



From 'History as Told' to 'History as Experienced': Contextualizing the Uses of the Past

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Abstract

Research has made great strides in understanding how and why organizational actors use the past. So far, scholars have largely focused the level of analysis on the organization, without exploring the intertwined nature of historical claim-making with the organizational field or society at large. This article extends the status quo by conceptualizing the role of context for organizational uses-of-the-past. It identifies three key aspects of context that shape how history contributes to the social construction of reality: the existence of multiple audiences, the landscape of pre-existing historical narratives and the experience of social practices giving credibility to historical claims.

By analysing the historical case of German business in colonial India, the paper makes three broader claims that could move research toward a more contextualized conception of the uses-of-the-past: (i) historical claims are validated in a continuous dialogue with multiple audiences; (ii) they revise previously existing narratives by critiquing or 'outpasting', i.e. invoking earlier origins; (iii) they often result in 'rhetorical frictions' that require continuous and skilful history revisions to mitigate emerging conflicts in their reception. By contextualizing the uses-of-the-past in this way, the paper moves beyond 'hypermuscular' organizational actors bending history to their will and foregrounds the situated nature of historical rhetoric.

Keywords

context, historical methods, history, rhetorical history

Introduction

This paper explores how contexts matter to organizational uses-of-the-past. Prior research has largely focused on histories in and by organizations but has seldom paid systematic attention to the role of context beyond the boundaries of the organization or made context an explicit focus of analysis. As a consequence, the literature understates the intertwined nature of historical claims with the organizational fields, socio-political environments and temporal sequences in which they are embedded. Zooming out, i.e. incorporating these multiple levels of analysis,

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foregrounds the powerful influence of context in shaping the processes by which organizational actors 'make history'.

This shift to a more situated understanding of an organizational actor's use-of-the-past allows us to take several processes into account. It increases scholars' sensitivity to struggles over historical claims, which often become sidelined when emphasizing one organization's deliberate, even strategic, rhetorical history. It also stresses the constraints on making and employing history. While the rhetor certainly has agency over the uses-of-the-past, his or her ability to advocate for any one version of history is limited by what is considered plausible at that moment in time and by relevant audiences. When explicitly moving the analysis to the level of the organizational field, the powerful influence of context becomes more easily observable.

While context is frequently stressed as important for understanding the uses-of-the-past, the conceptual and analytical engagement with context remains a largely unfulfilled agenda. The goal of this article is to go beyond the generic claim that context is important and examine *how* it influences organizational uses-of-the-past. Based on the historical case of German business in late colonial India, the article identifies three key aspects of context that shape organizational uses-of-the-past: (i) the existence of multiple audiences, (ii) the landscape of preexisting historical narratives, and (iii) the presence of social practices validating uses-of-the-past. None of these is completely new to the literature but scholars have rarely considered them fully in their role in the construction of history and in relationship to one another.

Based on these three key aspects of context, the article then explores the following research question: How do audiences, pre-existing historical narratives and experienced social practices shape the process by which history is used in organizations? And, in what ways does integrating these aspects of context shape our view of the role history plays in the social construction of reality? To do so, it examines the empirical case of German business in late colonial India, in which changing contexts shaped the way German firms used history to establish a foothold on the sub-continent. Making the historical claim that Germans and Indians shared a common 'Aryan' heritage, German firms established growing commercial relations despite Britain's political and institutional advantages in the crown colony.

By examining in depth the efforts of German firms to use the Aryan claim, the findings of the paper contribute to the scholarship on the uses-of-the-past by recasting some of its fundamental assumptions. First, the article argues that the unit of analysis in rhetorical history should shift from the isolated claim made by organizational actors to the dialogue through which history is co-constructed, which inevitably expands the analysis to the field level. This would allow scholars to account for the multiple audiences and practices inside and outside of organizations, and broaden the scope of rhetorical history to incorporate the process of reception as well as production. Second, the analysis moves the attention from how actors make historical claims to how rhetorical histories arise as critiques and counterclaims to previous historical accounts. This foregrounds the ways in which historical claims need to be understood as part of a sequence of revisions rather than treating such claims in isolation. Third, the case highlights that historical narratives are not limited to a single context but span multiple contexts, giving rise to the possibility of unintended frictions in the way rhetorical claims are perceived between diverse audiences. This brings to the forefront the need of organizational actors not only to produce rhetorical history but also to continuously maintain and revise historical narratives when under pressure.

The paper begins with an examination of how context has been incorporated in research on the uses-of-the-past in management. It highlights the need to examine the reception of organizational histories by audiences, the landscape of competing historical claims, and the practices in which historical claims are embedded as crucial elements of context that play a role in the process by which usable histories are constructed. It then introduces the case study, sources and methods used

to conceptualize context. The third section provides findings in the form of a historical narrative that delivers a contextualized interpretation of how German firms used the Aryan claim in late colonial India. Drawing on the findings from this interpretation, the analysis and discussion section then considers how taking these context factors into account reshapes the assumptions used in research on uses-of-the-past. The paper concludes by summarizing the results and pointing to opportunities for future research.

The Role of Context in Uses-of-the-Past

Organization scholars and historians together have developed a strong body of literature on rhetorical history and uses-of-the-past. They show how pasts are often used strategically in organizations to gain legitimacy (Brunninge, 2009; Foster, Coraiola, Suddaby, Kroezen, & Chandler, 2017; Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn Trank, 2010) and foster identification with the organization (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2017).

There is also a general consensus that for an adequate understanding of uses-of-the-past, context matters a great deal. Brunninge (2009, p. 10) stresses the importance of ‘organizational context’; Foster et al. (2017, p. 1179) talk about ‘the circumstances when historical narratives are produced’; and Ybema (2014, p. 510) sees in the ‘wider social and historical context’ an important dimension to our understanding of identity processes. While most scholars thus agree that context is an important variable, the literature rarely makes context the explicit focus of the analysis. Anteby and Molnár (2012, p. 518) make the criticism that scholars have considered memory work largely ‘uninfluenced by broader historical trajectories and context’; and Luyckx and Janssens (2016, p. 1598) find that historical contextual elements are at best used ‘as background information’ but are not fully acknowledged when analysing discursive legitimation over time. Instead, the implicit premise of rhetorical history studies is that the unique power of rhetoric comes from the act of constructing a historical narrative, which biases the accounts towards individual and hypermuscular agents. While it is undoubtedly perceived as important, the conceptual and analytical engagement with context is a largely unfulfilled agenda.

Reviewing the body of literature reveals that authors typically imply one of at least three distinct elements when they are referring to the context for rhetorical histories: (i) audiences, (ii) previously existing narratives and (iii) social practices. Scholars have nodded towards these elements individually, without fully elaborating on their role in the construction of rhetorical history or considering how they relate to one another.

The most prominent element of context in the literature is the *audience for rhetorical history*. Many scholars agree that it is necessary to distinguish between internal organizational audiences and external societal audiences (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Foster et al., 2017; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2017), and Zundel, Holt and Popp (2016) use this distinction as a basis for their typology of different uses-of-the-past. This distinction is important because ‘Internal and external stakeholders might embrace different understandings of history and might have distinct vested interests in a particular version of the corporate past.’ (Foster et al., 2017, p. 1183). It is thus logical to expect managers to vary their historical narratives depending on which of the two audiences they are addressing (Foster et al., 2017, p. 1177).

However, in their attempt to highlight the strategic use of history and its constructed nature, some rhetorical history scholars overemphasize the power of managers in controlling the narrative and *persuading* their audiences. Language that stresses history as ‘a powerful resource that can be instrumentalized’ (Brunninge, 2009, p. 23) has indeed put a strong emphasis on ‘the “packaging” of the organisational past and its significance for a specific set of stakeholders’ (Foster et al., 2017, p. 1178), with relatively little attention to the practical and motivational

constraints of instrumentalizing history. Both Hatch and Schultz (2017, p. 692) and Zundel et al. (2016, p. 228) caution against reducing historical narratives in this way, which they argue does not adequately capture the resonance and meaning that historical narratives inspire in their different audiences.

