly 'produced and re-produced through social processes that are continuously in motion'.⁶ Hence, declarations of independence might be perceived as endogenous to the performativity of state creation, and/or explained as contributions to broader sets of processes, narratives, and assemblages beyond the rigid international legal and political procedures of state creation.

Yet, as this article will contend, explaining the practice of independence declaration(s) in reference to non-state-related objectives, and/or to the intersubjectivity and heterogeneity of state performance, altogether still leaves those proclaiming statehood with an ostensibly (ever-)incomplete state ontology. Such explanations seem to reify statehood as perpetually 'in-the-making', instead of as a potentially achievable existence for statehood-seekers. While some maintain that no reality of statehood can ever be fully determined or attained,⁷ this does simultaneously throw the reasoning for declaring independence back into question. Put differently, insofar we are looking to account for statehood declarations' persistence, we should not linger on their limited capacity to ever actually obtain full statehood without losing sight of their effective agency.

some degree of territorial control, governing structures, and permanent populations, but refrains from elaborate debates about whether these movements qualify as (unrecognised) 'states'.

³Argyro Kartsonaki, *Breaking Away: Kosovo's Unilateral Secession* (London, UK: Lexington Books, 2018), p. xv.

⁴Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognised States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012); Bridget Coggins, *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law* (2nd edn, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2006); Ryan Griffiths, *Age of Secession: The International and Domestic Determinants of State Birth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016); James Ker-Lindsay, *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012); Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2004); Scott Pegg, *International Society and the De Facto State* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Milena Sterio, *The Right to Self-Determination under International Law: 'Sifistans', Secession, and the Rule of the Great Powers* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

⁵Dimitris Bouris and Irene Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states, hybrid diplomatic practices, and the everyday quest for recognition', *International Political Sociology*, 12:3 (2018), pp. 306–24; Irene Fernández-Molina, 'Bottom-up change in frozen conflicts: Transnational struggles and mechanisms of recognition in Western Sahara', *Review of International Studies*, 45:3 (2019), pp. 407–30; Edward Newman and Gëzim Visoka, 'The foreign policy of state recognition: Kosovo's diplomatic strategy to join international society', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 14:3 (2018), pp. 367–87; Gëzim Visoka, *Acting Like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018); Gëzim Visoka, 'Metis diplomacy: The everyday politics of becoming a sovereign state', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54:2 (2019), pp. 167–90; Gëzim Visoka, John Doyle, and Edward Newman (eds), *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020).

⁶Dimitris Bouris, 'Kosovo and its everyday quest for statehood', *The International Spectator*, 54:4 (2019), pp. 150–2 (p. 151).

⁷Janis Grzybowksi, 'The paradox of state identification: *De facto* states, recognition, and the (re)-production of the international', *International Theory*, 11:3 (2019), pp. 241–63.

Thus, in clarifying why people(s) over the world continue to declare their statehood, we need to make sense of the tensions between these declarations' effective agency and the international systemic constraints limiting it.

In an attempt to analyse and bridge these tensions, this article will explore the utilities of a ritualistic perspective on declarations of independence. As it argues, these declarations may be seen as international rituals with a respectively communicative, transcendental, and communitarian purpose. Firstly, declarers of statehood 'act' in accordance to the international ritual of statehood declaration in an attempt to 'fuse' their international political performance of 'statehood' with international (legal) recognition. Secondly, these polities thereby simultaneously express an internal belief in 'redemption' through the 'ascension' into a 'celestial' existence of (legally) recognised statehood. Thirdly, this article will consider the ritual of statehood declaration as a local bolstering of a polity's semblance of state community through political performance.

While this article cannot empirically account for the role of local and international discourses, identities, and interactions in proclaiming independence, it argues that ritual theory opens up new space for understanding the contradictions characterising the international political (in)significance and persistence of statehood declarations. Building on broader theories of practice, such a ritual perspective highlights how the persistence of independence declarations cannot be understood merely through discrete oppositions between non-recognition versus recognition, belief versus reality, or non-state versus state community. Instead, a ritual theory offers a less dualistic, albeit still critical, explanation for the (in)efficacy of observing, believing, and performing declarations of independence.

Why declare statehood?

Independence movements around the world are characterised by a desire for, yet (provisional) inability to, obtain (more) self-governance in international politics. The practical reasons for this desire seem obvious, as 'international [legal] recognition offers material and political advantages',⁸ and the benefits of formal statehood have actually increased since 1945.⁹ Yet, why such (aspiration towards) statehood continues to be openly *declared* is much less straightforward. Declarations of independence 'are public pronouncements, issued by individuals or collective bodies alleging to represent peoples (populations) of specific territories, which state that a new state, on that territory, has become independent', and which 'invite other states to officially recognise the new state as an independent state'.¹⁰ Reasons for such declarations may differ both for and within each individual case, but their international consistency simultaneously provokes a more abstracted investigation. In this more general sense, declarations of independence have been motivated based on restorations of previous territorial occupations and/or international agreements, the present or historical threat to communities' physical safety, their (alleged) exclusion and discrimination, and/or the exhaustion of all other means of resolving conflict(s).¹¹

These general motivations, however, remain altogether inconclusive about why statehood is so persistently declared in the first place. More fundamentally, indeed, declaring independence may be seen as historical international practice,¹² to the extent that it is simply something statehood-

⁸William Reno, 'How sovereignty matters: International markets and the political economy of local politics in weak states', in Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir, and Robert Latham (eds), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 197–215 (p. 203).

⁹Tanisha Fazal and Ryan Griffiths, 'Membership has its privileges: The changing benefits of statehood', *International Studies Review*, 16:1 (2014), pp. 79–106.

¹⁰Aleksandar Pavković, 'In search of international recognition: Declarations of independence and unilateral secession', in Ryan Griffiths and Diego Muro (eds), *Strategies of Secession and Counter-Secession* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), pp. 15–30 (p. 15).

¹¹Argyro Kartsonaki, 'Remedial secession: Theory, law and reality', in Griffiths and Muro (eds), *Strategies of Secession and Counter-Secession*, pp. 31–51.

¹²David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

seeking communities ‘have to do nowadays’. Alternatively, statehood declarations may occasionally be considered in more frivolous terms, uttered simply because people can. Yet, respectively, an emphasis on historical structure should not underexpose the role of particular agency in perpetuating this international tradition, while considerations of statehood declarations as mere ‘cheap talk’ should not underestimate the potentially significant costs involved in proclaiming a new state.

In addition, whereas declarations of independence have become increasingly commonplace, they appear almost uniformly ineffective as a means towards official statehood.¹³ By themselves, such declarations primarily seem to be mere rhetorical expressions that require ‘real-life’ consequences in order to be meaningful. This is, for instance, a primary criticism raised at the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) Advisory Opinion of Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence (17 February 2008), which ostensibly represented the Declaration as essentially a ‘formalistic act ... completely separate from the act of separation’,¹⁴ narrowing it down to ‘nothing more than ink on parchment: a sheet of paper’.¹⁵ The *de jure* recognition of such declarations, then, remains an (international) political decision exercised by individual states – not an automatic guarantee promised to the declarer – and the vast majority of established states continues to be obstinately reluctant to attach any consequences to statehood declarations by responding to them with international legal recognition. Even if an independence declaration could (potentially) be recognised, it is unclear whether such juridical recognition suffices to sustain a political ‘reality’ of state independence.

Contentions that communities might be emancipated through declarations of independence can therefore hardly vouch for those declarations’ (possible) international political potency, yet must also be careful not to put too much faith in international structure. It not only seems hardly tenable to claim that statehood is truly politically *produced* through its proclamation,¹⁶ it is also altogether unclear to what extent declarations of independence actually affect existing states’ (formal or informal) recognitional attitudes toward declaring parties.¹⁷ Returning to the ICJ’s Advisory Opinion on Kosovo’s 2008 independence declaration, for instance, even though the Court asserted that ‘the [Kosovar] declaration of independence ... did *not* violate general international law’,¹⁸ that judgement has neither been seriously interpreted as a full legal recognition of Kosovo’s statehood, nor seriously described as fully self-effectuating Kosovo’s *de facto* independence.¹⁹

The consistent recurrence of independence declarations, therefore, ostensibly persists as a result of broader expressions of agency beyond its supposed (in)effectiveness to induce statehood. As independence movements tend to be acutely aware of their ‘strategic playing field’,²⁰ independence might be declared with a variety of norms, audiences, and objectives in mind. Declarations of independence may be intended to elicit support from, morally appeal to, or strengthen engagement with international actors, and these purposes may enhance movements’ chances of survival aside from formally becoming states. An independence declaration, thus,

¹³For an indication of the success rate of declarations of independence since 1946, see Ryan Griffiths and Louis M. Wasser, ‘Does violent secessionism work?’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63:5 (2019), pp. 1310–36.

