ON DEALING WITH EVILDOING IN VISUAL POLITICS THROUGH REFLEXIVE LENSES

LIDANDO COM A CONSTRUÇÃO DO MAL NA POLÍTICA VISUAL ATRAVÉS DE LENTES REFLEXIVAS

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this article revolves around a reflexive perspective on the logic and practice of evildoing in the realm of visual politics. For this to happen, reflexivity becomes the main method of analysis with the aim of questioning how security practices come into being through visual, spoken and written discourses of Other. Dealing with evildoing in visual politics through reflexive lenses means to advance critical readings on identity formation, beginning with the understanding that relations of Self and Other are constructed according to interactions of dialogues historically implemented by visual and representational processes of mediation and strategies of depiction. In this connection, aiming to open up a debate about evildoing and visual politics, this article calls attention to the fact that "speaking security" by means of visuality makes part of a politics of offence that is intentionally articulated by those actors possessing power over representational practices. In doing so, the present article is concerned with the dynamics of visual politics, once these dynamics serve to promote security practices aimed at creating existential threats in the sense of suspending the normal rules of politics and achieving power interests of privileged actors of IR. This considered, the following investigation is broadly divided into three parts, whereby the chains between them are carefully drawn. The first briefly explains what evildoing in visual politics is. The second part gives special attention to reflexivity in social inquiries. The third brings into light empirical cases of evildoing and their double standard.

Keywords: evildoing, visual politics, reflexivity, identity formation, double standard.

RESUMO

O tema deste artigo gira em torno de uma perspectiva reflexiva sobre a lógica e a prática do "evildoing" (construção do mal) no domínio da política visual. Para que isto aconteça, a reflexividade se torna o principal método de análise que tem como objetivo questionar como as práticas de segurança surgem por intermédio de discursos visuais, oratórios e escritos do Outro. Lidar com "evildoing" na política visual através de lentes reflexivas significa avançar com leituras críticas referentes a formação de identidades, a começar pelo entendimento de que as relações do Eu e do Outro são construídas de acordo com interações de diálogos historicamente implementadas por processos visuais e representacionais midiáticos e estratégias de exposição. Nesse sentido, visando debater sobre a construção do mal na política visual, este artigo chama atenção para o fato de que "falar segurança" por meio da visualidade também faz parte de uma política de ofensa que é intencionalmente articulada pelos atores que possuem poder sobre as práticas representacionais. Ao fazer isso, o presente artigo se preocupa com a dinâmica da política visual, uma vez que ela serve para promover práticas de segurança destinadas a criar ameaças existenciais no sentido de suspender as regras normais da política e alcançar os interesses dos atores mais privilegiados nas RI. Tendo isto em vista, a seguinte investigação se divide em três partes dentro das quais as correntes que as ligam são cuidadosamente traçadas. A primeira parte explica o que são a prática e lógica do "evildoing" e a política visual. A segunda dá a devida atenção à reflexividade nas investigações sociais. A terceira e última parte traz à tona alguns casos empíricos de "evildoing" e suas características de dois pesos e duas medidas.

Palavras-chave: construção do mal, política visual, reflexividade, formação de identidades, dois pesos e duas medidas.

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INTRODUCTION

Rather than focusing on the causes of events and phenomena in the politics of international relations, this article intends to explore the constitutive questions over the construction of security meanings and identity formation through visuality, discursive practices and performance. Following a more critical reading of security, this article tasks itself with comprehending how the practice of evildoing comes into being in visual politics. More importantly, the article aims to look at some empirical cases of evildoing in visual politics through reflexive lenses, an interesting exercise that still receives little attention within the international relations academic community. As the theoretical and empirical arguments explored in the course of this article attempt to demonstrate, dealing with evildoing through reflexive lenses means to bridge critical security conceptions to visual and communication studies, thus promoting a particular interest in mediation and its power dynamics. For this to happen, the first part of this article revolves around a basic definition of evildoing in visual politics within the realms of international relations and security.

When it comes to further exploring the security practices in visual politics, the main personalities of the critical security school are brought into light, so that an accessible explanation about the exclusionary characteristic of evildoing can be made. Also, debates opened up by scholars like Roland Bleiker are taken into consideration, hence helping us to understand that visual politics delineates what we see and what we do not. Such an understanding leads us to further advocate towards a reflexive perspective.

Following this line of thought, the second part draws upon reflexivity to explain identity formation and the Self-Other dichotomy. It is intended to offer an interpretative locus on mediation, along with a focus on the constructions of opposing identities due to visual interactions of dialogue between them. The third part exposes empirical cases that demonstrate the double standard of evildoing, whereby the violations of individual liberties committed by Western governments tend to receive less attention from Western media and policymakers compared to the violations committed by non-Western leaders. The main goal is to trace evidence that would prove that evildoing is not only about creating threatening evils through visual mechanisms, but also about reinforcing the Self. This idea is pushed into

the limit by the observation of empirical evidence that form the security language of evil-doers.

WHAT IS EVILDOING IN VISUAL POLITICS?

Evildoing is a common logic and practice performed by those actors possessing power over representational procedures. Evildoing could also be best understood as a deliberate act of security that comes into being through a politics of offence articulated by a 'Benevolent-Self' that, appropriating Andrew Linklater´s words, "(…) can hijack cosmopolitan discourse and harness it to their specific cause" (Linklater, 2007: 194). As this article intends to show, the politics of offence can make use of cosmopolitan discourses and visual procedures to create depreciative representations of an Evil-Other. By creating the image of an Evil-Other, the politics of offence brings the evildoing into existence. Any political leader, or executive and editors of influential communication channels can be a propositive actor of evildoing responsible for, and once again borrowing Andrew Linklater´s words, "(…) the rhetorical employment of the idea of ´civilization´ against evil" (Linklater, 2007: 194).

More importantly, one cannot address the question of evildoing without considering the importance of visual politics. Both evildoing and visual politics are practices that complement each other in the construction and reproduction of knowledge about security-related issues. Fundamentally, the practice of evildoing through the articulation of visual representations reveals to be a biased and exclusionary mechanism of doing security and that shapes our understandings of IR in a basic, primitive and narrow logic of state-survival. Evildoing through visual politics might also confine us around and within what Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde referred to as "securitization game" (Buzan; Waever; de Wilde, 1998: 22). For Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, this securitization game is "(…) perceived by the practitioners as concerning existential threats to their survival, and as emergency actions in the sense of suspending the normal rules" (Buzan; Waever; de Wilde, 1998: 22).

In this game of creating threats through security narratives, the visual plays a crucial role. Advancing the debate on what she referred to as "visual securitization," Lene Hansen argues that the visual "(…) does not speak security by itself but is dependent upon someone or somebody who holds that the image demonstrates a threat-defense urgency and call for an

immediate response" (Hansen, 2011: 53). In this context, the actors playing the game by appealing to visuality might be seeking to, as Andrew Linklater asserts, "(…) disguise self-interested motives and make their promotion palatable" (Linklater, 2007: 78).

