

The visual securitarization of a ‘woman in need’ during the 2011 military intervention in Libya

The CNN reporting on Iman al-Obeidi

by Theresa Ogando



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PICTURE

Protesters in Tripoli denounce calls to divide the country into three autonomous regions

Source: Magharebia: 120312 Libya rallies against federalism, division

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ABSTRACT

A week after the NATO-led military intervention in Libya had commenced in March 2011, Iman al-Obeidi stormed into a hotel in Tripoli telling journalists that she had been raped by Gaddafi's fighters. She then was forcefully taken by security personnel. A video of this incident was broadcasted worldwide. It became the visual imagery most frequently replayed by CNN in the context of the Libyan War. CNN continued to follow up on the case of al-Obeidi for months. She became emblematic of the 'Libyan revolution'. This reporting is of interest for analysis because the intervention was based on the Responsibility to Protect - the aim to safeguard civilians. Therefore, the media representation of civilians and human rights abuses by the Gaddafi regime were especially relevant in influencing the public's opinion on the legitimacy of the intervention. I will outline that the CNN's broadcasting on Iman al-Obeidi used a gendered narrative of the 'woman in need' and thereby securitized the situation for Libyan civilians, supporting the legitimization of the 2011 NATO intervention.

KEY WORDS

Libyan War, CNN, securitization, Iman al-Obeidi, representations, gendered narrative

INTRODUCTION

On March 26th, 2011, a week after the NATO-led military intervention in Libya had commenced, Iman al-Obeidi stormed into the Rixos Hotel in Tripoli, Libya. She told international journalists that she had been raped by 15 of Muammar Gaddafi's fighters. An hour later she was carried off from the hotel by security forces and taken into custody. A video of this incident shot by Reuters' reporters was broadcast on TV stations worldwide and went viral (Basu 2012). "In that moment of utter defiance, splashed on television screens everywhere, she became a face of the Libyan revolution, her heroism a source of inspiration [...]" (ibid.). Iman al-Obeidi's story and the following developments in her life were reported in-depth by international media and especially by the US-American Cable News Network (CNN). The video of al-Obeidi at the Rixos hotel was the visual imagery most frequently replayed by the network in the context of the Libyan War in 2011 (Garrio 2012: 129). CNN's reporting is very influential as it is the most widely distributed news channel, reaching households worldwide. In 2011 it had an average monthly viewership of 99,4 million in the US alone (CNN 2011). Not merely was al-Obeidi's case reported on frequently, but the CNN reporters also emphasized the emblematic nature of the case, calling al-Obeidi the "face of the revolution" (Basu 2015).

CNN reporting on al-Obeidi gave audiences around the world a sense of the situation of civilians amid the war in Libya. "How (in)securities are politically recognized increasingly depends on the availability of images and the ways in which we are able to imagine what it means for people to live in war-torn societies" (Heck & Schlag 2012: 893). Media representa-

tions are influential as they provide a background of meanings, which over time indirectly shapes one's understanding of international relations and foreign policy (Weldes 1999: 119).

The reporting on al-Obeidi is of interest for analysis because the military intervention that had just commenced was based on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), with the aim to safeguard civilians (Adams 2012). R2P emerged as a norm after the end of the Cold War. It relies on the idea of two sets of responsibilities: The responsibility a state has for the safety of its citizens and the responsibility of the international society to intervene in case a state fails to fulfill this responsibility (Bellamy 2015: 162-163). The R2P was formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005 by passing resolution 60(1). The resolution entailed that collective action should be taken in cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity and provides the legal framework for humanitarian interventions (UN A/RES/60/1 (2005)). The case of the NATO-led Libya intervention in 2011 is of interest as it "was the first time the UN Security Council authorised a military intervention that explicitly referred to R2P principles" (O'Sullivan 2018: 3). The intervention is often described to be a turning point of the R2P. "[I]t has become a key marker in the R2P literature" (ibid.: 22). Employing a visual analysis seems fruitful as the R2P entails an explicit focus on the protection of civilians. The legitimacy of the intervention therefore is dependent upon the existence of a threat against Libyan people. Therefore, the media representation of the situation of civilians in Libya and of human rights abuses by the Gaddafi regime were especially relevant as it may have had an

influence on the public's opinion on the legitimacy of the intervention (Garraio 2012: 111).