¹⁴Sterio, *The Right to Self-Determination under International Law*, p. 82.

¹⁵Marcelo Kohen and Katherine Del Mar, ‘The Kosovo Advisory Opinion and UNSCR 1244 (1999): A declaration of “independence from international law”?’, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 24:1 (2011), pp. 109–26 (p. 109).

¹⁶Jacques Derrida, ‘Declarations of independence’, *New Political Science*, 7:1 (1986), pp. 7–15 (p. 9).

¹⁷Pavković, ‘In search of international recognition’, p. 15.

¹⁸International Court of Justice (ICJ), *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo: Summary of the Advisory Opinion* (The Hague: International Court of Justice, 2010), p. 8, emphasis added.

¹⁹Anne Peters, ‘Does Kosovo lie in the Lotus-land of freedom?’, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 24:1 (2011), pp. 95–108 (p. 108).

²⁰Ryan Griffiths, ‘Secessionist strategy and tactical variation in the pursuit of independence’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, pp. 1–19 (p. 4) (2020), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz082>}.

seems like ‘a collection of words writ in water [or] the sound of one hand clapping’²¹ mainly so far as it does not immediately trigger full (recognised and/or unrecognised) statehood; a more flexible conceptualisation of state ontology, however, draws attention to independence declarations as far more than empty speech performances.

As explained above, modern scholarship on secessionism, unrecognised statehood, and state recognition has placed an increasingly high emphasis on this more open-ended nature of statehood. Gëzim Visoka, for example, encapsulates Kosovo’s efforts of constructing independent statehood as an assembled, discursive, performative, and entangled ‘state-becoming’, broadly positing the political reality of statehood as a ‘historically-situated, socially-mediated, and inter-subjectively-constituted process’.²² In this regard, some are actually suspicious of a ‘state ontology’ altogether, claiming that ‘all “states” are effective only to some degree, and sometimes hardly at all’,²³ or that ‘statehood has no ontological status apart from the claims and representations, assumptions, and routines performing it’.²⁴ Fiona McConnell, for instance, quite openly bases her analysis of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE)²⁵ on appeals ‘not to concede, even as abstract formal-object, the existence of the state’,²⁶ or on contentions that statehood ‘should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the ... metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures *appear* to exist’.²⁷ Insofar we accept, then, that statehood is manifested through epistemological identification, acknowledgement, or indeed recognition, the significance of declarations of statehood would ostensibly become a lot more self-evident.

Yet, at the same time, it is questionable whether claiming that ‘statehood is what we make of it’ necessarily brings us more clarity about independence declarations’ effective agency. For one, arguing that people – in spite of them declaring (a desire for) statehood – *really* want or mean something else, leaves us with a rather awkward discrepancy in how we might appraise their agency. Admittedly, we might ask if, even though (an aspiration towards) statehood is explicitly mentioned in the declaration, statehood is genuinely what is aspired towards. Insofar communities declare their *independence*, is it in fact *statehood* that is declared? Yet, as Thomas de Waal finds about post-Soviet unrecognised states, these breakaway movements may ‘have persisted in proclaiming independence ... [out of] an ambition not so much for statehood’, but at least ‘for *state-like* agency’.²⁸

More importantly, insofar we may interpret agency as ‘embodied, intentional causality’,²⁹ and thereby independence movements’ agency as ‘their capacity to do something regarding their own circumstances ... despite international structural constraints’,³⁰ the theorists mentioned above still appear to situate such movements’ agency, and thus their declarative effectiveness, beyond

²¹James Crawford, as cited in James Ker-Lindsay, *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

²²Visoka, *Acting Like a State*, p. 6.

²³Grzybowki, ‘The paradox of state identification’, p. 250.

²⁴Janis Grzybowki and Marti Koskeniemi, ‘International law and statehood: A performative view’, in Robert Schuett and Peter Stirk (eds), *The Concept of the State in International Relations: Philosophy, Sovereignty and Cosmopolitanism* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 23–44 (p. 29).

²⁵Fiona McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

²⁶Philip Abrams, ‘Notes on the difficulty of studying the state (1977)’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:1 (1988), pp. 58–89 (p. 79).

²⁷Timothy Mitchell, ‘The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics’, *American Political Science Review*, 85:1 (1991), pp. 77–96 (p. 94), emphasis added.

²⁸Thomas de Waal, *Uncertain Ground: Engaging With Europe’s De Facto States and Breakaway Territories* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018), p. 72, emphasis added.

²⁹Roy Bhaskar, *Plato, etc.: The Problems of Philosophy and their Resolution* (London, UK: Verso, 1994), p. 100.

³⁰Eiki Berg and Kristel Vits, ‘Exploring *de facto* state agency: Negotiation power, international engagement and patronage’, in Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel (eds), *Handbook on the Politics of Small States* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2020), pp. 379–94 (p. 380).

their own international political capacity. Not only are the performances and interrelationships of statehood – possibly embodied and reinforced by an independence declaration – particularly studied as signalling state *emergence*, it is also specifically state *recognition* that tends to be conceptualised as a matter of degree, representation, contestation, variance, contextuality, and temporality. Certainly, any declaration of independence, at least in part, constitutes a performance beseeching some form of international recognition, and its effectiveness thus inherently lies at least partially beyond its own agency. That does not mean, however, that explanations for the persistence of declaring independence can too assertively ground themselves in notions of a never-fulfilled and exogenously constructed statehood: such notions risk to represent state agency as a perpetually protean process, shaped only by international flows and conventions, rather than as accomplishable by people, or more pertinently, declarations.

On the face of it, then, such anti-foundationalist state paradigms revert back to a somewhat paradoxical reasoning of international declarative practice – one that is based on independence movements' self-determining agency beyond fixed (formal) state existence, yet still showcases a scepticism towards that agency's potential to autonomously and radically transform state subjectivity.³¹ To be sure, non-essentialist theorisations of statehood may pluralise our notion of the effectiveness of declarations of independence, but also seem to (inadvertently) unveil and/or reinforce pessimism towards such declarations ever being effective in full. Declarative conduct cannot be comprehensively explained by a rejection of states as 'self-constituted and self-contained bodies' existing 'ontologically prior to international society',³² because such rejections ostensibly still cannot comprehensively explain why communities opt to declare statehood *in defiance* of their supposed dependence on international norms, relations, and structures.

Explanations for the persistence of independence declarations, thus, continue to be faced with a tension between underestimating and overestimating these declarations' effectiveness. A full account of declarative persistence should not choose between either an absolutist or hyper-relativist perspective of statehood – the former appears to have too little appreciation for declarations' 'state-adjacent' utilities, while the latter appears to have too much appreciation for international (legal) utterances, statuses, or recognitions as political foundations of statehood. If, indeed, declarations of independence are meaningful expressions and performances in international affairs, yet the actually complete and self-realising existence of statehood is forever 'out of reach', what does this tell us about the persistence of state declaration as an international practice?

Perhaps, then, we may find further clarity in tenets of (international) theories of practice themselves. Insofar the practice of independence declaration seems to sit 'at the intersection of [international] structure and [international] agency',³³ it seems appropriate to consult practice theory's effort(s) to explain the relationships between effective action and the wider system(s) in which they occur. Founded to a large extent on Bourdieuan social theory, international practice theory attempts 'to break with the antinomy or the dialectic of agents and structures', so that practices – like declaring statehood – might indeed become explained as 'moments' in which international objectivism and international subjectivism are put in a symbiotic relation with one another.³⁴

That being said, Bourdieu's own practice theory seemed itself adamant that '*the real is the relational*: what exist in the social world are relations ... independently of individual consciousness

³¹Chris Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe, and Alexander Gourevich, 'Politics without sovereignty?', in Chris Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe, and Alexander Gourevich (eds), *Politics without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (London, UK: University College London Press, 2007), pp. 20–38 (pp. 26–31).