Lene Hansen argues that "not all iconic images securitize, of course, but some do" (Hansen, 2011: 55). For Hansen, "by making an inter-visual reference, an image is situated within an intertextual, too" (Hansen, 2011: 55). In cases that images serve as securitizing tools, the spectators are led to think of security as a something good, and the security narratives make them also think that emergency measures (such as military intervention) would be the right antidote against an evil that often threatens and put into risk the survival of the Western civilization. Within this logic, security came to be thought as too easily a good thing able to promote democratic values and bring peace to humanity. In reality, what security comes to produce is, as Andrew Linklater highlights, "(…) a securitization game with higher risks of cultural imperialism, instability and intervention" (Linklater, 2007: 78).

As the cases of military interventions and excessive use of force that are explored here demonstrate, security came to be seen as something good because of the way the actors possessing power over representational practices decided to think, behave, speak, and act in relation to issues such as human rights, terrorism, and migration. But this has been only exacerbating human suffering and complex emergencies. That is why the notion of the securitization game should be challenged. For the realists, their basic conclusion about the securitization game is that competition and insecurity are, as argued by Stephen Walt, "(…) inevitable conditions for states coexisting in anarchy" (Walt, 2010: 8). However, the critique concerning this conclusion of the securitization game lies for Walt in the argument that "(…) the picture of restless security competition constantly portrayed by (neo)realism is, at best, incomplete and, at worst, dangerously self-fulfilling" (Walt, 2010: 8).

Alexander Wendt also summarizes the IR critical framework as comprised by a range of alternative approaches that, though their different lines of subject and analysis, share the common argument that "(…) civil societies tend to act towards objects on the basis of the meanings that sovereign states have found for them" (Wendt, 1995: 135). Eventually, one of these meanings is evildoing. With the help of visual resources of representation, the very practice of evildoing is responsible for keeping track of the progress of the so-called

securitization game. Nevertheless, for the evil-doers to succeed in creating the evil and achieving their power interests, they ought to convince their audiences about the existential threats to their survival, so that emergency actions could be put into practice.

To define the dynamics of evildoing and how it affects societies' political attitudes, it is important to bear in mind Andrew Linklater's words regarding the security language and discourses of Other. Linklater is convinced that this language is a "(…) reference to the differences between one's own civilized ways and others savage practices" (Linklater, 2015: 41). He also takes as an example the practice and system of slavery, alleging that "(…) it was once legitimate to use a security language that is now a sharp reminder of the discredited colonial age" (Linklater, 2015: 41). This security language still persists in today's world politics, but under other conditions and practices, disguised by modern terms, principles, values and doctrines, in particular terrorism and humanitarian intervention. According to Andrew Linklater´s argument, "(…) the principles that developed in one civilization continue to shape world politics, suggesting that the international order has outgrown the West, but it has not outgrown the Western civilization" (Linklater, 2015: 42).

As one may observe in this article, evildoing and its politics of offence consist of creating existential threats in the sense of suspending the normal rules of politics for achieving, safeguarding and preserving the interests of those privileged actors possessing power over representational practices. Moreover, the rhetorical choice for the construction of threats is discursive. That is to say, to constitute something as threatening means to invoke security discourses of danger, consequently situating something as of a particular importance to the threatened Self (Buzan; Hansen, 2009). In this case, the Self can be best understood and described as an ideology of the liberal democratic, peace-loving, benevolent warrior state presented as the height of human progress. The Self is an ideology that is always dependent on the social practices to ensure its continued existence (Kirkpatrick, 2017).

This considered, evildoing transcends securitization. It goes beyond securitization because it requires visuality to create threatening evils and reinforce the Self. This is the first step one should take to understand evildoing, i.e., grasping that the visual might help discursive narratives to assess a threat through a moral reasoning. This moral reasoning leads us, the audience, to believe that the Self has the duty to bear arms to defeat the evils as well as to

maintain the world order. For this reasoning to triumph, evil-doers tend to appeal to visual politics. They are aware that only the cards of visual politics can be used to convince the audience that the Self is engaged in a defense of a higher order.

When it comes to critically analyzing the visual politics, Roland Bleiker borrows Jacques Rancière's argument, highlighting the fact that "(…) images are political in the most fundamental sense: they delineate what we see and what we do not, how politics is perceived, sensed, framed, articulated, carried out and legitimized" (Bleiker, 2018: 4). Sharon Sliwinski also contends that "(…) images function like stage material of a grand, tragic play – hence providing the medium through which world spectators exercise their capacity to imagine humanity as one entity" (Sliwinski, 2018: 175). However, it is important to understand that images (and particularly those depicting pain and human suffering) never simply speak of humanity. A basic critical reading regarding visuality in world politics would be that images rather speak within political, institutional, and technological contexts that are able to make universal claims to truth and ethics (Chouliaraki; Orwicz; Greeley, 2019).

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects about the usage of images by evil-doers in their haggling of world politics consists of the "false purpose" on providing the spectators the capacity to imagine humanity as one entity. It can be considered a "false purpose" because images might be used as a political mechanism by evil-doers in their attempts to shape spectators` imagination and attitudes concerning security-related issues. As this article intends to demonstrate, along with their discursive practices, the propositive actors of evildoing make benefit from visual politics (i.e., the usage of images for political aims) to convince their audience about prearranged claims of truth, security, ethics, and humanity as one entity. Metaphorically speaking, and for a better understanding of the dynamics of visual politics, evildoing through the usage of images could be one of the main practices responsible for contributing to the development of what the French philosopher and filmmaker Guy Débord famously referred to as the "Society of the Spectacle" (Débord, 2002).

In Débord's "Society of the Spectacle," a falsified reality could be produced to promote alienation in the audience. His analogy with spectacle helps us to get a better idea of visual politics. Guy Débord explains that "the spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real

product of the reality" (Débord, 2002: 4). For Débord, "the reciprocal alienation is the essence and support of the existing society" (Débord, 2002: 4). In closing his argument, Débord convincingly highlighted that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is rather a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (Débord, 2002: 4).

Guy Débord's might lead us to consider the fact that thoughts and attitudes of an alienated society play a key role in authorizing authoritarian implementation of state power. In this dynamics, visual politics becomes an indispensable component, particularly because of its capacity to promote modes of conduct. This dynamic is not new, what is new is the unprecedented speed that visual representations circulate nowadays and the virtual and geographical reach they have. In Roland Bleiker`s words, "(…) this is first way which the politics of images has changed fundamentally" (Bleiker, 2018: 5). Roland Bleiker firmly summarizes that "in today`s digital world, a photograph or a video can reach audiences worldwide immediately after it has been taken" (Bleiker, 2018: 5).

In this context, since images of many forms of violence, like war and conflicts, began to be mediated by the mass media, Western political leaders saw the opportunity to make benefit of those images and improve their security narratives. As the liberal idea gained force during the post-Cold War period, Western political leaders decided to work with media organizations to pave the way for the establishment of a visual politics capable of engaging dominant liberal capitalist states in conflicts against Evil-Others under cosmopolitan and humanitarian credentials. The purpose of the visual politics was to gain support of the public sphere by creating discourses and representations of evils to reinforce a sense of humanity that was supposed to belong to what Western politicians, academics and policymakers called as the "global civil society" based on human rights and cosmopolitan principles.