Foster et al. (2017, p. 1182) suggest a shift in rhetorical history research from its earlier focus on persuasion to a new emphasis on identification. They urge scholars to study the process of ‘co-construction’ between ‘managers, who construct the narrative’ and ‘audiences, who identify with the organization’. While this change rightly highlights the bias towards the rhetor in the previous literature, it still remains committed to a relatively passive view of audiences who ‘question and, in some cases, disrupt the story the organization wants to tell’ (Foster et al., 2017, p. 1184). Rhetorical theorists, in contrast, have gone one step further when calling for examination of ‘the mutual shaping of rhetoric by its speakers and hearers, its writers and readers, working in concert with one another’ (Swearingen & Schiappa, 2009, p. 9). However, so far, we know little about how this process of co-creation unfolds.

If the characterization of audiences as passive is one shortcoming of the literature, another is the implicit assumption that external and internal audiences are relatively homogeneous – despite empirical evidence to the contrary. It is easy to see how internal audiences may get fractured into different interest groups within one organization. The much larger group of external stakeholders is even less likely to be homogeneous. A case in point is the multinational corporation, which in its cross-border activities is frequently forced to address different national audiences, with potentially different views of history. Scholars have already pointed towards this challenge, for example when stressing that Tim Horton’s embracing of Canadian national identity may turn into a liability in foreign markets (Foster et al., 2011, p. 114) or when identifying the challenges that collaboration with non-French nationals posed to the identity of Snecma, an organization closely linked to French national identity (Anteby & Molnár, 2012). However, neither of these studies explicitly analyses why and how such tensions arise or elevate the research to a transnational scale. So far, the questions of how history is used to align different concepts of nationhood and to soften or solidify the distinction between nationalities remain underexplored. And this is but one example of fractured audiences that rhetorical history scholars may find worthwhile exploring because it channels the attention from the rhetors to the co-creation between rhetors and audiences.

To understand the reception of the past by different audiences, research needs to pay closer attention to the *landscape of existing narratives and conventions*, which constitutes a second element that scholars often infer in alluding to context. Historical narratives have to be convincing, i.e. coherent and consistent (Mordhorst, 2014, p. 119), and need to make sense in shared ‘webs of beliefs’ (Poor, Novicevic, Humphreys, & Popoola, 2016, p. 149). To achieve this, new narratives are placed against the background of existing narratives and conventions, which they set out to support, extend or overturn. This is an implicit assumption of those contributions that talk about omissions in historical narratives (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Poor et al., 2016, p. 157) as well as those identifying periods of latency, when history becomes temporarily forgotten (Hatch & Schultz, 2017, p. 684). To omit or temporarily sideline elements of a history means to engage with an existing narrative, which included those elements, and to replace it.

The process of engagement with other narratives has been addressed in empirical studies by both historians and organization scholars (Hansen, 2006, 2012; Luyckx & Janssens, 2016; McGaughey, 2013; Mordhorst, 2014; Ybema, 2014). Ybema (2014) shows with a focus on internal organizational dynamics that uses-of-the-past are often confrontational; and Mordhorst (2008) analyses the process by which one narrative out of several competing ones becomes dominant on a societal level. With this, they shift attention towards processes of negotiations between

alternative and competing views and to sequences of narratives that replace one another. Hobsbawm (1983, p. 8) in his work on 'invented traditions' stresses that these traditions are not usually invented because 'old ways are no longer available or viable, but because they are deliberately not used or adapted', i.e. because actors bought into a competing narrative.

More recently, Zundel et al. (2016, p. 213) argue that an engagement with history is always 'historically placed against backgrounds of prevailing conditions and other commitments that are themselves entirely historical in nature'. To understand them requires historical analysis, which traces a series of uses-of-the-past over time. If studied in this (historical) way, prevailing narratives and conventions are an important element of context that deserves more attention.

Studying conventions and narratives over time, however, requires broadening the analysis to include *social practices*, as a third underexplored element of context. Most rhetorical history so far has focused on written narratives (Foster et al., 2017; Poor et al., 2016), not least because data on practices over time is often harder to discover (for this argument, see Anteby & Molnár, 2012, p. 517). Some scholars have broadened the field to also include artefacts (Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Schultz & Hernes, 2013) and the micro-processes of organizational actors when engaging with them. Despite the difficulties in operationalizing such an approach, there are good reasons for a more embedded view of history, which moves the unit of analysis from 'finished' documented texts or artefacts to the rhetorical performance in situ and the dialogue between rhetors and audiences. Two lines in the literature explicitly support this. First, Hobsbawm (1983, p. 12) makes the argument that changes in practices are often more insightful than 'official statements of authorities or spokesmen for organizations'. More generally, he stresses that 'the study of invented traditions cannot be separated from the wider study of the history of society, nor can it expect to advance much beyond the mere discovery of such practices unless it is integrated into a wider study'.

Second, the move to practices reflects the most recent developments in rhetorical theory, as outlined by Bessette (2016), McGee (1990) and Endres, Hess, Senda-Cook and Middleton (2016). These scholars criticize the detached stance frequently maintained by traditional rhetoric scholars and issue a plea for a more contextualized analysis of rhetoric as it unfolds in time and within communities. This line of rhetorical theory explicitly calls for understanding rhetoric as a 'living and breathing practice' (Hayes, 2017, p. 169) and to reconstruct an entire rhetorical situation attentive to situational constraints and the mentalities of different cultures (Enos, 2009). Rhetorical history suffers from similar shortcomings as the older rhetoric studies, focusing too strongly on the intentions of organizational actors and the written word but underestimating the practices within which uses-of-the-past are produced and consumed over time.

In summary, when scholars discuss the importance of context for rhetorical history, they usually refer to one of three elements: (i) audiences, (ii) previous narratives or (iii) practices. However, so far, the engagement with these contextual factors had its limitations. The role of audiences has been reduced to a binary distinction between external and internal audiences, and there remains a sense that rhetorical history involves hypermuscular agents engaging in history manipulation because less analytical attention has been given to the interactions between history acts and their various audiences. Partly because of this instrumental view, we know little about processes of negotiations between alternative and competing narratives, which may shed more light on the process and mechanisms by which history is constructed. Finally, re-embedding written narratives in their historical context and understanding actors' position in their own time requires reconstructing the rhetorical act, including the social practices that support or contradict it. To further advance rhetorical history as a field of study, it is necessary to ask how the three elements of context shape the process of creating history and how they interact with one another.

Methods

Approach

Ironically, much of the research on rhetorical history in organization studies has ignored historical narrative as a method. Studies have used a variety of other approaches to study how organizations use the past, including grounded theory (Anteby & Molnár, 2012), theory building from cases (Foster et al., 2011), process research (Hatch & Schultz, 2017) and discourse analysis (Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010). This represents a surprising twist in how the uses-of-the-past literature has made its way into management research, because many of the seminal works on which it was based, including Hobsbawm's (1983) *Invented Traditions* and Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities*, embrace historical narrative as their method of explanation.

Historical narratives provide an effective way to develop more deeply contextualized explanations of rhetorical history precisely because such narratives can take into account not only the production of particular historical claims but also the diverse audiences through which these claims are accepted, reinterpreted or rejected, the antecedent historical claims against which new claims are made, and the social practices in which they are embedded. Historical narratives, and the methods their production entails, can effectively account for the elements of context discussed above for several reasons. First, because they trace sequences of actions and events, historical narratives allow us to chronicle how new historical claims respond to previous or existing ones, and how their interpretation evolves over time. Second, historical narratives often triangulate between the perspectives of different actors, allowing the historical narrators to take into account the multiplicity of actors involved in the production, reception and evolution of particular historical claims. Triangulation between multiple sources also allows us to identify divergent interpretations. Finally, historical narratives situate historical claims by accounting for the places and practices surrounding their production.