³²Mikulas Fabry, *Recognizing States: International Society and the Establishment of New States Since 1776* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 2–3.

³³Vincent Pouliot, 'The logic of practicality: A theory of practice of security communities', *International Organization*, 62:2 (2008), pp. 257–88 (p. 257).

³⁴Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of practices, practices of power', *International Political Sociology*, 5:3 (2011), pp. 225–58 (pp. 234–5).

and will'.³⁵ As such, practice theory may appear to lead back to an understanding of independence declarations as 'competent performances'³⁶ still only insofar these are compelled by (pre-existing) international normative structures. Here, declarative practice seemingly becomes reified as originating in international relationality and discursivity, to the extent that its practical agency as effective international political power again becomes fundamentally indeterminate, or even non-existent. Explanations for the global persistence of statehood declaration, thus, should avoid reverting to a version of practice theory ostensibly bereft of 'individual calculation informed by intentionality', where declarative practice 'does not derive from conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection'.³⁷ A practice theory of declarations of independence should serve to conceptually amalgamate independence movements' agency with how international society informs their effective action – not fall back into a pure structuralism, where overarching international discursive arrangements are still privileged over the production and determination of (state) cognition and action.

Thus, although declarations of independence are immanent to global structure, an investigation of their significance cannot one-sidedly subscribe to 'the orthodox view of [international] practices as ... habitual or routinised actions' – declarations of independence are 'produced by intelligent individuals' who are capable of acting 'in a way that is not pre-programmed and that may involve mistakes'.³⁸ Whereas statehood declarations generally continue to be formally ignored, rejected, and/or reprimanded in international law and international politics, it is precisely *for this reason* that their persistence cannot be attributed merely to perpetually unsettled international norms and processes. This article maintains, consequently, that the significance of declarations of independence lies in an alternative rationality of international practice, aiming to thereby circumvent crude representations of statehood declarations' utility and/or futility.

The ritual(s) of statehood declaration

Therefore, while individual acts of independence declarations may be inspired by a variety of specific considerations, actors, and developments, this analysis of declarative *practice* frames it as a ritual of international politics. This, in fact, has been already suggested by Aleksandar Pavković, who considered that statehood declaration could be 'a ritual act', because 'specific arguments [for statehood] contained in the declaration may ... be irrelevant, as long as the act of declaring independence follows the formula required of that kind of ritual'.³⁹ This implies, however, a rather nihilist iteration of rituality, where independence movements' agency is represented as of little significance in perpetuating the declarative ritual obliged by international society. This piece, instead, supplements this with a more 'internalist' view of ritual practice, regarding declarers of independence as 'competent practice participants' who may choose whether and how to follow rules of the international.⁴⁰ Beyond merely ascribing independence declarations an international purpose,⁴¹ thus, a ritualistic perspective pays heed to these declarations' internal functions and effects, their considerable value for communities involved, and their degree of agency in the face of ostensible international legal-political marginalisation.

As a particular mode of international social practice, a declarative ritual constitutes a more conscious, deliberate, and/or calculated effort, exemplifying people's agency as not wholly defined by or subjected to international structure – even if it is seriously constrained by it. As recent critical scholarship has underlined, (international) rituality implies 'social practices with notable

³⁵Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses: Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1992), p. 20.

³⁶Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds), *International Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³⁷Pouliot, 'The logic of practicality', pp. 257–8.

³⁸Silviya Lechner and Mervyn Frost, 'Practice theory and International Relations: A reply to our critics', *Global Constitutionalism*, 9:1 (2020), pp. 220–39 (p. 220).

³⁹Pavković, 'In search of international recognition', pp. 15–16.

⁴⁰Lechner and Frost, 'Practice theory and International Relations', pp. 220–1.

⁴¹Fazal, *Wars of Law*.

disordering effects’, rather than ‘predictable routines aimed to stabilise social orders and limit conflict’.⁴² A traditional practice theory of declarations of independence would ostensibly explain declarative persistence as a mere corollary of international conventions of statehood; a ritual theory interjects a consideration that these declarations (may) also shape or clash with such conventions. A ritual theory of declaring independence neither necessarily looks to affirm independence movements as “‘primordial” structures of “Being””, nor does it purport that these movements only possess ‘rule-dependent identities’ behind which ‘nothing more solid, true, objective lies’,⁴³ but it does allow us to take more seriously the possibility of these movements’ capacity to choose whether to declare (or not declare) statehood.⁴⁴

The tentatively homogeneous character of declarations of independence, I argue, can be translated in ritualistic terms in three interrelated ways. These declarations, first of all, serve as rites enabling the international identification (or recognition) of independence movements as legitimate international actors. Secondly, they showcase an internal conviction that such international legal recognition will eventually happen. Finally, they constitute a domestic mimicking of official state practice that symbolically solidifies the movement more firmly as a political community. Such ritual explanations for the persistence of independence declarations help us move beyond, without setting completely aside, the oppositions of non-recognition versus recognition, belief versus reality, or non-state versus state community.

The (re-)fusion of statehood

In his piece on the nature of ‘cultural pragmatics’, Jeffrey Alexander emphasises the significance of rituals in the creation and consolidation of social meaning and identity. He defines such rituals as ‘episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication’s symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another’s intentions’. In doing so, a ritual succeeds in ‘fusing’ its participants, its symbolic content, and its audience into a coherently meaningful, and thus more effective, social performance. Such fusion, in turn, thus occurs when an audience emotionally and/or psychologically connects with a ritual’s actor(s) and content, creating the condition for projecting its meaning.⁴⁵

From this perspective, political communities may similarly declare their independence as a communicative act designed to divulge a specific message: that the type of political entity fostered by them warrants a formal, or at least informal, inclusion into the international community. In other words, through declaring independence these communities strive to engage in a (global) social performance of statehood, thus fusing their ‘irregular’ or ‘disruptive’ mode of statehood with the (supposedly) orderly and consistent logics of interstate society. One element of Bangladesh’s 1971 independence declaration(s), for example, states that it ‘is committed to a policy of nonalignment’ while simultaneously seeking ‘friendships with all nations and strive for international peace’, and concluding that one is ‘entitled to recognition from all democratic nations in the world’.⁴⁶

⁴²Tanja Aalberts, Xymena Kurowska, Anna Leander, Maria Mälksoo, Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Luisa Lobato, and Ted Svensson, ‘Rituals of world politics: On (visual) practices disordering things’, *Critical Studies on Security*, pp. 1–25 (p. 1) (2020), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2020.1792734>}.

⁴³Silviya Lechner and Mervyn Frost, *Practice Theory and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 9, 103.

⁴⁴Jorg Kustermans, ‘On the ethical significance of social practices’, *Global Constitutionalism*, 9:1 (2020), pp. 199–211 (p. 207).

⁴⁵Jeffrey Alexander, ‘Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy’, *Sociological Theory*, 22:4 (2004), pp. 527–73 (p. 547).

⁴⁶Major Ziaur Rahman (27 March 1971), as cited in Meghna Guhathakurta and Willem van Schendel (eds), *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 226.

Kosovo's 1991⁴⁷ and 2008 declarations seem similarly geared, at least partially, to European and global governance communities – the latter openly panders to the international obligations, provisions, and actors involved in the country.⁴⁸

In a ritualist interpretation, thus, an independence declaration forms a signifier of existence and intent. Without such declarations, in a sense, we may not actually know of the existence of these movements, nor take their manifestation(s) seriously as authentic efforts of state performance. In addition, some proclamations, like Timor-Leste's in 1975, seem to be motivated on the basis that (a declaration of) 'independent statehood' increases a community's chance of garnering international action against its assailant(s).⁴⁹ Very recently, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh has offered likewise arguments for a possible prospective independence declaration, citing it as potential vehicle to enhance international pressure on Israel.⁵⁰

Alexander's own compartmentalisation of rituals as social performances that must be fused in order to establish their meaning and authenticity may help to explain some of the communicative elements at play in the international practice of statehood declaration. (1) The 'value' of statehood is called upon in the performance or 'script' of declaring independence by (2) an embodied person or group. This performance (3) takes place in a specific location (for example, local or regional 'parliaments' or other type of 'informal' governmental meeting-places) and takes form in specific objects (for example, 'quasi-official' documents), and tends to be accompanied by (4) certain physical gestures and verbal expressions that 'set the scene' of the declaration. Crucially, (5) a (globally) 'shared' set of background values and beliefs about the (official) status and nature of statehood in interstate society is required for (6) the audience comprising existing states to decode or identify the declarative performance to a greater or lesser degree.⁵¹

Importantly, beyond questions how this international audience may (or may not) be involved in the declarative ritual's communicative work, ritual theory emphasises the interactive nature of the declarations' local and international significance. Here, Catherine Bell astutely highlights how ritual practice exists neither completely separately from society nor in all human activity, but is 'ritualised' to the extent that it is intersubjectively perceived as meaningful.⁵² The very act of labelling an international practice as a 'ritual' (as is done in this piece) endows that practice with significance. In other words, the existing practices and establishments of international law and international politics, and the meaning, authority, and consistency of participating in rituals such as declarations of independence, mutually feed into one another.