Right after the end of the Cold War, as Lilie Chouliaraki reminds us, "(…) CNN or BBC addressed the spectator as a global citizen of the 'be the first to know' or 'putting news first' type" (Chouliaraki, 2006: 61). Then, as a consequence of the news broadcasts aimed at reinforcing the sense of a global civil society, there was the reproduction of what Lilie Chouliaraki comes to describe as "(…) the certain version of world order, defined by space-times of safety, danger and hierarchies of human life" (Chouliaraki, 2006: 61). According to Lilie Chouliaraki's conclusion, "mediation became a governmental technology, which was

neither purely regulatory nor purely benign, consequently combining the exercise of rule by promoting modes of conduct" (Chouliaraki, 2006: 61). In more general words, the power of mediation came to serve as a source for the visual politics to reproduce hierarchies and shape our political imagination about opposing identities of the Self and Other.

It is possible to argue that in virtue of its power of mediation, the visual politics affected our political imagination and attitudes by creating modes of conduct, in ways that it became quite acceptable for us to believe that Western states could easily deal with existential threats by appealing to the unnecessary and excessive use of force. Piers Robinson argues, for example, that "the underlying premise of the CNN effect was that advocacy journalism was both transforming the conduct of states and underpinning a fledgling norm of 'humanitarian' intervention" (Robinson, 2018: 62). More importantly, Piers Robinson contends that "(…) the ensuing challenge was to explore how a post-Cold War global media environment was shaping the global power regulations" (Robinson, 2018: 62).

Speaking of the media's capacity to shape the global power regulations in the post-Cold War period, Susan Sontag takes an interesting example of the Western media coverage during the Bosnian War, an international armed conflict that took place between 1992 and 1995. Sontag contends that "the first idea is that public attention is steered by the attentions of the media – which means, and most decisively, images" (Sontag, 2003: 81). Having this idea in mind, she reminds us of the fact that "(…) the feeling that something had to be done about the war in Bosnia was built from the attentions of journalists" (Sontag, 2003: 81). Sontag reinforced Robinson`s argument about the CNN effect by giving the example of the Bosnian War. According to Sontag´s observation about this case, "(…) the CNN effect, as it was sometimes called, brought the images of Sarajevo under siege into hundreds of millions of living rooms night after night for more than three years" (Sontag, 2003: 81).

The Western massive media coverage of the war in Bosnia illustrates what Susan Sontag interestingly referred to as "(…) the determining influence of images in shaping what catastrophes and crises we pay attention to, what we care about, and what evaluations are attached to these conflicts" (Sontag, 2003: 81). Not only the Bosnian case, but also the many other cases explored in the course of this article demonstrate that the power of mediation performed by those propositive actors of evildoing became customary in the post-Cold war

period. Operating as a governmental and media technology, the visual politics performed by Western political leaders and mass media organizations was able to improve the security narratives by persuading the spectators about the legitimacy of humanitarian/interventionist policies against the Other whose being is different than the Self.

In closing the argument, Piers Robinson explores the fact that "one of the key findings of research into the CNN effect and the humanitarian interventions during the 1990s was that seemingly apolitical and altruistic, interventions were based on selfish national interests" (Robinson, 2018: 66). These research findings continued to be noted in the last decades in conflicts in the Third World as evildoing in visual politics could play a substantial role in justifying the use of force for achieving the interests of the West. A definition of evildoing through visual representational practices is that it entrenches power relations manifested by spectacles involving opposing identities. According to Roland Bleiker, for example, "representation is always an act of power" (Bleiker, 2001: 515). This power is, in Bleiker's viewpoint, "(…) at its peak if a form of representation is able to disguise both its subjective origins and values" (Bleiker, 2001: 515). However, it is quite impossible to formulate this argument without appealing to a basic reflexive perspective.

TOWARDS A MORE REFLEXIVE PERSPECTIVE

The notion of reflexivity has been so intimately tied to the critique of Positivism. Though reflexivity has been addressed from a theoretical, meta-theoretical and epistemic-normative perspective, recent "reflexive scholarship" has been concerned with the importance and practical meaning of reflexivity for empirical IR. This suggests the existence of some belief among post-Positivist scholars that reflexivity can lead to an alternative research program capable of producing a different knowledge of world politics, and of generating a cognitive growth in the traditional sense of the term (Hamati-Ataya, 2013). This alternative research program embeds a variety of sub-disciplines and approaches of IR critical theory, from post-modernism and post-colonialism to queer studies and feminism.

However, for the purposes of this article, reflexivity is the foundational source towards a comprehensive and critical view of the knowledge and meanings at play in the practices of evildoing through visuality. This assumption might also lead us to think of Roland Bleiker's

article called “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory” (Bleiker, 2001). In this article, Roland Bleiker explains what he referred to as the aesthetic turn by highlighting the notion that “aesthetics approaches have initiated an important process of broadening our understanding of world politics beyond a relatively narrow academic discipline that has come to entrench political problems it seeks to address and solve” (Bleiker, 2001: 510).

In the aesthetics turn, Bleiker believes that “we need to employ the full register of human perception and intelligence to understand the phenomena of world politics and to address the dilemmas that emanate from them” (Bleiker, 2001: 519). Thus, one of the key challenges for Bleiker “(…) consists of legitimizing a greater variety of approaches and insights to world politics. Aesthetics is an important and necessary addition to our interpretative repertoire” (Bleiker, 2001: 519). In closing his argument, Bleiker seems convinced about the fact that aesthetics also “(…) helps us understand why the emergence, meaning and significance of a political event can be appreciated only once we scrutinize the representational practices that have constituted the very nature of this event” (Bleiker, 2001: 519). What is striking about Roland Bleiker’s aesthetics turn is the support it gives to the idea that a more reflexive perspective concerning the IR knowledge could be possible.

Furthermore, reflexivity goes beyond the aesthetics by giving a conscious and continuous attention to the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development as long as empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written (Alvesson; Sköldberg, 2000; Guillaume, 2002). In this connection, reflexivity pursues one of the basic purposes of social inquiry in IR, which is, in Andrew Linklater’s words, “(…) to improve upon some commonplace understandings and everyday explanations, whereas reflecting on the complex relations between knowledge and social practice” (Linklater, 1998: 118). Closely associated with social sciences, the reflexive perspective takes into consideration the human consciousness as the subject (whether individually or collectively) of a material world within which it constructs a social and intersubjective world (Guzzini, 2000; Guillaume, 2002).

Any reflexive perspective that pursues the aforesaid purpose of social inquiry might offer a horizon of reference where the knowledge, meanings and practices of evildoing can also be understood as fundamental parts of the power dynamics of visual global politics. This

considered, it is better to aim for reflexivity when it comes to critically analyzing issues surrounding the spectrum of IR and security. This is because reflexivity pursues a more interdisciplinary approach, establishing an eclectic inquiry that highlights the casual relationships between knowledge, meanings and structure. For the sake of critical theory, an interdisciplinary approach helps to question the legitimation of knowledge.