This paper uses historical narrative to engage in what Maclean, Harvey and Clegg (2016, pp. 612–614) call 'conceptualizing', applying a narrative mode of historical investigation to generate 'new theoretical constructs'. Historical organizational research of this type seeks to 'draw lessons from history, generalizing inductively on the basis of specific [historical] cases'. The historical narrative hence provides the occasion for exploring conceptual claims. In this paper, the purpose is to use narrative to examine the processes by which the aspects of context identified earlier – multiple audiences, existing historical claims and social practices – shape the processes by which organizations engage in the use of history. Hence, the historical narrative produced is an 'analytically structured history' (Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014, p. 263) in that it is designed specifically to explore how audiences, preexisting narratives and social practices mattered in the production of a historical claim, but nevertheless takes on a narrative form and derives periodization from the sources.

Case selection

The case focuses on the efforts of German firms in the late colonial period in India to draw on and deploy the historical claim that Germans and Indians belonged to the same ancient Aryan peoples. German firms used the claim of common ancient origins to cement relationships with Indian stakeholders and customers in an important market and to distance themselves from British colonizers. The case covers the period from the 1890s, when German firms first became commercially successful in India in large numbers, until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, when German assets in India were expropriated.

Table 1. Size and Founding Dates of Archives Used.

	Size of full archive	Founded
Siemens Corporate Archives	10,000 shelf metres	1907
Bayer Corporate Archives	about 28 million documents	1907
Krupp Corporate Archives	9,000 shelf metres	1905

Source: Company websites; Feldenkirchen (2007); Pogarell (2007).

The case is particularly interesting for exploring how context matters because it provides the opportunity to examine the origins and evolution of an historical claim over a relatively long span of time, and takes into account the multiple actors and situated practices involved. It offers an opportunity to examine rhetorical history in a non-Western colonial context, which has rarely been considered and inherently brings attention to variations in context and the (uneven) distribution of power.

Sources and interpretation

Drawing on Leblebici (2014) and Runciman (1983), Wadhvani and Decker (2017) describe four aspects of the historical research process (reportage, explanation, understanding and evaluation) which I use to explain my sources (see Appendix 1 for details) and their interpretation.

Reportage is the process of reconstructing facts and actions from primary sources. Historians analyse sources because the phenomenon being studied is not directly observed but reconstructed from the traces it leaves (Lipartito, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014). The types of sources used in this study include correspondence between firms' headquarters in Germany and their offices in India; between high-ranking German managers and government representatives of Germany, India and Great Britain; between different government institutions; internal company reports; travelogues; statistical data on sales and employees; and newspapers. These sources were collected over a six-year time period from March 2011 to March 2017.

Material from corporate archives came from Bayer (which since 1925 was part of the conglomerate I.G. Farben), Siemens and Krupp. These three companies were selected because they were pioneers in the India business, the three largest employers during the time period studied and had extensive internal records that allowed for a reconstruction of activities at the micro level in both Germany and India.

The corporate sources have a high degree of credibility and validity (Kipping, Wadhvani, & Bucheli, 2014). The institutions – long-established corporate archives of German multinationals – have a respected track record of professional archival maintenance (see Table 1 for details.) However, the companies may have had reasons for keeping some sources and omitting others (Decker, 2013; Trouillot, 1995). The process of triangulation allows historical researchers to establish a plausible pattern of facts and identify divergent accounts. In this case, as German companies had tight relationships with their home government, both the German Federal Archives and Foreign Office Archives provided a second set of sources, which complemented (and sometimes contradicted) the material from corporate archives. Additional source material from the British, Indian and US governments allowed for the identification of divergent perspectives on the production and reception of historical claims. Finally, the source compilation was further extended by making use of Indian and German newspapers that survived at the Cambridge-based Centre of South Asian Studies.

There are a number of limitations to these primary sources. First, all of the archives store a selection of documents, for which the concrete selection criteria are unknown. Even if the three companies analysed in this article can be seen as ambitious in the development of their archives,

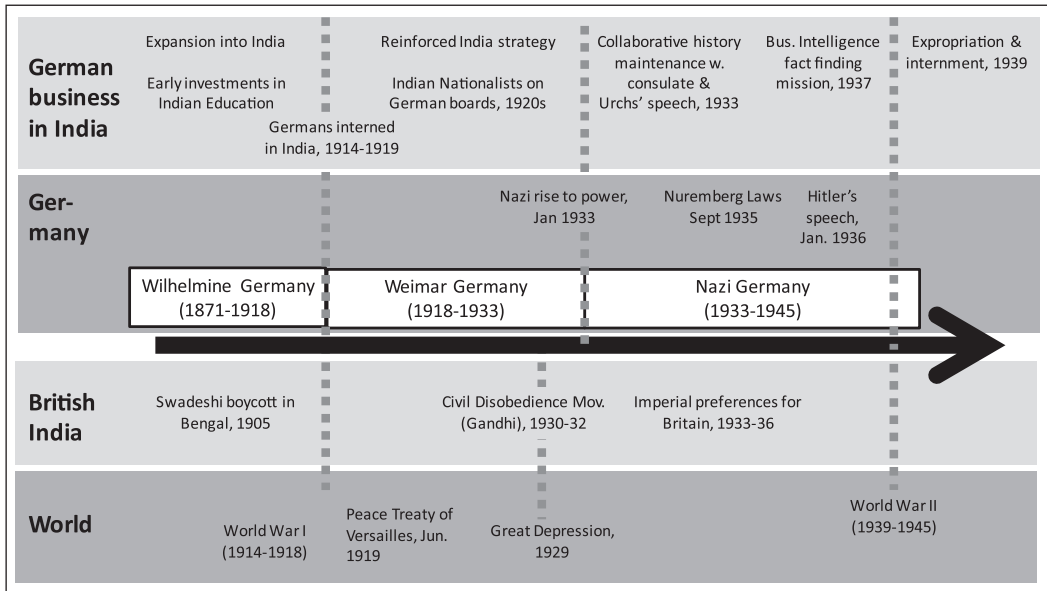


Figure 1. Overview of Historical Events, 1890s–1940s.

selected documents may have been consciously omitted and unless other organizations (governments, competitors) have reflected on them, they would be impossible to reconstruct. Second, power relationships are inscribed in the archives, and the three corporate archives consulted have a strong Western bias (Stoler, 2009). Most documents haven been authored by Westerners, whereas reflections by Indians mostly survived as second-hand accounts and in nationalist newspapers. The voices reconstructed in this way all pertain to educated Indians.

Based on the source material and the research question, I established basic chronologies for each company's business with India in a process of '*explanation* through contextualization' (Wadhvani & Decker, 2017). This process initially took several months to complete and required the reading of the documents in relation to one another and to secondary sources, and in dialogue with the uses-of-the-past literature. The process involved relating organizational rhetoric and action to contextual changes in India, Germany and Great Britain. Afterwards I compared the time-lines to identify similarities and differences as well as significant turning points over the time period studied. This interpretive process led me to identify the central narrative arc of the historical case, and the key turning points, as shown in Figure 1.

Identifying how actors created and perceived history required reading sources in a way that produced *understanding* of the actors' perspective. Thus, I followed managers' acts in using history, often in cooperation with or in reaction to outside actors. It quickly became obvious that organizational actors were not in a position to autonomously generate historical narratives but rather had to invest time and energy in negotiating different versions of history. I thus revisited many of the sources and the historiography to look for evidence of this dialogue and how uses-of-the-past were being contested and collaboratively produced, embracing a polyphonic approach (Smith & Russell, 2016) to introducing multiple perspectives and voices into the narrative of the historical case I produced.

Finally, based on the narrative of the case, I identified how various audiences, pre-existing historical claims and practices shaped the processes by which the historical claim to a common Aryan

heritage was used. I did this by focusing on how the case revealed the relevance of audiences, pre-existing narratives and practices in ways that the existing literature on rhetorical history did not acknowledge. This formed the core *evaluative* process by which I inferred conceptual claims (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016) about the role of context in rhetorical history. It was in going back and forth between the narrative case and the conceptual claims that I highlighted my contributions to a more contextualized rhetorical history.

Co-Constructing a Useful History in Colonial India

German companies were latecomers to colonial India. Just before 1900 they realized that the conflict-ridden relationship between Great Britain and its crown colony India created a unique opportunity for them, as the Indian independence movement gained strength and started calling for boycotts of British products. Some Indian nationalists wanted to avoid foreign imports altogether, but others suggested a more pragmatic approach, in which the dependence on Britain was to be avoided but imports from other Western nations accepted because they were perceived as being free of colonial injustice (Aurobindo, 2002a [1908a], p. 852).