Thus, the declarative ritual 'does not simply express or transmit [structural] values and messages but also actually creates situations'.⁵³ That is, participation in the ritual of declaring statehood not merely secondarily reflects the structural authority of international norms compelling international actions – it constructs and reinforces these norms. In turn, the declarative ritual's communication derives its meaning in the 'magical efficacy' through which its 'special functions' fuse with 'culturally normal acts' of international politics.⁵⁴ Like any ritual, independence declarations strive (and often succeed) to be hyper-visible on the international stage, yet also tap into the routines and norms of international affairs. The 2014 Crimea independence declaration, for

⁴⁷Snezana Trifunovska (ed.), *Former Yugoslavia through Documents: From Its Dissolution to the Peace Settlement* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1999), pp. 767–9.

⁴⁸Pavković, 'In search of international recognition', p. 25.

⁴⁹Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: The Price of Liberty* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2009), p. 49.

⁵⁰This would, notably, be the second Palestinian declaration of independence, after the one uttered by Yasser Arafat on 15 November 1988. See Oliver Holmes, 'Palestine says it will declare statehood if Israel annexes West Bank', *The Guardian* (9 June 2020), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/09/palestine-says-it-will-declare-statehood-if-israel-annexes-west-bank>}.

⁵¹Alexander, 'Cultural pragmatics', pp. 529–33.

⁵²Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵³Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 136.

⁵⁴Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York, NY: Random House, 1973), as cited in Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 73.

example, was explicitly justified in reference to the ICJ's earlier announcement(s) about the supposed non-illegality of declaring (Kosovo's) independence. Thus, borrowing from Armitage, declarers of independence represent 'their revolution to be [internationally] *unrevolutionary*', and are careful not to be viewed as inciting rebellion elsewhere in the world.⁵⁵

In one way, then, existing states 'ritualise' declaring statehood to strengthen and concretise the make-up and boundaries of a supposed 'international community'. However, while declaring independence can be seen as a compliance with this international ritual of state declaration, it obviously does not comply with all international norms of statehood – a declaration of independence deliberately violates state integrity to reposition an independence movement in interstate society. As such, declarative rituals are not merely generators of international solidarity and/or equality, as they differentiate political communities from existing states, and barely resolve international political hierarchies between official and unofficial (forms of) statehood. To be sure, this was the fate of the abovementioned 1975 Timor-Leste declaration, which was not only recognised by a mere few countries, but was also followed by Indonesian – and largely internationally sanctioned – military invasion.⁵⁶ Alternatively, the November 1983 independence declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) appears to be proclaimed under the assumption that such a declaration could foster international – and mainly the United Kingdom's – condemnation and/or even recognition, despite the many explicit indications that such an assumption was misguided.⁵⁷

Any ritual's fusal efficacy, indeed, is strongly affected by differences in social power within a collectivity. As Alexander concludes, 'not all texts are equally legitimate in the eyes of the powers that be ... Not all performances, and not all parts of a particular performance, are allowed to proceed.'⁵⁸ This means, in a circular manner, that the more complex, segmented, and differentiated a society, the more contingent the fusion of the ritual on power dynamics within that society.⁵⁹ As the international 'community' of states incontrovertibly forms a fragmented and differentiated value-system, declarations of independence might thus indeed find fusion with their audience only to a limited or differing degree. Such fusion may be hampered by differing considerations of international political power and by differing considerations of their international legitimacy.

On the other hand, however, ritual theory may also supplement perceptions of the sparse (juridical) recognition of declarations of statehood. In conventional understandings of international law and politics, the recognition of a declarative ritual is reduced to a rationalist and instrumental affair.⁶⁰ As James Ker-Lindsay explains, '[agency] is crucial. To put it crudely, there cannot be accidental recognition. As long as a state insists that it does not recognise a territory as independent ... it does not do so.'⁶¹ That being said, as individual states do not form a uniform international society, they cannot function as 'the unproblematic, authoritative disseminators of [international] meaning and order'. Again, indeed, independence movements may choose to engage in statehood declaration regardless of its rational international legal effectiveness.⁶²

⁵⁵Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, p. 65.

⁵⁶Kingsbury, *East Timor*, p. 50.

⁵⁷James Ker-Lindsay, 'Great powers, counter secession, and non-recognition: Britain and the 1983 unilateral declaration of independence of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus"', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 28:3 (2017), pp. 431–53.

⁵⁸Alexander, 'Cultural pragmatics', p. 532.

⁵⁹Jeffrey Alexander and Jason Mast, 'Introduction: Symbolic action in theory and practice: The cultural pragmatics of symbolic action', in Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason Mast (eds), *Social Performance Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–28 (p. 17).

⁶⁰Christopher Daase, Anna Geis, Caroline Fehl, and Georgios Kolliarakis (eds), *Recognition in International Relations: Rethinking a Political Concept in a Global Context* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶¹James Ker-Lindsay, 'Engagement without recognition: The limits of diplomatic interaction with contested states', *International Affairs*, 91:2 (2015), pp. 267–85 (p. 284).

⁶²Alexander and Mast, 'Introduction: Symbolic action in theory and practice', p. 17.

Without losing sight of statehood declarations' lack of recognition, therefore, ritual theory unveils how these declarations serve a broader purpose: the identification of an independence movement as a political formation, and the acknowledgement of the independence movement as a moral agent.⁶³ While conceptually broadening narrow (legal) understandings of international recognition, a ritualised view of independence declarations simultaneously highlights their role as an agential vehicle at independence movements' disposal within the familiar gradual, complex, and hybrid international-structural processes of state emergence and international legitimacy-building.⁶⁴ Insofar as international legitimacy and recognition exists beyond mere declarational notions of 'status that is achieved (or lost)', it is instead 'negotiated on a daily basis through a series of quotidian practices, materialities and sites'.⁶⁵ A community's participation in the ritual of declaring independence, in this sense, may form an immanent feature of that community's legitimacy.⁶⁶

In this regard, participation in the ritual of statehood declaration might at least as be well explained in terms of a Hegelian notion of *misrecognition*, in which peoples' agency and identity manifests itself precisely in the struggle against the apparently perpetually elusive full recognition of (*de jure*) sovereignty. Insofar independence movements generally experience a structural 'impossibility' to be recognised in the way they want to be, a ritual theory demonstrates how such communities may also precisely therein engage in the acquisition of agency.⁶⁷ To be sure, as 'struggles for recognition can become an infinite, insatiable demand',⁶⁸ the very dismissal of declarations of independence appears to form a central element of their rituality. At this juncture, a second potential way of understanding the ritual of statehood declaration comes to the fore.

The 'Holy Grail' of statehood

As this article has maintained, although independence declarations can be explained as an *international* ritual, such a ritual theory precisely does *not* imply the rejection or oversight of local agency against international structure. Declarations of independence, almost by their very nature, embody tensions between global particularity and universality: they generally ground their (right to) state-creation in appeals to (supposedly) international justice norms and principles, while at the same time emphasising how the uniqueness of their specific grievance legitimises their breaching of existing (inter)state structures. As a ritual praxis, therefore, declarations of independence reproduce and subvert international norms. In this respect, especially when independence movements manage to realise more permanent political structures, their manifestations and performances of 'statehood' have been commonly conceptualised as being 'stuck in limbo'.

⁶³Jens Bartelson, 'Three concepts of recognition', *International Theory*, 5:1 (2013), pp. 107–29; Oliver Kessler, and Benjamin Herborth, 'Recognition and the constitution of social order', *International Theory*, 5:1, pp. 155–60.