Reflexivity operates hand-in-hand with the post-Positivist tradition of critical theory that problematizes the world interpreted by rationalist-objectivist social science, and it seeks to answer to constitutive questions about the construction, production and the performance of actors and structures (Kirkpatrick, 2015). Speaking of actors' performance, a reflexive perspective also entails a dialogical reading of identities. Essentially, reflexivity looks at identities through the conscious mediation of a hermeneutical locus that an identity is set according to a dialogical network relative to other identities considered as highly relevant by their place in this network (Guillaume, 2002). This argument might lead us to think of IR through a more dialogical dynamic among the identities within the international structure. Therefore, this means looking at the objects of international relations studies through an interpretative and critical locus that pushes the discipline away from the rationalist legacy established by the traditional theories and their epistemologies.

Take as an example Andrew Linklater's definition of IR critical theory. According to his argument, IR critical theory "(…) challenges the positivistic tendency that is pronounced in (neo)realism, of assuming that actions which recognize the power of existing structural constraints are alone in satisfying the criteria of rationality" (Linklater, 1998: 22). He also highlights the fact that "whereas (neo)realism offers an account of the reproduction of the international states-system, critical perspectives seek to identify the prospects for change in global politics – latent though they may be at present" (Linklater, 1998: 22). In doing so, IR critical theory invites human agency to reflect on the possibilities for rethinking the issues surrounding world politics through cognition. For this, IR critical theory ought to rely on reflexivity in order to develop a more cognitive consistency.

Bringing such a cognitive concern to the critical analysis of visual politics, whereby the mediation plays a crucial role in reinforcing the constructed nature of facts and creating knowledge, meanings and identities by representational practices, Roland Bleiker comes to

summarize that "(…) our understanding of terrorism, for example, is intertwined with how images dramatically depicted the events in question, and how these images tend to circulate worldwide" (Bleiker, 2018: 4). Yet in this reading, whereas many take seriously the ability of media to drive and influence foreign policy, others argue the other way around, saying that foreign policy decision makers drive the news media (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Either way, the cognitive concern of reflexivity invites us to reflect on the knowledge that a media saturated world can produce through discursive and visual elements. As convincingly indicated by Roland Bleiker, "images are political forces in themselves. They often shape politics as much as they depict it" (Bleiker, 2018: 3). Bleiker also reminds us about the Hollywood films, which in his argument, "(…) provide us with well-rehearsed and deeply entrenched models of heroes and villains to the point that they could shape societal values" (Bleiker, 2018: 3). Within this context, the seeing and scripting of popular films helped spectators to think of how geopolitical imaginaries work and how friends and allies are distinguished from enemies and Others (Dodds, 2018). Obviously, foreign policy decision makers became well aware of the power of mediation developed by popular films, and they made use of it as a means of communication for evildoing.

Take as an example the visual politics for evildoing performed by the Bush administration. Recognizing the power of popular film, the Bush's advisers were keen to frame the War on Terror as a sort of "black-and-white" story opposing "us" versus "them." This popular visualization of evils stripped them of their humanity and made their killing possible and desirable (Philpott, 2018). This is just one of the empirical examples, among many others explored throughout this article, which proves that visuality helps an utterance to link its discursive dimension to its subjective one, thus enabling the discerning of its figuration of alterity (aka Otherness), and dialogically of its own Self (Guillaume, 2002). According to Roland Bleiker's argument, "images become weapons themselves in a myriad of ways: not solely to protect fear but also to recruit combatants, sway public opinion, guide drones and missiles – in short, to wage visual war" (Bleiker, 2018: 3).

Within this context, the relation between a Self and an Other comes to be transgredient. Transgredience, in this situation, means that a Self establishes a necessary relation with a multitude of Other selves, i.e., a Self alone might not constitute and be itself within its own

realm of existence of the Other. In this reading, it is quite impossible to become truly self-conscious (i.e., to be the one Self) if one does not reveal one's Self to the Other, through the Other and with the help of the Other (Bakhtin, 1984; Guillaume, 2002). A more reflexive perspective consists of thinking how these identities of Self and Other are constructed in accordance with visual interactions and discursive elements.

Any reflexive perspective concerning visual politics would require the focus on such relationality between the Self and Other, where the Self make the Other visible through representational practices. For example, the overwhelming focus on single images of specific crisis, or on small numbers of images and cases might narrow our field of vision and consequently prevent us from envisioning the broader regime of visual politics. In fact, the collective unconscious of a society is made visible by the images it produces and consumes (Brothers, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 2015). In this connection, making claims about visual politics, implicitly if not explicitly, also consists of further exploring the fact that, as Susan Sontag brilliantly comes to summarize, "(…) an image is drained of its force by the way it is used, where and how often it is seen" (Sontag, 2003: 82).

When it comes to the massive coverage of war and conflict, more specifically, the images of human suffering that we see, and the images of suffering that remain unseen to us, are often subject to political governance and power (Kotilainen, 2016). In other words, the images of crises, pain and human suffering that are presented to us in a regular basis through massive media coverage might be also serving as stage material for evildoing in visual politics. Eventually, this process of making crises, pain and suffering visible with the purpose of constructing the image of an Other/Evil corresponds to the phenomenon that was already mentioned by Lene Hansen as "visual securitization" (Hansen, 2011). For this kind of securitization to happen, the visual representations must, as Hansen asserts, "(…) constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defense, or when some securitizing actors argue that images 'speak security'" (Hansen, 2011: 51).

Piers Robinson comes to reinforce this assumption by highlighting the fact that images of suffering, for example, "(…) are brought to our attention because political actors attempt to persuade the audience of the legitimacy of a particular story" (Robinson, 2018: 66). The following section stresses the importance of describing some empirical cases whereby the

practice of visual securitization came to serve the purposes for evildoing in world politics. Ultimately, highlighting some empirical evidence about the fact that visual representations might be presented for securitizing purposes and made to tell particular stories for evildoing should be the matter of concern for any kind of reflexive exercise that a scholar or student of international relations intends to do concerning visuality.