One facet of such injustice was the dominant narrative to which British businesspeople and government representatives had for long subscribed. They claimed to pursue a ‘civilizing’ project in India, ‘confer[ing] upon the natives of India the benefits of ... European wisdom and benevolence’ (Kaye, 1853, p. 5). British colonialism, in this argument, sparked and ensured progress in India, and the British Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Curzon, argued that these alleged improvements are ‘the Englishman’s justification in India’ (Curzon & Raleigh, 1906, p. 589). The claim to bring civilization to India was the preferred legitimization for British colonialism (Mann, 2004).

Over the course of the twentieth century, however, the civilizing narrative increasingly came under attack. Criticism towards the colonial ruler included a new counter-narrative that India is a ‘great and ancient nation’ and that it even qualifies as ‘the eternal land’, whose ‘strength, greatness, holiness’ may never cease (Aurobindo, 2002c [1907], p. 315). According to this narrative, the source of India’s economic problems was not a lack of civilization but rather British colonial policies which, as the only Indian member of the Indian Industrial Commission (1918, p. 305) argued, turned India into an agricultural country and destroyed traditional manufacturing industries. He saw a more suitable model in Germany, a late economic developer, which he admired in particular for its industrial education. Other Indian nationalists held similar views (Bose, 2012 [1933], p. 259) and looked to Germany as an alternative economic partner. The new narrative they constructed became meaningful as a critique of British claims for their civilizing project in India.

The managers of German firms initially knew little about this. In the absence of formal trade barriers, they considered India ‘a free trade country’ (BArch R/901/13404) but mostly copied the practices of the British first movers. They frequented the same European social clubs and agreed with their British peers that these were places where a man could be ‘in the society of men of his own race’ (Home, 1928, pp. 101–102). Eventually, around the turn of the century, they stumbled upon the realization that the emerging narratives of Indian independence activists bolstered their business prospects. They showed some interest in the Indian *Swadeshi* (= for one’s own country) movement, which called for a boycott of British products (Aurobindo, 2002a [1908a], p. 852). As a consequence, British officials in Bengal observed not only a new preference for continental European goods over British goods but also fraudulent practices, in which English goods were intentionally mislabelled and sold successfully as ‘made in Germany’ (WBSA POL. (Pol.) F. No. (J)/1905 Report on the Agitation). Bengal was the state most openly challenging British power in the context of an unpopular partition of the region by the British colonial government (Sarkar, 2010). The swadeshi boycott revealed to

German managers the opportunity for successfully competing in India. It set the stage for a counter-narrative to the dominant civilizing mission, which both (selected) German businessmen and Indian nationalists co-constructed and which was confirmed by changing social practices, such as a more prominent display of ‘made in Germany’ labels.

World War I and a window of opportunity

World War I was the second milestone in this process and gave a new urgency to German commercial aspirations in India. At the end of World War I, the German economy lay in shambles. War-related expropriations, new competitors and the harsh conditions of the Peace Treaty of Versailles made doing business with the important markets of the US, UK and France more difficult and thus forced German companies to focus their attention on the few still receptive foreign markets, including India.

Indians were open if not eager to cooperate with German business. They, too, experienced the end of World War I as a major disappointment. Like the Germans, Indians saw the Versailles Treaty as an act of suppression by the British overseers. Having supported Britain during the war, their expectations for a reward were deeply disappointed (Manela, 2007). Indians saw in Germany a potential partner with similar anti-British sentiments, hardened by loss in the war and humiliation in peace. In 1926, the Bengali economist Benoy Kumar Sarkar highlighted that both Germany and India were victims of British power. ‘The treatment that Germany ... has been receiving [at Versailles] ... is absolutely identical with what Asians and Africans have been used to obtain from Eur[o]-Americans ... All this treatment is a corollary to colonialism’ (Sarkar, 1926, p. 35). Germans similarly felt the oppression by the British and likened their experience to that of India. The nationalist German historian Oswald Spengler (1924, p. 14) pointedly referred to Germany as ‘a European India’. The two groups came together around a common understanding of the past and a joint identity as victims of British power.

German businesspeople on the ground in India had emotionally and physically experienced such British oppression, when they were first expelled from British social clubs (Lohmann, 1934, p. 43; Sinha, 2001, p. 489) and then incarcerated in internment camps during World War I. Several German businessmen wrote publicly about their camp experience and the impact it had on their view of history. They described that they had previously felt themselves part of the ‘white elite’, echoing a central theme of the civilizing mission narrative. The war, however, had created a new line of distinction based on nationality rather than race. N. O. Tera, who worked for a Hamburg-based rubber company in India, argued that the day of internment was when ‘the British destroyed the community of fate of the Europeans vis-a-vis the coloured races of the world. Here is when for the first time the British destroyed the fiction of the superiority of the white race’ (BA 330/596 Internees: Tera¹ report). The reason for the loss of credibility of the idea of a community of white businesspeople in India was as much social practices (internment, exclusion from clubs) as it was changing narratives. Together they created a window for new allegiances. The sense that Germany and India had similar political goals – weakening British hegemony in Europe after World War I and in Asia in the context of a crumbling empire – made the idea of an Indo-German alliance possible.

Making an unexpected historical claim, both Indians and Germans appropriated the concept of ‘Aryanism’, which highlighted commonalities between Indians and Germans and even suggested a common mythical origin. The concept of Aryanism today is inextricably associated with the National Socialist regime in Germany. However, it has its roots in Vedic (ancient Indian) tradition. The *Rig Veda*, composed around 1500 BCE, talked about tribes that self-identified as ‘Arya’ and were settlers from Central Asia encountering the indigenous population of Northern India. Indian nationalists early on identified the Aryan claim as a source of pride, and the nationalist Sri

Aurobindo argued that ‘the history of the country is taught to the students of Bengal in a national context’, not by memorizing recent historical events but by teaching ‘how in ancient times the Aryans formed the nation’ (Aurobindo, 2002b [1908b, p. 814]).

European linguists, who before 1914 started to map out the similarities between Greek, Latin and Sanskrit, combined their work with the Vedic framework, arguing for a common heritage. From the early nineteenth century onwards, Aryanism was a prominent concept in many genealogies of newly emerging nation states (Ballantyne, 2002), including Germany. German-speaking scholars claimed that the Aryan community was comprised of Germans, Indians and East Iranians and thus blurred the line between East and West (Von Schroeder, 1908, p. xi). Aryanism was not only a source of pride for Indians but also served the Germans as a tool to distinguish themselves from other Western Europeans in the context of commercial and political competition in Europe. On both sides it was welcomed as a concept that facilitated the emergence of a new ‘us’ versus ‘them’ line (Ballantyne, 2002; Manjapra, 2014).

For some Indian audiences, the newly ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) increased the hope for a different relationship with Germany than the one with Great Britain. One Indian nationalist, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, made that point when arguing, ‘We in Asia have hitherto confined our definition of the white man to England[;] and if we have sympathy with Germany ... , it is not because Germans are white but because they are an able, hard-working and persevering people from whom we have no fear of aggression’ (PA R 77414, 16 August 1925). Importantly, the image of the ‘white man’ was used synonymously with aggression against India and thus did not apply to Germany according to the new Aryan narrative.

German managers did not pioneer this use of history but they recognized it as an opportunity. They did so by presenting themselves as more desirable partners to Indians than British competitors and by investing in symbolic projects, most importantly in educational schemes. The German chemical giant Bayer engaged in one of the earliest educational projects in the princely state of Baroda, which had a history of anti-British protests. The company financially supported the establishment of an industrial school focused on applied sciences. Training centers for dyers were opened in several locations and many of the students were later employed by Bayer in its India business (Lubinski, 2015). The local Indian ruler continued to stay in close contact with several German firms and visited Siemens in Berlin in 1931 (SAA 8109 Prince of Baroda visit, 7 August 1931). Several companies sponsored Indians to undertake industrial training with them in Germany (SAA Directory Foreigners; PA R 104777 Memorandum Hentig 17 December 1937). In a 1929 publication by the Indian Information Bureau, an organization of the Indian diaspora in Berlin, the ease with which Indian students were admitted to German factories was highlighted as a major difference to Great Britain, where admissions were rare and extremely costly (PA R 77462 ‘Education in Germany’). The social practice of accepting Indian interns and trainees into their companies was interpreted as framing and assisting the Aryan narrative because it supported India’s development, not its exploitation.