⁶⁴Independence movements engage in a plethora of activities to enhance their international legitimacy. These activities range from adopting the usual symbols of statehood (for example, currency, flag, anthem) to striving to showcase their political stability, popular support, economic performance, and 'good behaviour'. These activities may perhaps each be considered as adhering to some form of international ritualism, this article views these legitimisation performances primarily as facilitators of statehood (to be) declared. See also Catherine E. Arthur, *Political Symbols and National Identity in Timor-Leste* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2019); Alex Jeffrey, Fiona McConnell, and Alice Wilson, 'Understanding legitimacy: Perspectives from anomalous geopolitical spaces', *Geoforum*, 66:1 (2015), pp. 177–83; Zachariah Mampilly, 'Performing the nation-state: Rebel governance and symbolic processes', in Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 74–97.

⁶⁵Alice Wilson and Fiona McConnell, 'Constructing legitimacy without legality in long term exile: Comparing Western Sahara and Tibet', *Geoforum*, 66:1 (2015), pp. 203–14 (p. 212).

⁶⁶Although in some prominent cases (Taiwan), the deliberate *non*-participation in the ritual of declaring statehood has served to bolster external legitimacy. See Nina Caspersen, 'Degrees of legitimacy: Ensuring internal and external support in the absence of recognition', *Geoforum*, 66:1 (2015), pp. 184–92 (p. 189).

⁶⁷Charlotte Epstein, Thomas Lindemann, and Ole Jacob Sending, 'Frustrated sovereigns: The agency that makes the world go around', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), pp. 787–804 (pp. 794–5).

⁶⁸Anna Geis, 'The ethics of recognition in international political theory', in Chris Brown and Robyn Eckersley (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Theory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 613–26 (p. 622).

Indeed, more established independence movements (also known as unrecognised states) tend to be conceptually located in a grey zone between non-state entities and real-because-recognised states⁶⁹ – as an Agambean predicament ‘[b]etwixt and between life and death, hanging in the middle of time, living in interruption’, in which ‘[d]isruption ... appears permanent’.⁷⁰ Again, an independence movement’s ‘statehood’ simultaneously denotes international political mimesis and transgression, challenging the interstate order while striving to imitate and join it at the same time.⁷¹ Independence movements, then, are neither subscribing to a state/non-state binary, nor submitting to a marginal or subaltern ‘stasis of political subjectivity’;⁷² they instead form ‘liminal polities’, occupying ‘a grey zone of international and/or local contestation’.⁷³

This concept of liminality, defined by Victor Turner as ‘the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions’,⁷⁴ in fact forms a central element in theorisations of rituality. It signifies the ambiguous circumstance between a human or social body’s pre- and post-ritual status and identity. Turner himself ascribed this liminal quality to individual social-political actors that were ‘neither here nor there ... betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony’,⁷⁵ but others have highlighted liminality as a conceptual tool in reference to a wide range of international political issues.⁷⁶ In this respect, international liminality has been attributed an emancipatory quality that ‘produces intense creativity and ... practices of innovation, political renewal and aspiration’,⁷⁷ while also being characterised by ‘ambiguity, paradox and confusion’.⁷⁸

Likewise, independence movements’ liminality manifests itself in the way they create, use, and appropriate an international political agency for themselves in precarious and in-between circumstances. Whereas therefore an independence movement’s period of non-recognition has been described as one of autonomy, flexibility, and latitude, in which it can ‘establish the narrative, the identity, and the structure of the [unrecognised] state’,⁷⁹ we should simultaneously remain cautious in celebrating such liminal subjectivity to vigorously. An independent movement’s liminality might be resisted or alleviated in performance and imagination, but its political reality remains subject to international legal and political constraints. Ritual theory, in short, elucidates how declarations of independence signify vulnerability and predicament at least as much as transformation and innovation – how they become ‘a screen for political hopes, desires and aspirations for empowerment’⁸⁰ in conjunction with the reminder ‘that the here and now is “uncentered, dispersed, plural and partial”’.⁸¹

⁶⁹Grzybowski, ‘The paradox of state identification’, p. 248.

⁷⁰Yael Navaro-Yashin, “‘Life is dead here’: Sensing the political in “no man’s land””, *Anthropological Theory*, 3:1 (2003), pp. 107–25 (p. 121).

⁷¹Laurence Broers, ‘Recognising politics in unrecognised states: 20 years of enquiry into the de facto states of the South Caucasus’, *Caucasus Survey*, 1:1 (2013), pp. 59–74 (p. 59).

⁷²Fiona McConnell, ‘Liminal geopolitics: The subjectivity and spatiality of diplomacy at the margins’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42:1 (2017), pp. 139–52 (p. 150).

⁷³Gëzim Krasniqi, *Contested Territories, Liminal Polities, Performative Citizenship: A Comparative Analysis* (Florence, IT: European University Institute, 2018), p. 1. See also Dylan M. H. Loh and Jaakko Heiskanen, ‘Liminal sovereignty practices: Rethinking the inside/outside dichotomy’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 55:3 (2020), pp. 284–304.

⁷⁴Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 237.

⁷⁵Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 95.

⁷⁶Maria Mälksoo, ‘The challenge of liminality for International Relations theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 38:2 (2012), pp. 481–94.

⁷⁷McConnell, ‘Liminal geopolitics’, p. 142.

⁷⁸Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 96–7.

⁷⁹Rebecca Richards and Robert Smith, ‘Statebuilding and the politics of non-recognition’, in Daase et al. (eds), *Recognition in International Relations*, pp. 162–77 (pp. 163–5).

⁸⁰McConnell, *Rehearsing the State*, p. 33.

⁸¹J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell 1996), p. 259.

Still, in the face of such ambivalent context(s), and a seemingly ever-lasting position of (international) legal-political indeterminacy, independence movements' agency can manifest itself in their embracing of state-like positions and repertoires. Within independence movements' liminal 'out-of-placeness',⁸² then, participating in a declarative ritual enables them to imagine themselves not so much 'unrecognised' as 'recognitionally challenged'. This might perhaps explain why, for example, some movements oxymoronically declare independence as a kind of rite of passage towards allegiance to, union with, or indeed *dependence* on another (patron) state – the above-mentioned Crimean declaration forms one example, among other post-Soviet unrecognised states, of stated intentions to integrate into the Russian Federation.

Conversely, insofar the ideal of (formal) statehood remains the 'holy grail' to be pursued by independence movements, the declaration of independence aims to serve as a symbolic reference point in their quest towards finding it. The purpose of a community's participation in declarative ritual, here, is to signal that its unrecognised existence is not timeless or eternal, but 'part of time' and transitional: it strives to invoke a positive self-image of an independence movement's 'temporality of geopolitical becoming, belonging, and recognition'.⁸³ Any ritual, indeed, mediates the interaction between oppositions of continuity and change, tradition and progress, synchrony and diachrony.⁸⁴ To exemplify, not only are many declarations framed in terms of a restoration of previous territorial occupation, political independence, or statehood,⁸⁵ independence movements (have been compelled to) occasionally declare statehood more than once. Bangladesh, for example, declared independence in some form three times, while cases like Latvia, Timor-Leste, and South-Cameroon openly label(led) their most recent independence declarations (respectively 1990, 2002, and 2017) as 'restorations' of earlier statehood proclamations (respectively 1918, 1975, and 1961).

For Turner, in this regard, rituals' fundamental societal function was in fact to 'celebrate man-made meaning, the culturally determinate, the regulated, the named, and the explained' in order to 'confront problems and contradictions of the social process'.⁸⁶ In doing so, rituals integrate and guide transformation and transgression in/through social order, dissolving 'traditional status distinctions' and abating 'normative social constraints'.⁸⁷ In a ritualist sense, thus, independence movements declare independence not only to 'do something' in their immediate circumstances, but also to frame those circumstances as a pathway to a higher international and existential ethereality. The declaration of independence tries to act as the 'switcher' that transcends the dichotomies and subjectivities associated with formal and non-formal statehood. It reformulates an independence movement's liminality as a trajectory towards an elevated state-of-being. The ritualised declaration may only 'see the goal of a new person' – it may not actually concretely prescribe itself the way towards producing actual official statehood⁸⁸ – but it does allow the independence movement to 'suspend its disbelief, and to enhance its (re)imagination beyond the existing international (legal-normative) order, releasing its 'unused evolutionary potential [even if it] has not yet been externalised and fixed in [international] structure'.⁸⁹

For a declaration to work in such a ritualistic way, however, the declarers themselves must not only implicitly yet purposefully overlook any notion that they and their declarations are essentially mere speakers of words and pieces of paper, but also misapprehend or conceal the

⁸²Krasniqi, *Contested Territories, Liminal Politics, Performative Citizenship*, p. 5.