EXPLORING EMPIRICAL CASES

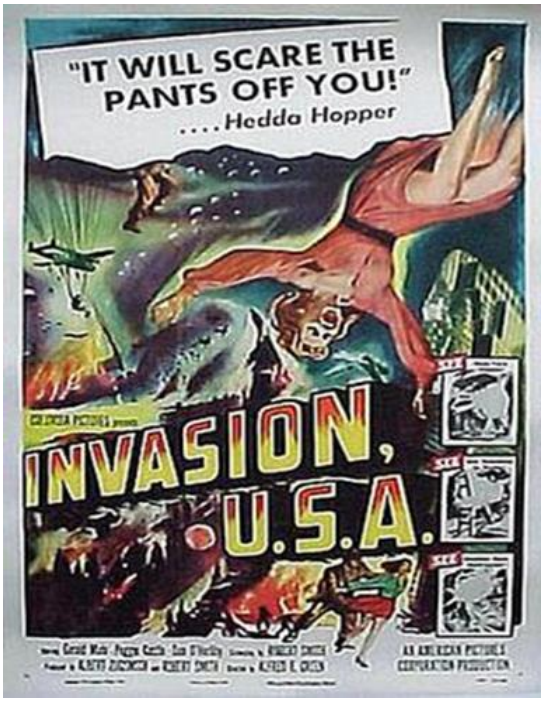
As previously explored, identities are formed by oppositions, whether regional, national or hemispheric, once to value a certain characteristic called Self, there is a devaluation of its antagonist that belongs to the Other. In this connection, constructions of identities permeate narrative disputes, as the same historical fact might have different understandings and, for a given perspective to be accepted as truth, it is sought to erase what converges with it. As discussed in the previous sections, within the Self versus Other panorama, political and journalistic characters contribute to the dichotomy between the Self-superior and the Other-inferior by using an explicit partiality, dealing with similar situations but with distinct approaches. Therefore, in order to capture a better view about this issue, some empirical examples produced after the Second War are worthy of attention.

Eventually, one of the most remarkable empirical cases of evildoing is the Soviet-Other reproduced by the US security narrative during the Cold War. In the context of American security, the construction of the Soviet enemy's discourse was relevant to the ideological framework, where the Soviet expansion was treated as the great evil for the West. The US President Harry Truman played a key role in the demonization of the USSR, as can be demonstrated by his statement "Russians only understood an iron fist." In this regard, the Truman Doctrine was marked by an aggressive approach towards Russia, arousing the US Congress to national security expenditures (Flanagan, 2009).

In the meantime, both sides of the Cold War period have placed considerable importance on film as a means of global and domestic engagement to promote and win the ideological competition between the United States and Soviet Union and reach the hearts and minds of global population. However, the US had an insurmountable advantage in the form of an internationally dominant film industry, in a way that both the production and distribution

processes could not be matched by any other nation (Kateman, 2021). Cinema employed an influence on American life. Hollywood's films were important in portraying the Western identity as the Self-superior. The Soviet threat was represented in a more direct and physical way. Aside from the slew of films warning of nuclear attack, from the 1950s to the 1980s, American cinema also developed a fascination with the Soviet invasion narrative, such as the films "Invasion, USA" (1952), and "Red Dawn" (1984) (Piper-Burket, 2017).

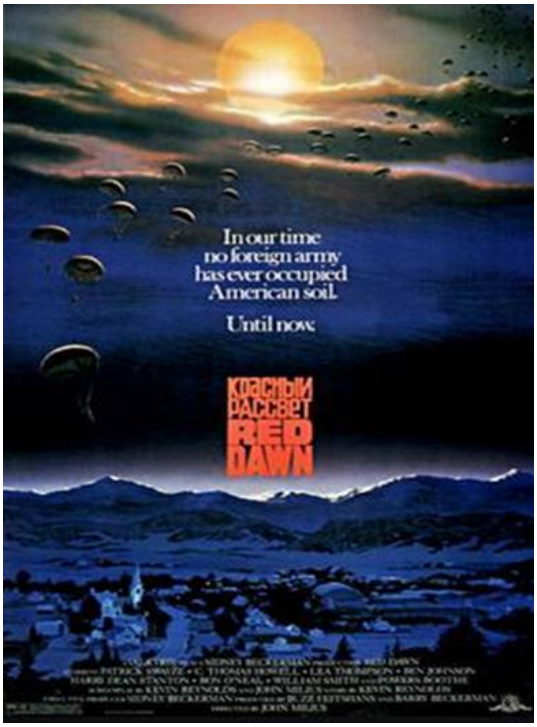
Figure 1: Invasion, USA (1952, film)[3]



Source: American Pictures Corp. /Columbia Pictures

[3] This figure illustrates the release poster of the American drama film "Invasion, USA," set in a Cold War scenario. The film portrays the invasion of the USA by a communist enemy.

Figure 2: Red Dawn (1984, film)[4]

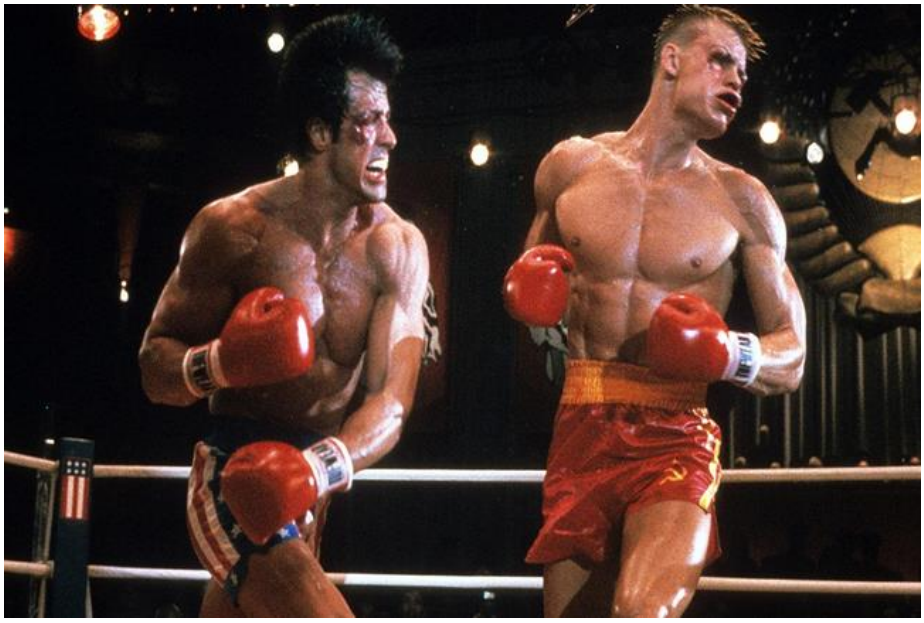


Source: MGM/UA Entertainment Co.

The American film industry throughout the Cold War best represented the foreign policy interests established by the Truman Doctrine by being far and away the most prolific in the world, releasing several hundred movies a year. By the 1950s, for example, more than one hundred of these films explicitly attacked the USSR or Communism (Kateman, 2021). Hollywood embodied the Soviet threat in the physical form of invading armies, but also transcended the brutish Bolshevik beasts. Indeed, the pervading stereotypes were a steely determination and callousness honed with scientific precision. An example is the training sequence in "Rocky IV" (1985). In this montage, we see that the two boxers prepare for the match. As Rocky Balboa runs up snowy mountains and lifts bags of rockets, also helping peasants pick up their overturned carts, Ivan Drago, his Soviet opponent, usually trains on machines in red laser lighting under the watchful eyes of a fleet of scientist evaluating the progress of his every move. Guess who wins? (Piper-Burket, 2017).

[4] This figure illustrates the original poster of the American action film "Red Dawn." The film also depicts an invasion of the USA by the Soviet Union and allies.