The Great Depression of 1929 politicized business even further. For a limited time, between 1933 and 1936, Britain enjoyed privileges based on the regime of imperial preferences, which taxed (selected) products from within the British Empire at a lower rate than products from elsewhere (SAA 8109 Ottawa results, 1932). However, the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–1932) and Gandhi’s famous salt march also increased the illegitimacy of British goods (Gordon, 1978, pp. 210–218; Markovits, 1985, pp. 72–76). British colonial intelligence reports highlighted that nationalists called to buy products ‘made in any non-British country’ even if they were costlier than British alternatives (NAI Home Dept., Pol. 33/6 Note by Director of Intelligence Bureau, 16 February 1931).

Industries that were sensitive to economic nationalism held the greatest opportunities for German rivals. Siemens targeted spinning mills for its machinery products because of their perceived proximity to Indian nationalism (SAA 4286 Siemens India Annual Report, 1931/32). Similarly, the steel industry was considered crucial to India's industrial development and the German industrial giant Krupp established close relationships with the Indian Tata Iron and Steel Company, and hosted its directors in Germany in 1935 (KA FAH 23-FAH 4 C 170 Memo on visit of Tata directors, 19 July 1935). However, to understand the fine-grained differences in the Indian political environment, German companies needed sophisticated business intelligence. For that reason, they increasingly invested in departments for political strategizing. The largest and most sophisticated was I.G. Farben's 'NW 7', which studied Indian newspapers and government reports and hired India experts from universities and former government posts (BA 82/1 Macroeconomic Analyses; 330/1124 Reports by the Macroeconomic Dpt. 1938–1944).

The Nazis' rise to power and the need for narrative maintenance

In January 1933, the Nazi party came to power in Germany and was immediately a source of concern for German businesses in India. As early as July 1933, the German Electricitaets-Gesellschaft Sanitas addressed the German Foreign Office to report about the negative image consequences of the political change (PA R 77416, letter 20 July 1933). Indian audiences criticized the new political regime primarily for its racial and religious discrimination. Paradoxically, the regime did not establish a clear racial ideology beyond its anti-Semitism, but rather worked off a series of ad hoc, vague and often conflicting postulates. This was uncomfortable for German firms in India but also kept their hopes up for safeguarding the joint Indo-German historical narrative.

Together with the German consulate in Calcutta, several leading businessmen coordinated their efforts to influence Indian public opinion in favour of Germany. This, they argued, was crucial because 'the Indian has an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the white race' (PA R 77416 letter Consulate Calcutta to Foreign Office, 7 June 1933). As a first step, German entrepreneurs and consulate officials identified news outlets and submitted English language articles that took a German-friendly stance. Pro-German articles highlighted that: 'There is no color prejudice in Germany and an Indian is readily admitted to German society, which makes him feel quite at home' ('Letters to the Editors' in *Advance*, 20 July 1933, p. 3). Regular extensive lists showed the growing number of articles in the Indian press supporting the German version of Indo-German history (PA R 77462).

The term 'Aryan' remained vague and opaque. The German 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' of 7 April 1933 called for the early retirement of non-Aryans and in an accompanying order defined Aryans as either Western (European) races or 'Eastern (Asiatic) races, i.e. Indians (Hindus) and Iranians (Persian, Afghan, Armenian, Georgian and Kurds),' thus explicitly including Indians (Sieferle, 1987, p. 461). With fragmented and mixed messages coming from Germany and appeasement by German businesspeople in India, the alluring narrative of a joint Indo-German Aryan community was contested but not destroyed. An article in the nationalist newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in 1934 reminded readers that the Germans 'have reverence for our race and country as (1) they claim to be belonging to Aryan race; (2) they possess and study vast Sanskrit literature; and (3) they have adopted the "Swastika" as their national symbol, which is a typical Indian emblem' ('Indians in Germany' in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 November 1934, p. 12).

German managers not only responded to these external factors, but also actively created new narratives to integrate novel developments into existing accounts. Oswald Urchs, a leading manager of the Haverlo pharmaceutical company, part of the I.G. empire, took it upon himself to re-harmonize Nazi ideology with the joint Indo-German history. He gave a lengthy speech in September 1933 in India and then had it circulated widely through the consulate and the Indian press. Urchs highlighted (alleged) connecting threads between nationalistic India and Nazi Germany, such as support

Table 2. Major Themes of Urchs' Speech, September 1933.

1. Focus on community rather than individualism	'The Hitler movement is a direct outcome of the war experience ... [which] made the soldier realize that the individual means nothing; that the community alone is the supreme truth.'
2. Willingness to sacrifice for the greater good	'The born leader will never hesitate to demand and to offer the supreme sacrifice.'
3. Glorification of peasants and labourers	'The ruling caste, especially the <i>Junkerdom</i> and the rich bourgeois classes ... denied every communal bond with the toiling masses.' 'This neglect and alienation of the lower classes particularly of the peasants and laborers was the sin of the old regime, which was bound to bring about its downfall.'
4. Need to unify the nation with numerous heterogeneous states	'The various German countries: Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria etc. still remain as individuals and retain their cultural perspective and peculiarities ... but the political association of these tribal names are no more[:] and every inhabitant of the German Reich is now also in the political sense of the term – a German.'

Source: PA R 77416 Political relationship between India and Germany: Urchs' speech, enclosed with letter from Consulate General Calcutta to Foreign Office Berlin, 13 September 1933.

for peasants and workers in both countries and the need to unify the nation comprised of numerous heterogeneous states (see Table 2 for details of the argument). He stressed those achievements of the Hitler regime that could also address prominent socio-economic problems in India, such as support for peasants and small consumers and for investment in industrial machinery (PA R 77416, 13 September 1933). He consciously used Indian terminology, such as 'caste' and 'dowry', to describe developments in Germany. While these attempts seem rather artificial, they have to be understood as an attempt to create a common language with his Indian audience.

Decline of the narrative: Hitler's speech in Munich (1936)

The Nuremberg laws of 15 September 1935 have often been highlighted as a point of escalation for Nazi racial policy. Interestingly, they triggered almost no reaction in India because they were mainly focused on the relationship between Germans and Jews. Instead, it was a speech by Adolf Hitler on 26 January 1936 which escalated tensions in the relationship with India and threatened to destroy the notion of a common Aryan heritage that some firms and managers had cultivated. In this speech to over 6,000 students, Hitler proclaimed that 'the white race is destined to rule. This is its unconscious urge, which arises from a heroic conception of life.' He also claimed that it was the British who taught Indians 'how to walk' (Baynes, 1942, p. 1258). With this clear statement, Hitler expressed his disdain for the narrative of joint Aryan heritage and instead sided with the earlier narrative of the civilizing mission.

Not surprisingly, the speech triggered major protests in India (PA R 43 II 991). In a heated debate in the Indian press, Indians reproduced their own understanding of history as a counterpoint to Hitler's speech:

He [Hitler] conveniently forgets the glorious history of 'Aryans' from times immemorial, when the white race he speaks of, was in the woods and jungles and had no notion of society and nationhood. One wonders why he takes pride in calling himself 'Aryan'. ('Hitler's Insult' in *Bombay Chronicle*, 1 February 1936, p. 12).

Hitler's remarks were a blow for the German business community in India, which had worked feverishly for a version of national history and identity that would support Indo-German

cooperation, in a situation when overall international sales were decreasing but business with India had developed positively. India was Siemens' second largest overseas market accounting for 18 percent of sales in 1937/38, and I.G.'s single most important market for dyes (SAA 8150 Statistics; SAA 8133 Siemens India Annual Report 1938/39; Plumpe, 1990: 571). For that reason, German firms were eager to keep business going and the historical claims plausible. They intensified their intelligence efforts to monitor how political changes were perceived (BA 191/1.3 Travel report Reithinger, 1937).