⁸³McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics', p. 150.

⁸⁴Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 20.

⁸⁵Argyro Kartsonaki mentions, for example, Bougainville's stated frustrations about its lack of self-determination over the past century, and Azawad's proclamation that 'in 1960 ... France attached Azawad without its consent to the Malian state that France had just created', as cited in Kartsonaki, 'Remedial decession', pp. 38–42.

⁸⁶Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, NY: PAJ Books, 1988), p. 94.

⁸⁷Alexander and Mast, 'Introduction: Symbolic action in theory and practice', p. 10.

⁸⁸Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, pp. 103–10.

⁸⁹Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 127.

unlikelihood of the declaration's international recognition. Any declaration of independence, indeed, places itself at the heart of 'the aporia of the contemporary international legal order', misrecognising the inescapable international legal impasse it encounters when it simultaneously constitutes and undermines the norms of the interstate system.⁹⁰ As Catherine Bell observes, the functionality of a ritual is 'embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing'.⁹¹ In other words, these participation in rituals requires a 'deliberative oversight' of their material or 'objective' attributes,⁹² in order for their symbolic, religious, or magical content(s) to have an effect: any ritual practice 'paying attention to itself' loses its ability to express its own meaning.⁹³

Thus, whereas it is possible to reflect on and criticise a ritual before and after, the 'ritual moment' itself signifies 'a temporary destruction of awareness of the wider meaningful relations of one's individuality'.⁹⁴ It is worth quoting Bernhard Giesen at some length here:

Rituals shield social reality from facing the unspeakable ... from the crisis of absurdity, disorientation, and uncertainty. Rituals provide answers to the question of beginning as well as the question of death, they create foundations and horizons beyond which nobody should try to go.⁹⁵

In a ritualistic interpretation of declaring independence, then, declarers aim to 'reverse' international hierarchies, and to enact international positionings they could not experience in their everyday international politics. Within independence declarations' ritualistic liminality, independence movements strive to become 'at once [international] subject and direct object' – their 'suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities ... all become legitimate'.⁹⁶ In performing the ritual of declaring statehood, in other words, 'the world as lived and the world as imagined ... turn out to be the same world',⁹⁷ as an independence movement mobilises its identity, purpose, and faith in the face of anxiety and fear about its present and future.

A declaration of independence, in this way, aims to generate a sense of communal ontological security⁹⁸ by offering a cerebral and emotional response to the fundamental insecurities of an independence movement's existence. It is indeed imperative not to bypass the fact that many state declarations are made in the face of (threats to) violence, oppression, marginalisation, and other (feelings of) group grievance. The 1776 'proto'-declaration of United States independence was itself justified as a reaction to 'a long train of abuses and usurpations'⁹⁹ that had now reached a breaking point.¹⁰⁰ This theme is often repeated in more contemporary declarations, such as in South Ossetia's and TRNC's claims of being subjected to their respective parent states'

⁹⁰Tanja Aalberts, 'Misrecognition in legal practice: The aporia of the Family of Nations', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), pp. 863–81 (p. 863). In fact, this international legal void was itself revealed by the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Kosovo's 2008 Declaration, which reasoned that this declaration 'manifested itself beyond any existing international or local juridical order.

⁹¹Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 81.

⁹²Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 6.

⁹³Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 91.

⁹⁴Jan Koster, 'Ritual performance and the politics of identity: On the functions and uses of ritual', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 4:2 (2003), pp. 211–48 (p. 219).

⁹⁵Bernhard Giesen, 'Performing the sacred: A Durkheimian perspective on the performative turn in the social sciences', in Alexander, Giesen, and Mast (eds), *Social Performance Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, pp. 325–67 (p. 342).

⁹⁶Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. vii.

⁹⁷Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York NY: Basic Books, 1973), p. 112.

⁹⁸See, for instance, Bahar Rumelili (ed.), *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); Brent Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁹⁹Jack N. Rakove (ed.), *The Annotated U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press 2009), p. 79.

¹⁰⁰Karlo Basta, "'Time's up!": Framing collective impatience for radical political change', *Political Psychology*, 41:4 (2020), pp. 755–70 (pp. 762–3).

historical, ongoing, and/or imminent warfare, terror, physical destruction, eradication, aggression, and/or massacring. Alternatively, declarations like the Catalans and the Tamils spoke of experiencing sustained economic, social, and political marginalisation.¹⁰¹

Declarations of independence, thus, are mutually entwined with the way in which communal narratives of grievance become socially embedded in and constructed over time. These declarations help 'narrate the aggrieved community's arrival to a threshold of collective impatience', and thus (try to) bridge the tension between being a contributor to and a culmination of narratives and performances of state creation.¹⁰² Differently conceptualised, in the same way that declarations may claim that all other means of conflict resolution with their parent state have been exhausted,¹⁰³ the listing of grievances in a declaration combines cognitive legitimisations for 'breaking away' with appeals to collective sentiment(s) over an unpalatable and unjust political status quo. This inscription of affect into a declaration, thereby, should not be confused with a declaration's capitulation of deliberative agency – a sign of rash irrationality. As a ritual theory exposes, a declaration is precisely purposed to rationalise radical sentiments into 'justified' or 'logical' action.

The communitas of statehood

Such a rationalisation, admittedly, perhaps remains rather symbolic, and as such, directs us to a third ritualistic interpretation of declarations of independence. In this interpretation, declarers of independence do not merely strive to share their aspirations towards statehood with the international audience of recognised states, but also with their own political community. As Turner highlighted, in the shared experience of ritual liminality emerges a *communitas*,¹⁰⁴ which, as suggested above, 'transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalised relationships'. This *communitas* is summoned by statehood declaration, in this light, to foster a rudimentary but therefore potent form of solidarity among the inhabitants of an (unrecognised) community, in opposition to its (formerly) structured and institutionalised power relationship with the parent state.¹⁰⁵

A declaration of independence, thus, is a mechanism of socially appropriating and/or conditioning the motivations and behaviours of individual 'citizens' into a national (communal) desire for official statehood. It aims to induce a social 'effervescence', a 'sort of electricity' transmitting a heightened awareness of community as a single entity.¹⁰⁶ It does this not merely in reference to a potentially better future, but also to a structural familiarity: insofar the declaration constitutes a (participation in) ritual performance, it is known, prepared, practiced, and observed in/from a pre-existing global context, and therefore not proclaimed in a local 'vacuum'. While an emphasis on the performative nature of statehood is certainly not new,¹⁰⁷ for independence movements more emphasis might be placed on the pre-performative 'rehearsal' of state theatrics. Performing 'stateness', here, becomes an expression of training, practising, and crafting the future performance of (official) statehood, and is thus not only staged for an international audience, but also as an internal pedagogical and emancipatory device. In providing statehood repetition and mimicry, the ritualistic performances of statehood declaration aim to have a internal

¹⁰¹Kartsonaki, 'Remedial decession', pp. 42–4. The 2008 Kosovo declaration is a notable exception here, as it makes only tangential reference to its historical oppression or war of independence against Serbia. This may perhaps be explained as an attempt to circumvent the fact that the 1999 NATO intervention, which settled the war in Kosovo's favour, had already been branded illegal (even if legitimate).

¹⁰²Basta, "'Time's up!'", p. 755.

¹⁰³Kartsonaki, 'Remedial decession', pp. 43–4.

¹⁰⁴Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, pp. 76–83.

¹⁰⁵Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 128, 96.