Figure 3: Rocky IV – Rocky Vs Drago (1985, film)[5]



Source: MGM/United Artists

Not only in the US, but the British spy James Bond has also made a career out of skirting authority and maintaining a deeply narcissistic attitude. First and foremost, Bond, as other Hollywood heroes, was a white man, presented to the Western popular audiences not just as righteous, but also as sexually desirable (Philpott, 2018). In more general words, whereas offering the trope of Soviet bad guys, the imagery production made sure to perpetuate the character of Western heroes ready to save the world from any threat. No wonder that film industry played a crucial role for evildoing in visual politics in the Cold War, telling the audiences about how their political imagination should work. In today´s world politics, the Soviet-Other created by leaders, media and film industry still influences the Western public opinion towards Russia, while no responsibility is taken for the murder of civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq during the so-called "War on Terror."

[5] This figure illustrates the so-called Final Fight between Rocky Balboa (character performed by Sylvester Stallone) and Ivan Drago (character performed by Dolph Lundgren). To add more drama to the story, and particularly to its political message, the Final Fight takes place in the Soviet Union, where Rocky Balboa had to face a hostile crowd. He ended up knocking out his opponent and giving a victory speech hugged by the American flag in the boxing ring. This scene, as well as the film as a whole, also represents the power of the American hero in defeating the Soviet enemy. In contrast, Rocky Balboa´s antagonist, Ivan Drago, is an arrogant professional boxer who might even deprive of his own humanity to pursue his goal of becoming the best boxer. Eventually, the film has not only used Ivan Drago to vilify the Russian people, but it has also highlighted the victory of Rocky Balboa as the representation of the American power (the Self-superior) overcoming the totalitarian and crumbling regime of the Soviet Union (the Other-inferior).

Speaking of "War on Terror," the negative symbols offered to non-Western leaders have not been limited only to names from the major world powers. Saddam Hussein, for instance, was also a target of evildoing. Throughout his authoritarian regime, from 1979 to 2003, Saddam supported pan-Arabism and the end of European influence in Iraq. At this time, Iraq was involved in the Gulf War, one of the most resonated conflicts by the Western media after the Cold War period, standing out in US news outlets like the New York Times. The figure below illustrates the NYT front page announcing the initial operations carried out by the US and Western allies to expel Saddam's troops from Kuwaiti.

Figure 5: NYT announcing the operations of the Gulf War (newspaper front page, 1991)

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

VOL. CXL ..... No. 48,483 NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 1991 40 CENTS

U.S. AND ALLIES OPEN AIR WAR ON IRAQ; BOMB BAGHDAD AND KUWAITI TARGETS; 'NO CHOICE' BUT FORCE, BUSH DECLARES

A TENSE WAIT ENDS

News of Attack Sweeps the Country, Stirring Profound Feelings

No Ground Fighting Yet; Call to Arms by Hussein

Raids, on a Huge Scale, Seek to Destroy Iraqi Missiles

OTHER NEWS

Gorbachev Is Moving To Muzzle the Press

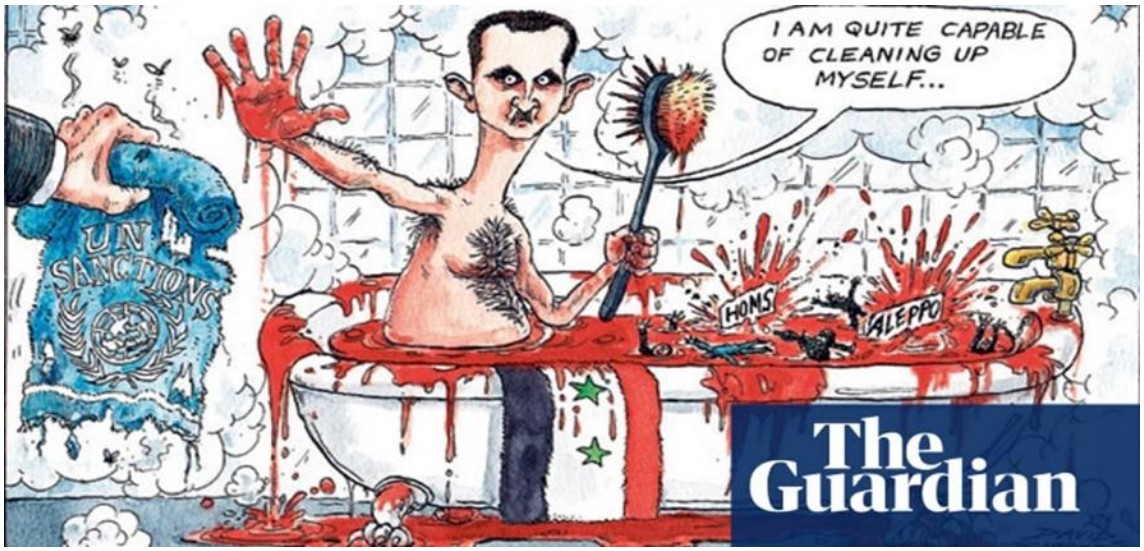
Source: The New York Times

In 1990, the US President George Bush the elder even compared Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler. Bush said that Saddam was more barbaric than Hitler in the attempt to convince the audience about his determination to defeat the Iraq leader. Following this, the media often compared Hussein to Hitler by demonizing him to Western viewers, thus cooperating with prejudice against Arab peoples based on xenophobic caricatures. However, the portray of Saddam Hussein as Hitler became the perfect strategy to display a securitizing move that justified the later interventions (Althaus; Largio, 2004). The fact is that whoever Saddam Hussein was, it is impossible to suggest that he could be compared to Hitler, either in his intentions or in his military capabilities. The scope of Saddam's ambition or the numbers of civilians he killed can never be compared to the atrocities committed by Hitler, nor did his military capabilities. This kind of analogy reveals to be simplified security reasoning very common in the assessments of threats and evils (Stein, 2013).

Nevertheless, attempts to vilify leaders of Middle East countries have not ceased with the aforesaid Saddam´s demonization. The Syrian War was widely documented by the Western media, which was underpinned by the narrative that featured Bashar al-Assad as the great murderer, though the violence was not one-sided. On 20 August 2012, for example, the US President Barack Obama told the press that the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian authoritarian regime would cross the red line, justifying a potential US intervention. As a consequence, the Barack Obama's statement also contributed to the media-created image of Bashar al-Assad as the great killer for the West (Dent, 2020).

In September 2014, the US President Barack Obama also announced his intentions to bomb Syria as an attack against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) without requesting permission from the Syrian government. Only in 2016, for instance, his administration had carried out 12.192 bombings in Syria (Dent, 2020). Of course, the extreme violence of Assad regime should neither be discredited nor questioned. But the demonization through the representation of Bashar al-Assad as the major murderer of the century has received more attention in the news outlets and governments officials' discourses than the Western coalition attacks and blind air strikes in Syria over the last years. It turns out that evildoing was, once again, a mechanism to justify the US and its allies´ military operations, then serving as a pass allowing the West to assert their geopolitical interests in the region.