Indian nationalists also continued to emphasize their alignment with Germany, despite the changing political climate. Padamraj Jain, a leader of a Hindu nationalist party, expressed to the German authorities that 'Germany's crusade against the enemies of Aryan culture will bring all Aryan nations of the world to their senses and awaken the India Hindus for the restoration of their lost glory' (PA R 104777, letter with enclosed statement by Jain, 25 March 1939).

When World War II broke out on 1 September 1939, German assets in India were expropriated. As German companies closed their doors, British colonial intelligence reports noted that German managers compensated Indian employees generously for their loss of service. 'They [the Indian employees] are consequently inclined to regard the Nazi regime with favour and to speak well of it among their friends, a fact which has propaganda value' (IOR/L/PJ/12/506, Survey No. 19, 1939). The war shifted attention away from business collaborations; however, the uses-of-the-past, including the historical claim of a joint Aryan community, continued into the war and supported political collaboration between the German government and Indian nationalists (Kuhlmann & Das, 2012).

Analysis and Discussion

How do audiences, pre-existing historical narratives and social practices shape the process by which history is used by organizational actors? In what ways does integrating these aspects of context shape our view of the role history plays in the social construction of reality? In this section, I draw out the conceptual implications of the study for our understanding of the processes by which history is used by organizational actors.

The uses-of-the-past as a co-construction process

Research on the uses-of-the-past in organizations has focused on the production of historical claims by managers and organizations. Little analytical attention has been devoted to the reception of these claims by audiences. This study, however, suggests that the processes by which history is used may be better understood as a negotiated dialogue between organizations and their audiences, of which the production of historical claims forms only one part. A fuller grasp of the co-construction process is essential in accounting for the uses-of-the-past in the social construction of reality because it sheds light on how such claims come to be integrated into the lived experience of actors.

Taking the process of reception seriously involves recognizing the ways in which audiences may accept, reject or negotiate historical claims. Such a perspective emphasizes the active role of audience in the co-construction process. Audiences, in this sense, do not passively accept historical claims by organizations, nor do they simply act as constraints on historical claim-making, but rather co-produce historical narratives. They take a claim and make it their own, producing or elaborating their own accounts that may echo, challenge or revise an initial historical claim. This process was clearly at work in late colonial India, as Indian nationalists were active participants alongside German firms, intellectuals and public officials in the development of the claim of a common Aryan past and its implications for the relationship between the people of India, Germany and Britain in the present.

Moreover, the historical co-construction process was not limited to language but involved a dialogue with practices as well. Part of the way in which the Aryan claim became real for members of selected audiences was that firms practised it in hiring and staffing, at least in ways that temporarily distinguished them from their British rivals. The adoption of such daily practices served to reinforce the plausibility of the historical claims and their reception as authentic. In this way, the use of history was not about language alone. Though there has been particular focus in management and organizational research on history as expressed in language, some of the classical work in the uses-of-the-past (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983) as well as some of the scholarship in critical rhetorical theory (Hayes, 2017) has emphasized the role of places and practices in the co-construction of history. The study hence argues that while the success of the historical claims made by organizations rests heavily on communication, this communication extends well beyond traditional discourse, to include a wide range of symbolic actions and non-verbal displays.

This finding has research implications for how we study the uses-of-the-past in and around organizations. While an organization's historical claims may be found in well-articulated documents and crisp websites, the co-creation processes at work in the uses-of-the-past can only poorly be captured by text alone. Studying their negotiated reception by audiences and the daily practices in which they are embedded is essential to understanding their socially constructed veracity. The scholarly interest thus shifts from 'history as told' to 'history as lived and experienced'.

Historical counter-narrative: Critique, outpasting and timing

The study also highlights that managers and organizations do not paint their histories on blank canvasses but rather produce historical claims against the background of an existing semantic landscape that shapes the social construction process. While most management studies in the uses-of-the-past focus on analysing the claims made by organizations, Hobsbawm (1983), Hansen (2012), Ybema (2014) and Mordhorst (2014) as well as critical rhetoric scholars (Endres et al., 2016; McGee, 1990) remind us that audiences make judgements between multiple claims, usually *in competition* with each other, and that the process by which history is used needs to account for when and why some claims win out over others in audiences' perceptions of reality.

New historical narratives, in this sense, are always in dialogue with previous and simultaneous accounts. Historians consider their discipline a revisionist one for that same reason, with new historical interpretations serving in part as critiques of previous ones in a historiographical process (Scott, 2007). 'The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal in order to show that these things have their history' (Johnson, 1981, p. xv) Thus, history as critique foregrounds the culturally constructed character of phenomena and narratives that seem natural and are therefore rarely questioned. As a consequence it opens the system up to change, which in its extreme overhauls the previous interpretations' justification of power (Foucault, 1984; Scott, 2007) and creates new 'programs of truth' (Veyne, 1988).

The uses-of-the-past in management studies, and rhetorical history in particular, has not systematically included this process of history as critique into its analysis. It has contributed most strongly, in fact, to our understanding of those narratives which legitimate managerial power or corporate strategies, linking to the expansive literature on organizational legitimation (for a detailed literature review, see Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017). However, historical narratives do not emerge in a vacuum nor do they necessarily legitimize the status quo or the most politically powerful actor. Instead, they often develop in opposition to dominant existing narratives and derive power to drive change from their critical counter-positions. It is thus crucial that uses-of-the-past research in management accounts for the antecedent and existing narratives as part of their context. Which previous narratives are being critiqued or challenged?

The case shows how German managers first appropriated the category 'Aryan', which became meaningful against the backdrop of older categories of belonging, such as 'white vs. coloured people' or 'Europeans vs. Asians'. German businesspeople had previously felt themselves included in these in-groups. When their feeling of inclusion was challenged (by war, internment, exclusion from clubs), they contributed to the co-construction of the Aryan narrative with a new audience (Indian nationalists), which aimed at challenging the 'civilizing mission' narrative that justified British colonialism.

The strengths of the narrative of the Aryan community arose largely because it was a persuasive counterpoint to the British civilizing mission (for details see Table 3). While the narrative of the civilizing mission claims that Britain brought culture and civilization to India, the counter-narrative highlights India as an ancient grand civilization. While the civilizing mission focused on the differences between white Western colonizers and coloured Indians, the category Aryan claims a common racial origin of Germans and Indians, foregrounding similarities rather than differences. While the civilizing mission argues that British colonialism sparked and ensured progress in India, the counter-narrative contends that Britain appropriated Indian wealth illegitimately and destroyed indigenous industries.

The Aryan history was positioned in stark contrast to the narrative of a civilizing mission and had a particular allure in the context of earlier and parallel narratives of Indian independence activists that already criticized the colonial overseer. The narrative profited from Britain as a common antagonist. However, it remained contested. The public outcry in India provoked by Hitler's 1936 speech is to be explained by his clear support for the older narrative based on race that underpinned the British civilizing mission and, by extension, justified British colonialism.

In referring to an ancient Aryanism, Germans and Indians claimed historical priority for their common ancestry. As both the works of Hobsbawm (1983) and Zerubavel (2003, p. 8) show, this mechanism highlights 'the common mnemonic effort to enhance one's legitimacy by exaggerating one's antiquity'. Antiquity is inherently relative. Germans and Indians could claim authenticity by highlighting their narrative as *more ancient* than the predominant British one. Together, Indians and Germans tried to 'outpast' the British in India by invoking an earlier origin that challenged the British civilizing mission as a relatively recent and ephemeral development. Moreover, what made the concept of Aryanism powerful is that its antiquity gives a timeless and natural quality to the identity, free of present political frictions and concerns. It allowed Indian nationalists the claim for 'the eternal land, the eternal people' (Aurobindo, 2002c [1907], p. 315), an apt exaggeration of antiquity towards the eternal and irrefutable act of 'outpasting'.