¹⁰⁶Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York, NY: Free Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁷Cynthia Weber, 'Performative states', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27:1 (1998), pp. 77–95.

security-inducing potential. Even in the absence of a ‘fusing’ audience of existing states, thus, performing a declarative ritual seeks to internally bolster the ‘playing’ of statehood.¹⁰⁸

Notably, viewing independence declarations as a ritual moves beyond an understanding of declarative performance as merely symbolising and/or marking external and internal relationships – it actualises them.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, in acknowledgement of the international structural constraints faced by ‘aspirant states’, we may perhaps argue that statehood declarations are ‘more important for such polities than ... for established nation-states’.¹¹⁰ Something is put into play when declaring independence, as the ritually proclaimed statehood ‘is not identical with pretending. However made up, it is not regarded by participants as mere fiction of a game.’¹¹¹ Returning to the concept of belief, Yael Navaro-Yashin distinguishes ‘make-believe’ from performed statehood in terms of their respective ideational nature,¹¹² conceiving statehood as a possible future reality rather than merely ‘forming mental images’ of it.¹¹³ Bangladesh’s (first) independence declaration, in this light, appealed to ‘Allah’ to ‘aid in our fight for freedom’ – seemingly not merely to conjure hopeful imagery of an independent Bangladesh, but to actually ground their claim that ‘[t]oday Bangla Desh [*sic*] is a sovereign and independent country.’¹¹⁴

Independence declarations are thereby intended to arouse a shared communal imagination that is open-ended, creative, and egalitarian – Turner’s *communitas* that is different from ‘society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions’.¹¹⁵ In doing so, the declaration of independence tries to translate an independence movement’s condition(s) of liminality into a site for producing, creating, and maintaining its internal legitimacy. Navaro-Yashin, for instance, contends that the TRNC’s legitimacy among its citizens is promoted and secured in certain documents and materials.¹¹⁶ As has been explained by Zachariah Mampilly, symbols like declarations of independence can help to bolster civilian compliance and cultivate their identification with the independence movement.¹¹⁷ A declaration of independence may serve to become the cornerstone of ‘state’ identity, narrative, and societal ownership, as it attempts to foster national unity and civilian collaboration without having to resort to ‘strong arm tactics and authoritarian rule’,¹¹⁸ modes of force and coercion, or even to the provision of public goods.¹¹⁹

Yet, in turn, for an independence movement’s leadership the statehood declaration functions as an instance of self-legitimation, affirming its ruling position as the ritual’s principal actor. For example, the fact that TRNC declared its independence, despite ample evidence that such a declaration would be ill-advised, has been attributed to its leader (Rauf Denktash) being ‘his own man’, who ‘proved a consummate game player’.¹²⁰ Timor-Leste’s 1975 declaration, proclaimed by the leadership of the region’s independence movement Fretilin before and against Indonesian invasion, seemed to reinforce Fretilin’s role as leading the rebellion, starkened its

¹⁰⁸McConnell, *Rehearsing the State*, pp. 36–8.

¹⁰⁹Alexander, ‘Cultural pragmatics’, p. 537.

¹¹⁰McConnell, *Rehearsing the State*, p. 33.

¹¹¹Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 196.

¹¹²Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Post-War Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹¹³Annika Björkdahl, ‘Republika Srpska: Imaginary, performance and spatialization’, *Political Geography*, 66:1 (2018), pp. 34–43 (p. 36).

¹¹⁴Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (25 March 1971), as cited in Guhathakurta and van Schendel (eds), *The Bangladesh Reader*, p. 225.

¹¹⁵Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

¹¹⁶Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*.

¹¹⁷Mampilly, ‘Performing the nation-state’.

¹¹⁸Richards and Smith, ‘Statebuilding and the politics of non-recognition’, pp. 167, 163.

¹¹⁹Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, ‘Introduction’, in Arjona, Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, pp. 1–21 (p. 8).

¹²⁰Ker-Lindsay, ‘Great powers, counter secession, and non-recognition’, p. 446.

state-resembling image and functionality among local populations, and thus ‘gave the [movement] greater significance’.¹²¹ Whereas, thus, independence declarations may present ‘society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus’, such envisioned ‘equal individuals’ are also ‘called’ to ‘submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders’.¹²² As highlighted earlier, in rituals the sharpening of communal loyalties and the accentuation of hierarchies can go hand in hand – they produce not only insiders and outsiders, but leaders and followers too.

Like on the international level, therefore, the ‘ritualisation’ of declarations of independence is similarly ‘a [local] strategy for the construction of a ... power relationship’ that objectifies and legitimises the local ‘ordering of power as an assumption of the way things really are’. As the ‘open society’ of liminal *communitas* – made possible through ritual – is thus constantly presurised by the (potential) institutionalisation of that same ritual, it therefore seems prudent to revisit the material agency of such ritualising efforts. Rituals ostensibly form ‘the means by which collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced, and affirmed as *real* by the community’,¹²³ but viewing independence declaration as an ‘enactment’ or ‘imitation’ of statehood also provokes us to consider this ritual as a possibly illusory affectation.

This is not to suggest that declarers of independence are disingenuous or inauthentic; to reiterate, for most of them the declaration is a deliberate political performance that matters, even if they are well aware that it is unlikely to have the desired outcome.¹²⁴ However, the ritual of declaring statehood only seems to provide the state’s basic or elementary performative construction, and does not in itself build political order. Furthermore, there is not an automatically constitutive relationship between a declarative ritual’s external and internal resonance. As Nina Caspersen shows us, even if a movement declares statehood in an attempt to placate international actors, such a declaration can have significant trade-offs locally – especially in light of its low chance of meaningful ‘reward’.¹²⁵

In this sense, a declarative ritual, rather than genuinely positioning an independence movement’s internal agency in international political and legal structures, appears to offer something more akin to a ‘hyperreality’ of statehood.¹²⁶ It simulates ‘real’ statehood, but has no inherent bearing to that reality – in fact, it does not necessarily have to have a substantial referential state ‘being’, but to blend it with state representation until it appears ‘truth’ in its own right. Palestine’s (first) independence declaration (1988), for example, was made from Algeria, at a time when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation did not in fact control any (state) territory; it also claimed that ‘[t]he state of Palestine shall be for Palestinians, *wherever they may be*’.¹²⁷

In a cynical take of independence movements’ rational agency, therefore, declaring independence may be represented as part of ‘[a] quest for identity in the realm of the unreal – [a] simulation of that which never was – and [a] superficial self-constitution derived from this endeavour’, seemingly spiralling these movements into ‘a constant process of self-delusion’.¹²⁸ To be sure, the ritual inducement of liminal *communitas* signifies a relatively unestablished internal social hierarchy, in turn implying that it does not induce an established political community – a (*de facto*)

¹²¹Catherine Arthur, ‘From Fretilin to freedom: The evolution of the symbolism of Timor-Leste’s national flag’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 49:2 (2018), pp. 227–49 (p. 239).

¹²²Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

¹²³Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, pp. 8, 170, 20, emphasis added.

¹²⁴Michelle Pace and Somdeep Sen, *The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank: The Theatrics of Woeful Statecraft* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p. 8.

¹²⁵Caspersen, ‘Degrees of legitimacy’, pp. 190–1.

¹²⁶Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan, MI: Michigan University Press, 1994), p. 1.

¹²⁷Yasser Arafat, as cited in Abdullah Sallah, *Letter dated 18 November 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General* (New York, NY: United Nations General Assembly Forty-third Session, 18 November 2018), p. 15, emphasis added.