Figure 6: Assad´s bloodbath (newspaper, 2012)[6]

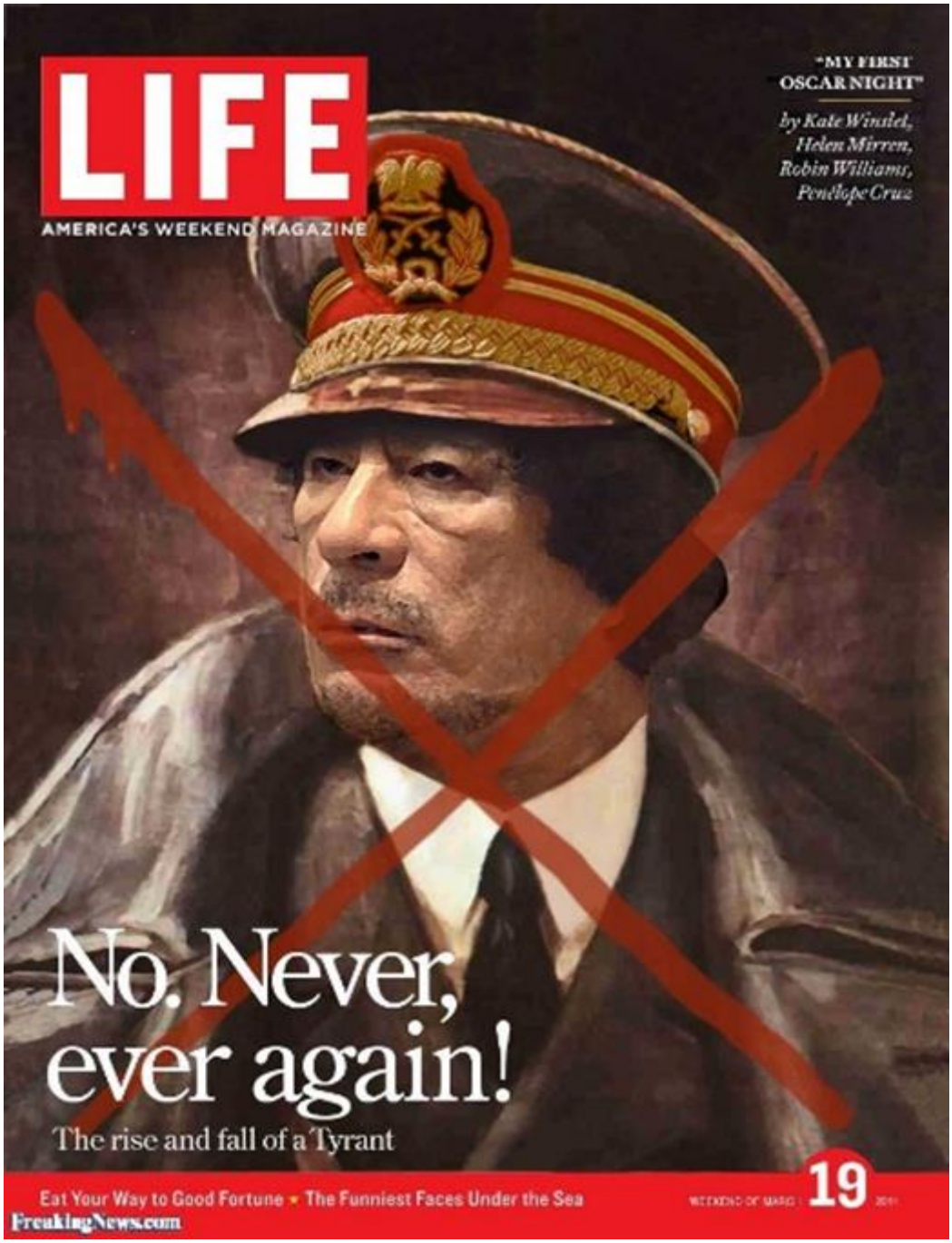


Source: David Simonds/The Guardian

Another case of evildoing in visual politics revolves around the 2011 military intervention in Libya. In March 2011, Barack Obama called Muammar Qaddafi a tyrant, accusing him of denying his people freedom, exploiting their wealth, and terrorizing them. Though Obama's accusations were based on facts, the demonization of Qaddafi has raised doubts about the promotion of liberty and democracy in Libya. The Western-led intervention that came afterwards has exacerbated a complex emergency in the country. In other words, instead of setting the country free from barbarism and violence, the main actors of the intervention, as Robert Murray alleges, "(…) showed themselves for what they are: rational survivalists" (Murray, 2013: 31). More importantly, in their attempts to acquire public support for a new intervention after a decade-long NATO intervention in Afghanistan, those actors that were interested in intervening in Libya have made used of visual representations and security discourses to vilify and demonize Muammar Qaddafi under humanitarian credentials by accusing him of human rights violations against his own people.

[6] Illustration of Bashar al-Assad taking a bloodbath. Since the Syrian uprisings in 2012, Bashar al-Assad has been heavily criticized and accused by Western media and governments officials of being engaged in several crimes and human rights violations. Meanwhile, little is heard from Western influential media circles and government officials´ discourses about the Western coalition attacks and blind air strikes against civilians and humanitarian structures in the Middle East over the last two decades.

Figure 7: The rise and fall of a Tyrant (magazine front page, 2011)[7]



Source: Life Magazine

Muammar Qaddafi should have been held accountable for his several atrocities and crimes. Nonetheless, the process of representing him as the new great evil has also served for the purposes of what Robert Murray firmly defined as "(…) the rational strategy of

[7] This figure illustrates the fall of Muammar Qaddafi, the tyrant who ruled Libya for decades. After his death, Libya became a more insecure state. Under humanitarian credentials and through the demonization of Qaddafi, the 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya has left a legacy that still affects Europe.