Importantly, the point in time when narratives are being created is not necessarily the same as the moment when they become used and useful. Neither German businessmen nor Indian nationalists pioneered the category of Aryanism. Indeed, it had existed long before the emergence of this alliance. In line with the argument made by Hatch and Schultz (2017, p. 676), the narrative remained dormant for decades but could be revitalized and engaged at a moment in time when the concrete rhetorical context gave it new relevance in the context of anti-colonial critique. German businessmen saw an opportunity to become economically competitive in India, while Indian nationalists considered the Germans helpful partners on their road to independence. The alliance made sense at this particular moment in time, when the interests of both groups happened to align.

Appropriating a remote (rather than a recent) past has advantages because it allows for greater flexibility of interpretation. The Aryan claim, based on the myth of Aryanism, could claim to be true because it made sense in the context of actors' experiences at that moment in time. Archaeologist and historian Paul Veyne (1988, p. 118) argues that 'each epoch thinks and acts within arbitrary and inert frameworks' and that it is actors' 'constitutive imagination' that creates historical 'programs of truths' with their specific set of rules and conventions. The historical distance of the Aryanism concept allowed for the details of the concept to remain vague and to be flexibly deployed for present purposes, while the constitutive imagination of the actors involved claimed this particular compound of myth and history to be true.

Table 3. Comparison of claims of ‘civilizing mission’ and ‘Aryan community’ narrative.

Civilizing mission		Aryan community	
Claim	Example	Claim	Example
Britain brought culture and civilization to India	[British military historian, civil servant and army officer, 1853] ‘the internal management of the country [India] under our rule was regulated by a code of written laws, intended to confer upon the natives of India the benefits of as much European wisdom and benevolence as was compatible with a due regard for the character of native institutions.’ (Kaye, 1853, p. 5) [Viceroy & Governor-General of India, speech 16 Nov. 1905] ‘to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment, or a stirring of duty, where it did not before exist – that is enough, that is the Englishman’s justification in India.’ (Curzon & Raleigh, 1906, p. 589) [Resident Anglo-Indian on British clubs, just before WW I] ‘it was surely not asking too much that a man might have, after his day’s work, a place where he could for an hour or two take his ease in the society of men of his own race, and those whose habits and customs were his own.’ (Horne, 1928, pp. 101–102) [Hitler speech, 1936] ‘the white race is destined to rule. This is its unconscious urge, which arises from a heroic conception of life.’ (Baynes, 1942, p. 1258)	India is an ancient grand civilization	[Indian nationalist, 1907] ‘There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilization, were a miracle of our heroic age ... Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness, may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease.’ (Aurobindo, 2002c [1907], p. 315) [Indian newspaper article, 1936] ‘he [Hitler] conveniently forgets the glorious history of “Aryans” from times immemorial, when the white race he speaks of, was in the woods and jungles and had no notion of society and nation-hood.’ (‘Hitler’s insult’ in Bombay Chronicle, 1 February 1936, p. 12) [German scholar, 1908] ‘There can no longer be any doubt that the Aryans once spread as undivided from central Europe all the way to southern Russia, before the Asian branch of the ethnic group, the Indians and the Persians, separated themselves.’ (Von Schroeder, 1908) [Indian nationalist, 1908] ‘the history of the country is taught to the students of Bengal in a national context. We do not attach much importance to how many kings have ruled the country, ... or the date when the Battle of Plassey was fought. What we teach, rather, is how in ancient times the Aryans formed the nation.’ (Aurobindo, 2002b [1908b], p. 814) [Indian nationalist, 1939] ‘Germany’s solemn idea of the revival of Aryan culture ... and the ardent championship of the tradition of Indo-Germanic civilizations are welcomed by the religious and sensible Hindus of India with a jubilant hope. ... I think that Germany’s crusade against the enemies of Aryan culture will bring all Aryan nations of the world to their senses and awaken the India Hindus for the restoration of their lost glory.’ (PA R 104777, letter with enclosed statement by Padamraj Jain, a leader of a Hindu nationalist party, 25 March 1939) [Indian members of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1918] ‘I have dwelt at some length upon these facts to remind my English fellow-subjects how ... grave an economic wrong has been done to India by the policy pursued in the past ... I have also done this to dispel the idea that Indians are to blame for the decline of their indigenous industries.’ (Indian Industrial Commission, 1918, p. 305) [Indian nationalist, 1933] ‘The strangling of India’s indigenous industries – including the shipbuilding industry – by Great Britain during her rule in India.’ (Bose, 2012 [1933], p. 259)
White Westerners have a common historical bond that differentiates them from coloured Indians		Germans and Indians have a common racial origin, and the two groups have deep similarities	
British colonialism sparked and ensured progress in India	[John Chapman, letter to the Shareholders of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, 1850] ‘aiding in imparting to our fellow subjects in India a participation in the advantages of the greatest invention of modern times.’ (quoted in: Macpherson, 1955, p. 182) [British engineer to the government of India for railways, 1894] ‘A land where the very names of innovation, progress, energy, and the practical arts of life were unknown, or were abhorred, and which appeared sunk in a lethargic sleep too profound for any possibility of awakening ... it is from the British nation that the vast continent of India has received the leaven of a new moral and material regeneration ... The most potent factor in this truly wonderful resurrection of a whole people ... is unquestionably the railway system.’ (MacGeorge, 1894, pp. 292–293) [Hitler speech, 1936] Britain taught Indians ‘how to walk’. (Baynes, 1942, p. 1258)	Britain appropriated Indian wealth illegitimately and destroyed indigenous industries	

Maintenance work: Addressing rhetorical frictions

The existence of multiple audiences with shifting interests forces organizational actors to try to manage the reception of narratives between them and over time. When previous studies have considered the link between historical claims and external audiences, they have focused on the relationship between a firm and a single, uniform context, such as one national environment (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Brunninge, 2009; Foster et al., 2011). However, most of the companies discussed in the literature are in fact active across national borders and operate in *multiple* national environments with different and diverse audiences. Moreover, organizations find themselves exposed to transnational narratives as well, which transcend any one nation state. The historical narratives associated with ‘civilizing mission’ and Aryanism, for example, are not limited to one national environment, but may be interpreted and perceived in very different ways in various local contexts.

Acknowledging that an organization’s audiences are diverse points to another analytical problem that arises when taking contexts into account. Rather than focusing on how a historical narrative works to align an organization with a given context, it brings explicit attention to ‘rhetorical frictions’ that organizational actors need to address in dealing with the reception of a historical claim by different audiences. I define rhetorical frictions as the conflicts that arise when a historical claim creates divergent expectations among different audiences. Rhetorical frictions provide important insights into actors’ mentalities, prevailing ideologies and the tensions that arise in the co-construction process. The case shows that the same historical narrative was perceived differently in the organizations’ home and host country over time. The initial rise of Nazism in Germany turned into a liability for German business in India, as it contradicted the essence of the historical claim of an encompassing Aryanism. Similarly, both Mordhorst (2014) and Hansen (2018) show how narratives (of the cooperative movement in Denmark and the ‘Danish modern’ design category), over time, turned from an asset into a liability for organizations. As organizational fields changed, their ‘fit’ with particular narratives was increasingly called into question and audiences started to reframe the organizations. Rhetorical frictions, such as these, show in written text but are also often accompanied by new practices that provide counter-narratives with veracity.

Dynamic rhetorical frictions pose challenges for organizational actors. The case shows how these frictions forced managers to engage in a series of efforts designed to adjust historical representations under pressure. While most earlier contributions, with the notable exception of Anteby and Molnár (2012), examine the initial production of historical narratives, the case shows the importance of continuous engagement for *rhetorical history revisions*. Some of the maintenance activities in the case were bold, such as Urchs’ speech creatively constructing analogies between nationalist India and Nazi Germany, but most of them were incremental, mundane day-to-day adjustments, such as the continuous flow of newspaper articles highlighting German appreciation of Aryanism and Indian symbols. The need for these activities stresses the fact that strategic uses-of-the-past can have unintended consequences and require ongoing revisions to deal with newly emerging rhetorical frictions.