¹²⁸Aidan Hehir, ‘Hyper-reality and statebuilding: Baudrillard and the unwillingness of international administrations to cede control’, *Third World Quarterly*, 32:6 (2011), pp. 1073–87 (p. 1077).

state. ‘Statehood’ remains ‘fuzzy’ in a declarative ritual, allowing for ‘those under its rule ... to inscribe their own meaning to the notion of the state’, but its political existence remains ‘a discordant reality’.¹²⁹

It is quite remarkable, for instance, that Bougainville’s declarer of independence (1990) – Bougainville Resistance Army leader Francis Ona – declared his own new ‘kingdom’ (2004) in the part of the Bougainville region he controlled, in defiance of efforts towards more autonomy or statehood for Bougainville as a whole.¹³⁰ In Timor-Leste, some intergenerational debate remains between those who associate the country’s independence with either the 1975 or 2002 declarations, as, according to Jose Trindade, ‘many East Timorese still do not know what was declared [in] 1975’, and ‘argue that [it] ... did not represent the united will of the people’.¹³¹ Whereas participating in a declarative ritual may thus offer a sense of security in insecure circumstances, and thereby engender an important kind of power, it hardly functions as an inherent political state foundation. Declarers of statehood may very well be sincere about their proclamation, but its effects remain rendered immanent to international political structure. As David Armitage therefore professes, ‘only positive acts [can] constitute statehood’.¹³²

At the same time, as ritual theory attests, although the object, image, or sign of the declaration itself does not necessarily symbolise a ‘reality’ of statehood, this does not automatically preclude an independence movement’s capacity to project real (international) political power.¹³³ Certainly, contemporary scholarship on state creation is rife with claims about statehood being supposedly ‘ideational’, ‘intangible’, ‘post-foundational’,¹³⁴ ‘improvised’,¹³⁵ and/or ‘bluffed’,¹³⁶ ostensibly speaking of a Schrödinger’s state that remains unidentifiable unless it is represented or, indeed, declared. Yet, whereas in doing so such accounts ostensibly continue to equate state ‘reality’ with social imaginaries¹³⁷ and/or mediations of state identity,¹³⁸ a ritualist perspective of state declaration does not so definitively maintain that ‘[i]t is not possible to talk about the state as an ontological being’.¹³⁹ Reassessing independence movements’ *communitas* forged through declarative ritual, these entities by no means constitute places or movements ‘that do not exist’,¹⁴⁰ even if *declaring* statehood is not the material basis of their political make-up.

¹²⁹Pace and Sen, *The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank*, pp. 7–8.

¹³⁰Anna-Karina Hermkens, ‘Like Moses who led his people to the promised land: Nation- and state-building in Bougainville’, *Oceania*, 83:3 (2013), pp. 192–207; Joanne Wallis, ‘Nation-building, autonomy arrangements, and deferred referendums: Unresolved questions from Bougainville, Papua New Guinea’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 310–32.

¹³¹Jose Trindade, ‘Reconciling conflicting paradigms: An East Timorese vision of the ideal state’, in David Mearns and Steven Farram (eds), *Democratic Governance in Timor-Leste: Reconciling the Local and the National* (Darwin, NT: Charles Darwin University Press, 2008), pp. 160–85 (p. 169).

¹³²Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, p. 85.

¹³³Krenar Gashi, ‘The hyperreality of EU enlargement: A Baudrillardian critique of the European Union in Kosovo’, in Gëzim Visoka and Vjosa Musliu (eds), *Unravelling Liberal Interventionism: Local Critiques of Statebuilding in Kosovo* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), pp. 54–68 (pp. 55–8).

¹³⁴Björkdahl, ‘Republika Srpska’, pp. 34–6.

¹³⁵Alex Jeffrey, *The Improvised State: Sovereignty, Performance and Agency in Dayton Bosnia* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

¹³⁶Jolle Demmers and Mikel Venhovens, ‘Bluffing the state: Spatialities of contested statehood in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict’, in Annika Björkdahl and Susanne Buckley-Zistel (eds), *Spatialising Peace and Conflict: Mapping the Production of Places, Sites and Scales of Violence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 159–77.

¹³⁷Annika Björkdahl, ‘Imagined states and clashing state-building processes in the Bosnian space’, in Jens Bartelson, Martin Hall, and Jan Teorell (eds), *De-Centering State Making: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Northampton, MA: Edgar Elgar, 2018), pp. 131–52 (p. 133).

¹³⁸Weber, ‘Performative states’, p. 83.

¹³⁹Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State, and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3.

¹⁴⁰See, for instance, Nick Middleton, *An Atlas of Countries that don’t Exist: A Compendium of Fifty Unrecognized and Largely Unnoticed States* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2015); Simon Reeve, *Holidays in the Danger Zone: Places That Don’t Exist* (London: BBC Four, 2005).

Conclusion

Returning, then, to the initial conundrum premising this article, ritual theory helps us make sense of why declaring independence remains such a persistent international practice. The rare efficacy of declarations of independence as ‘state creators’ underlines traditional claims that such performances of statehood very quickly run into real limits of international political (dis)empowerment. That being said, explanations for the continued recurrence of declarations of independence seem to lie in more open-ended considerations of what constitutes state performance, state emergence, and state recognition, and/or in motivations besides the (immediate) legal or political acquisition of statehood. Such explanations have become increasingly accepted in studies of secession, state creation, and state recognition, even if they risk reifying doubts about the agential efficacy of declarations of independence to aid in the forging of full statehood. To be sure, the recurrence of independence declarations can be understood as an international practice, so far as such an understanding does not destabilise their agency wholly in relation to international structure.

The value of a ritual perspective of declarations of independence, therefore, is that it allows for an insight into how the observed, imagined, and performed aspects of state declaration manifest themselves, despite constraints imposed by the (international) political hierarchies structuring state creation. As Maria Mälksoo confirms, ‘[a] ritual approach expands on the practice lens’ in the way that it highlights ‘the circular dynamic’ between the international structural (dis)empowerment of declarers’ agency, and declarers’ intentionality to influence, transform, or disorder that international structure.¹⁴¹ A ritual theory of independence declarations attempts to break down international political conceptual binaries between recognition/non-recognition, rationality/irrationality, and statehood/non-statehood, thereby explaining these declarations neither as definitively transformative nor as completely meaningless in international politics. Encountering the limits of international political and legal structure, declarative rituals may help actors navigate the uncertainties and indeterminacies that accompany their supposed international ‘marginalisation’ and/or ‘powerlessness’. Independence movements, thus, are willing participants in the international ritual of independence declaration, their declarative actions constituting neither pure rational choice nor pure subjection to international rules.

In light of this ascription of agency, more empirical and inductive work on the ritualistic features of independence declarations remains imperative. Our understanding of the discrepancy between the ubiquity and apparent inefficacy of these declarations can be augmented by experience-near research methodologies – both with declarers and international authorities – on particular motivations, power dynamics, and perceived challenges in devising a (formally) recognised state. How do declarations of independence translate the messy narratives and imaginaries of community into a vernacular of statehood? How does one become able to speak on behalf of the independence movement through these (ritual) declarations? Do declarations’ internal and external functions always reinforce one another, and do they always appeal to local and international audiences in the same manner? How might declarative rituals not merely release but also exacerbate tensions within independence movements’ external and internal politics? And what might motivate the deliberate *non*-participation in international declarative rituals?

Leaving such more particular questions aside, a ritual theory of state declaration can exemplify how existing scholarly explorations on international practice(s), emotions,¹⁴² and/or temporality¹⁴³ can be interwoven with a broader appreciation of how different modes of ‘statehood’ are

¹⁴¹Maria Mälksoo, ‘A ritual approach to deterrence: I am, therefore I deter’, *European Journal of International Relations*, pp. 1–26 (p. 14) (2020), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120966039>}.

¹⁴²Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Renée Jeffery, *Reason and Emotion in International Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁴³Andrew Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020); Kimberley Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008).

created, sustained, and/or recognised in international relations. Furthermore, as declarations of independence may serve a number of functions other than 'building a state', ritual theory aids in expanding visions of what purportedly state-referential narratives, performances, and imageries 'can be for'. A sensitivity to international rituality also emphasises how international agents may not only 'follow' certain structural-normative 'scripts', but also actively (seek to) create alternative aggregations of practice beyond the supposedly codified rules of international law and international politics.

In any case, the ritualistic interpretation of statehood declarations feeds into deeper (non-formalistic and non-geostrategic) critiques of such legal 'acts and/or 'events' in international politics. For instance, as scholars of state recognition are beginning to perceive it not (merely) as 'a matter of law or a single act', but as 'a process which involves complex entanglement with external forces',¹⁴⁴ perhaps for state declarations too 'it is time to rethink the existing legal literature and bring it into a conversation with non-legal disciplines'.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, as David Armitage postulates that declarations of independence will persist against the odds,¹⁴⁶ such a prediction can be conceptually underpinned by supplementing traditional paradigms of state creation, declaration, and recognition with (international) social theory, thereby providing a deeper and more compelling understanding of why declarations of independence remain 'instrument[s] pregnant with ... the fate of the world'.¹⁴⁷

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¹⁴⁴Visoka, *Acting Like a State*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵Mikulas Fabry, 'Theorizing state recognition', *International Theory*, 5:1 (2013), pp. 165–70 (p. 165).

¹⁴⁶Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, pp. 142–4.

¹⁴⁷Thomas Jefferson, as cited in Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, p. 1.