Introduction

This chapter will draw on a historical investigation to argue that naturalizing the ‘illiberal-rogue nexus’ commits an ontological fallacy and removes from sight ‘the very practice in which states or regimes are labeled as rogues and subjected to specific disciplinary regimes’ (see the Introduction to this volume). So far, the ‘rogue state’ literature (for example, Caprioli and Trumbore 2005, Klare 1995, Lennon and Eiss 2004, Litwak 2000, 2007) predominantly depicts ‘rogues’ as states which not only sponsor terrorism and seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction, but at an underlying level, as actors with domestic structures that are at odds with liberal-democratic norms (for example, Becker 2005, Hoyt 2000, Nincic 2005, O’Reilly 2007, Rubin 1999). Regime types are tied to international security on the basis that domestic oppression and international aggression are both argued to be rooted in the intrinsic qualities of illiberal regime structures. Generally ‘un-free’ non-democratic political organization is said to lead to non-consensual and forceful means of domestic governance which are then reflected in threatening behavior internationally. ‘Without the checks and balances of a democratic system or the constraints of large-scale bureaucracies, rogue regimes are [argued to be] subject to the whims of charismatic individuals’ (Tanter 1998: 16–17). In short, ‘rogues’ are viewed as being ‘more likely to oppress their own people, [as well as to] threaten their neighbors’ (Lake 1993), because they are illiberal. As such, ‘how states treat their own populations’ (Homolar 2011: 271) is determined by regime structures which also inform foreign policy behavior.
Democratic decision-makers are in turn prone to establish a ‘we-they logic’ in regard to illiberal ‘rogues’ ‘on the grounds of institutional (for example, decision-making) and cultural (for example, intolerance) deficiencies’ (O’Reilly 2007: 311). While such a perspective brings with it the risk of narrowing down diplomatic openings (Sharp 2009: 211) by marking states as ‘irredeemably evil’ (Heisbourg 2004: 16) at the level of foreign policy, the theoretically more pressing issue is that the widespread acceptance of such arguments has led to a naturalization of what can be termed a ‘illiberal-rogue nexus’.1

While recent critical approaches to the study of ‘rogue states’ have convincingly underscored the constructed character of ‘rogues’, the link between illiberalism and ‘being a rogue’ has not been problematized extensively. But explicating the historically contingent character of this link is especially important for constructivist (and arguably English School) approaches, as naturalizations are at odds with their underlying ontological and epistemological commitments. This chapter therefore engages the ‘illiberal-rogue nexus’ from a historical perspective and seeks to show that it reflects contemporary political processes rather than ontological necessities. In order to add to the growing critically inclined literature studying deviance in international relations (Finnemore 2003, Homolar 2011, this volume; for an English School take, cf. Sharp 2009), the chapter at hand has two main tasks.

First, the following study seeks to demonstrate that the concept of ‘rogue’ is not tied to illiberal regime types by necessity, but through continual re-enactment. The notion of ‘rogue state’ adopted here signals that states are constructed as being intrinsically threatening and as being banished from international society in a stigmatized fashion (Derrida 2005: 133). ‘Rogues’ are therefore qualitatively different from rivals or enemies in that they are understood as being outside the international order, occupying the position of evil or the diabolical (Derrida 2005: 137). This spatial allocation arguably allows for special measures to be applied in relation to these states which are beyond redemption. Rather than treating ‘rogues’ in terms of pre-given categories with certain (contested) characteristics, this chapter underscores the constructedness and historical variability of ‘rogue states’ by pointing to a process in which liberalism was linked to intrinsic threat and liberal states actually acquired a ‘rogue state’ status. The possibility of liberal ‘rogues’ underscores that regime structures and therefore inherent qualities cannot easily serve to ‘define rogue states by any set of objective criteria’ (see the Introduction to this volume).