The case shows that skilful rhetorical history work requires a diverse arsenal of techniques. Organizational actors developed these capabilities over time. German managers, for example, learned to give more attention to the different actors involved in the process of history maintenance and invested in collaborative efforts with them. Not only did German companies join forces in designing historical narratives for India but they also cooperated with the local German consulate, which took on a leading role as intermediary. Organizational actors also acquired skills in how to design narratives, making them understandable for the targeted audience in content and language,

for example by explicitly employing Indian terminology and highlighting joint challenges in India and Germany. To do so, they needed comprehensive business intelligence, in which the larger German companies in India increasingly invested.

Conclusion

Rhetorical context is not just a background or environment to be included into rhetorical history studies. Systematically incorporating context requires rethinking some of the fundamental assumptions of rhetorical history. Shifting the unit of analysis from the autonomous claim to the dialogue incorporates multiple actors and a series of collaborative practices, thus moving from 'history as told' to 'history as experienced'. Moving the focus of rhetorical history research from analysing claim-making to exploring revisionist processes puts a new emphasis on the sequence of narratives and their design as counterclaims, which can only be studied over longer time frames. Incorporating the rhetorical frictions produced by multi-layered contexts extends analytical attention from the initial production of an historical narrative to the continuous efforts necessary to maintain it in the context of dynamic change.

Follow-on work could consider several issues raised about the role of context in rhetorical history. More research is needed to unpack the mechanisms by which organizational actors maintain rhetorical histories. Likewise, scholars could further explore which rhetorical capabilities organizations develop that allow them to deal with maintenance challenges and how organizations differ in their portfolio of rhetorical capabilities. This would address why some organizations are more successful at history management than others and are able to map specific capabilities to particular rhetorical challenges. Studying not just the emergence of rhetorical histories but their maintenance over time will require more detailed case studies over a range of empirical contexts, time periods and geographies.

Expanding rhetorical history scholarship beyond the confines of developed Western countries and seeing the production of history from various geographical points of view will inevitably increase the attention to context and allow for a discussion of the intertwined relationship between historical claim-making and specific elements of context.

One way to expand the methodological toolbox for context-sensitive analysis is bringing historical methods into the study of rhetorical history. It would involve stretching out the spans of time analysed by rhetorical history research, as we consider how historical claims evolve. The development would require pushing further not only into how organizations use the past but also into how scholars could use historical methods to examine this process, ultimately calling for more interdisciplinary research projects. Contextualization hence stretches rhetorical history beyond its origins and offers us the opportunity to reimagine how and why the past is made present.

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Appendix Ia. Overview of Sources: Archival Collections and Individual Files Directly Quoted.

	Type of sources	Actors authoring these sources
Corporate archives		
Bayer Corporate Archives, short: BA (including I.G. Farben)	Internal reports, correspondence, business analyses, marketing material	German business
Siemens Corporate Archives, short: SAA	Internal reports, correspondence, business analyses, marketing material	German business
Krupp Corporate Archives	Internal reports, correspondence, marketing, statistical material	German business
Government archives		
Bundesarchiv [Federal Archives] Berlin, short: BArch	Correspondence German government – companies, correspondence German Foreign Office with Consulate Calcutta, reports by different state officials	German government and business
Politisches Archiv Auswaertiges Amt [German Foreign Office Archives], Berlin, short: PA	Correspondence German Government with German companies in India and German consulates, reports, war-related materials, relationships to Great Britain/British Empire policy, German racial policy reports	German government and business
British Library	'D I B's reports on activities of Germans, Italians and Japanese in India'	British intelligence observing German business
National Archives and Record Administration US, short: NARA	Reports by US consulates and travelers in India, investigations in Germany's international business and I.G. Farben	US government representatives observing business
National Archives of India, short: NAI	Reports on the Indian independence movement	Indian nationalists
West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata	British reports on Indian nationalism, primarily prior to 1914	British government observing Indian nationalists
Other sources		
Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford	German newspaper clippings on India, collection by US-based academics researching India and German-Indian relations	German journalists observing India (nationalism)
Subhas Bose [Indian nationalist with strong ties to Germany] Collected Works	Correspondence	Indian nationalists
National Library Calcutta	Indian Newspapers, reports on nationalism	Indian nationalists and journalists
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin [Library]	Newspaper 'The German in India', 1936– 39 and 'Industrial Review', 1923– 26	German business in India
Center for South Asian Studies, Cambridge	Indian nationalist newspapers	Indian nationalists and journalists

Appendix Ib

Primary Sources Directly Referenced

Siemens Corporate Archives (short: SAA)

- SAA 4286 Siemens India Ltd. Calcutta, Annual Report 1931/1932, 31 March 1932, with appendices.
- SAA 8109 Foreign Business Organization: Memos of Prince of Baroda visit, 7 August 1931.
- SAA 8109 Foreign Business Organization: Results of Ottawa Conference, 1932.
- SAA 8133 Siemens India Ltd. Calcutta, Annual Report 1938/39, 31 May 1939, with appendices.
- SAA 8150 Foreign Business Statistical Reports.
- SAA 8156 Siemens Abroad 1913– 1940, file: Siemens India Ltd. Calcutta Board Meetings, Meeting of 24 December 1924.
- SAA 9470 Human Resources, Calcutta, 1925– 1939, Correspondence of General Administration Overseas Office with Siemens India Ltd. regarding human resource issues, Letter Siemens India to Siemens, 24 January 1931.
- SAA Directory Foreigner, showing Indian interns.

Bayer Corporate Archives (short: BA)

- BA 82/1 India General 1888– 1984: Macroeconomic Analyses.
- BA 191/1.3 East Asia Travel reports 1937/1938: Travel report by Anton Reithinger, India 1937, dated 12 December 1937.
- BA 330/596 Southeast Asia Internees, 1939– 1944: Report by N. O. Tera on internment in India during World War I [undated].
- BA 330/1111 Reorganization British India, 1926– 1939, letter Havero India to I.G., 15. August 1938.
- BA 330/1124 British India, Macroeconomic Department Berlin, central administration, 1938– 1944: Report by the Macroeconomic Department.

Krupp Corporate Archives (short: KA)

- KA FAH 23-FAH 4 C 170 Private secretariat Krupp von Bohlen Halbach, Files pertaining to East India, 1933–1937, Memo on visit of Tata directors, 19 July 1935.

Bundesarchiv [Federal Archives] Berlin (short: BArch)

- BArch R/901/13404.

Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt [German Foreign Office Archives], Berlin (short: PA)

- PA R 77414 Political Relationship between India and Germany, Letter 16 August 1925 and enclosed article by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.
- PA R 77416 Political Relationship between India and Germany:
 - Letter Consulate General Calcutta to Foreign Office Berlin, 7 June 1933.
 - Letter Sanitas to Foreign Office Berlin, 20 July 1933.
 - Urchs' speech, enclosed with letter from Consulate General Calcutta to Foreign Office Berlin, 13 September 1933.
- PA R 77462 Political and Cultural Propaganda 1926–1936:
 - Leaflet 'Education in Germany', 1929.
 - Series of lists showing the growing number of articles in the Indian press supporting a German-friendly version of Indo-German history.

- PA R 104777 Political Relationship between India and Germany 1936–1939:
 - Memorandum Hentig 17 December 1937.
 - Letter of Consulate General Calcutta to Foreign Office, with enclosed statement by Jain, 25 March 1939.

British Library, India Office Records (short: IOR)

- Public and Judicial Department Files, 1913–1947, IOR/L/PJ/12/506, ‘D I B’s reports on activities of Germans, Italians and Japanese in India’, Survey No. 19 of 1939 for the week ending 16th September, 1939.

National Archives of India (short: NAI)

- NAI, Home Dept. Pol. 33/6 Note by Director of Intelligence Bureau 16 February 1931.

West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata (short: WBSA)

- West Bengal State Archives POL. (Pol.) F. No. (J)/1905 Report on the Agitation.

Center for South Asian Studies, Cambridge, Microfilm collection of nationalist newspapers

- Suresh C. Paul, ‘Letters to the Editors.’ In *Advance* 20 July 1933, p. 3.
- Nath. Goyal, ‘Indians in Germany.’ In *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 November 1934, p. 12.
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