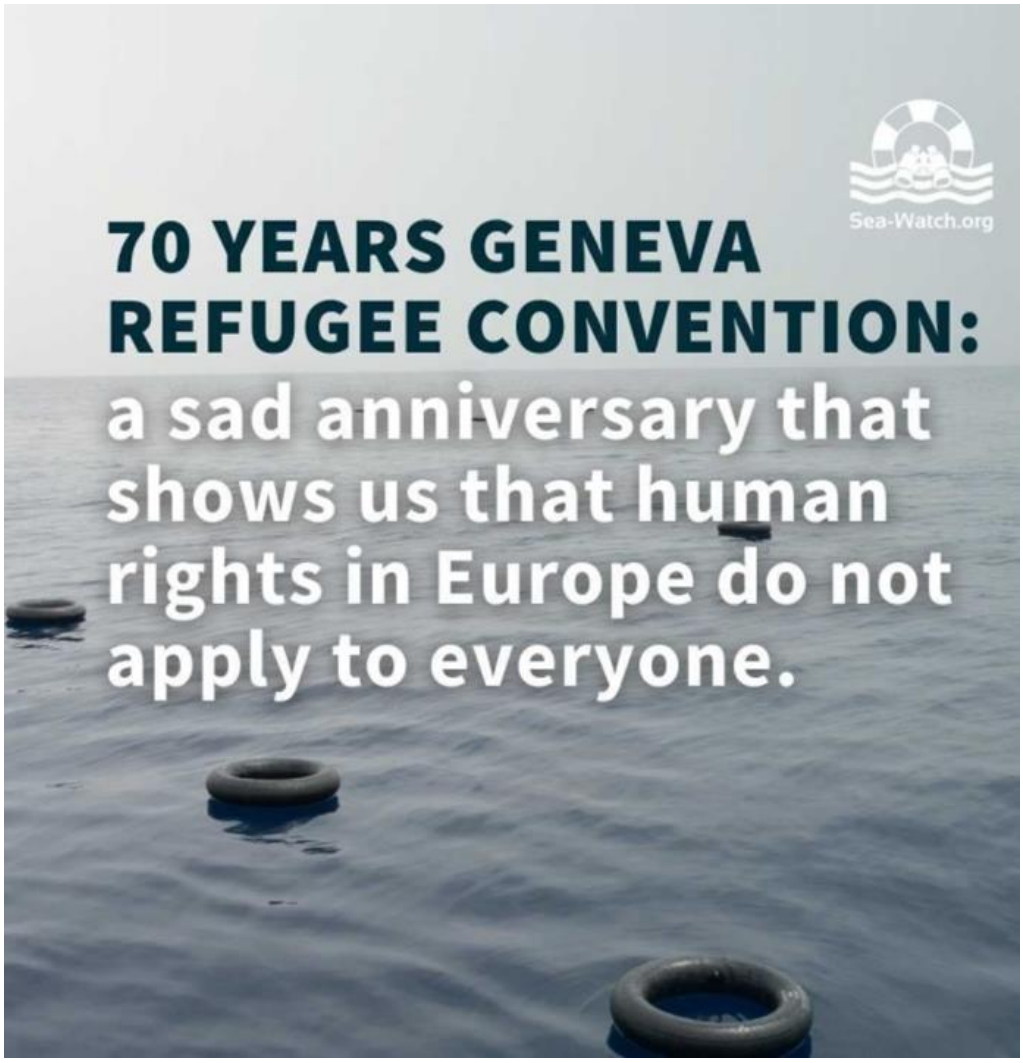
facing with prospect of oil and gold reserves for all those actors direct and indirectly involved in the intervention" (Murray, 2013: 31). Beyond facing with prospect of oil and gold reserves, the Western actors involved in the intervention neglected the complex emergency in the Mediterranean Sea, a direct consequence of their military enterprises that exacerbated the economic and political instability in the region, hence allowing militias to gain control over illicit trade and large migration flows along the maritime borders.

It could be argued that the visible aspect of the 2011 military intervention in Libya was the demonization of the Other and the idealization of the Self, while humanitarian crises and complex emergencies that were aggravated by the intervention received little attention from the European authorities and media outlets. The deplorable migration situation across the Mediterranean Sea in the last years – where thousands of people have been fleeing danger in overcrowded boats in the attempt to reach Europe – has not been largely discussed in public sphere and academic circles, neither have the images of people in distress at high sea been constantly aired in prime time on national televisions around Europe and USA. Unlike the images of the crimes and atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad and Muammar Qaddafi, the images of people in distress at the Mediterranean Sea have not been used to promote the emotional rhetoric against those European authorities that have been neglecting the thousands of lives lost at high sea every year.

Understanding the double standard of evildoing by questioning why this logic and practice is not applied to the West corresponds to the reflexive exercise proposed in this article. The invisibility of the ongoing tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea should invite us to reflect and rethink about the absence of discursive elements within the political, social and academic spheres that question the Western failure to comply with the international law. Despite the multiple denunciations from international associations that point to the precarious treatment offered by the Frontex (the European agency responsible for the EU border management) to those people fleeing danger via Mediterranean Sea routes, we see no concrete and practical evidence coming from politicians and authorities that would make us think they are trying to deal with this tragedy by respecting the law and in a more humane manner. On the contrary, several kinds of NGOs which are specialized in rescue operations at high sea have been frequently facing a range of restrictions from Frontex.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in the Mediterranean Sea continued to deteriorate, with EU authorities and institutions proceeding with their politics of indifference and lack of assistance. A report of the Sea-Watch Organization has detected 4493 people in distress at sea in 2020. This same report has confirmed that, until the end of February 2021, three times as many people have unfortunately died in the Mediterranean Sea routes as the number of days on the calendar (Sea-Watch, 2021).

Figure 8: Human rights in Europe do not apply to everyone (social media post, 2021)[8]



Fonte: SIPRI (2019)

[8] This figure illustrates the activist message of Sea-Watch against the European negligence and mismanagement of migration policies to deal with the migration flows in the Mediterranean Sea. Even though images of people in distress at high sea made the news in 2015 and 2016, they are now barely remembered by the most influential communication channels and European leaders. Aggravated after the 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya that was followed by the demonization of Qaddafi, the migration issue still causes pain and suffering to thousands of migrants every year. The deaths and suffering in the Mediterranean became invisible to us, insofar as images like this one pressuring Europe to apply human rights protection to everyone do not circulate in Western influential media environments in a regular basis.

Ultimately, the increasing numbers of deaths and the dramatic images of people in distress at high sea have not been properly served to create a high emotional rhetoric in the European society against Frontex. This leads us to consider evildoing in visual politics an exclusionary practice that emerges intentionally on some pre-established occasions, and in response only to a small group of authoritarian leaders who happened to threaten the Western geopolitical interests at play in the haggling of international relations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of mediation is essential to understand evildoing in visual politics. As this article intended to demonstrate, opposing identities of the Self and Other are also constituted and reproduced by discursive elements through mediation and performance of those actors possessing power over representational practices. In this process of vilifying the Other by representing it as an existential threat to the Self, visuality plays an important role because it serves as a tool to convince the audience to accept the adoption of emergency measures like military interventions under humanitarian credentials, surveillance and militarization of the national borders, and the use of force against vulnerable groups.

This article explored the fact that a politics of offence has been often produced by Western governments and reproduced by influential media organizations to sustain the practice of evildoing in visual politics. That is to say, for the Self to vilify the Other, a politics of offence should be put into action to create a sort of moral reasoning able to convince most of the audience that the Self has the duty to bear arms to maintain the world order. For this, the evildoers tend to avoid showing the audience their fatal flaws.

This assumption explains the double standard of evildoing in visual politics, whereby the violations of individual liberties committed by Western authorities receive little attention from politicians and news outlets compared to other violations committed by non-Western tyrants. Only by advancing a reflexive perspective that is possible to comprehend the dynamics of evildoing in visual politics and its double standard. This article also sought to illustrate that reflexivity and its critical focus upon the relationality between the Self and Other help us to question the concept of security and its claims by acknowledging

that evildoing is reliant to exclusionary processes of mediation and constructions of identities.

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