There is a wide range of feminist International Relations (IR) contributions on the nexus of gendered and racialized images and practices of international relations, especially in the context of justifying the so-called War on Terror (Lee-Ko 2007; Khalid 2011; Kearns 2017). However, there are not many contributions on the Libyan War. Gender can be critical in enabling securitization (Kearns 2017: 491). Drawing on (postcolonial) feminist approaches and connecting a critical feminist approach with the concept of visual securitization (following Hansen 2011), I will argue that the portrayal of Iman al-Obeidi's story followed an orientalist narrative of a woman in need of saving from 'Western' men. I will examine how these visuals have been deployed in support of this narrative, focusing on the depiction of plight and threat and how this created an emotional connection to Iman al-Obeidi. Moreover, I will argue that this portrayal entailed othering dynamics regarding Gaddafi and 'his men'. To conclude I will outline how this created affection and how the portrayed morality of the 'Western' actors can be considered as securitization. In this context, securitization is hereafter understood as a process that limited the debate and implied a positive background of meaning regarding the NATO-led intervention. The article will outline that the CNN news program, Anderson Cooper 360° (AC360°), used a gendered and racialized narrative to securitize the situation for Libyan civilians to support the legitimization of the 2011 NATO-led military intervention.

THE MYTH OF PROTECTION—WOMEN IN NEED OF SAVIORS

There is a wide range of feminist IR contributions that has critically interrogated representation of women as victims in the context of legitimizing wars, especially in the context of the 'War on Terror' (see e.g. Heck & Schlag 2012; Kearns 2017; Khalid 2011; Weber 2005). The narrative of the woman and child in need of rescue by men has been referred to as the 'myth of protection' (Tickner 2001: 57). 'Myth of protection' representation and discourses justify aggressive international politics as well as the hierarchic gender binary and international hierarchies, thus contributing to the sustenance and emergence of a wide range of violence (Åse 2018: 273).

For example, 'Western'¹ soldiers have been motivated to fight for centuries through the employment of a two-fold narrative. Jean Bethke Elshtain has coined them the 'just warrior', and 'beautiful soul' narratives. They entail the expectation that men as 'just warriors' should protect women who are in turn characterized as 'beautiful souls', who are pure, peaceful, and in need of protection (Elshtain 1987). The 'myth of protection' is analogous to Jean Bethke Elshtain's 'Just Warrior' and

'Beautiful Soul', with the gender binary at its core (Åse 2018: 273). 'Myth of protection' discourses are inevitably problematic for women as they enable further victimization: "Their status as objects to be acted upon, rather than agents in their own right, is consolidated, as is the acute physical vulnerability of being a venue through which masculinity is created and can prove itself" (ibid.: 280). The protector-protected and man-woman dual identities are always relative, which is why masculinity is reliant on protecting women as well as on subjugating them (ibid.: 276).

Some scholars have articulated that the 'myth of protection' narrative entails a triangular relationship between 'just warriors', 'beautiful souls', and 'villains' (Stiehm 1982; Lee-Ko 2007). While the 'just warrior' has ambiguous male characteristics of aggression, war-affinity but also morality, the 'villain' only embodies one side of the male characteristics, which renders him barbaric and cruel (Lee-Ko 2007: 44).

FOUNDATIONAL POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST APPROACHES TO GENDER

The representation of the 'villain' often entails a racial element (Tickner 2001: 57). One example is the narrative of a barbaric, uncivilized, savage male 'other', from whom the local woman needs to be protected by the 'West'. This is what Gayatri Spivak famously called: "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1988: 296). A more implicit version of this narrative that is contemporarily evoked is that women in the 'Non-West' should be liberated from patriarchal traditions in 'their' societies (Åse 2018: 275). Those narratives form part of an orientalist discourse. Such racialized and gendered narratives "have been used to justify conquest and colonialism for over two centuries [...] and continue to function in contemporary times" (Khalid 2011: 15).

In his seminal work 'Orientalism', Edward Said, outlines narratives, representations, and perceptions entailing othering regarding the imagined 'Orient'. He draws on colonial writings to showcase how those constructed the 'Orient' and its inhabitants as inter alia 'backward', 'barbaric' and 'exotic', while at the same time constituting the 'West' as its opposite - as rational and moral. This discourse includes a power imbalance - representing the other as inferior and their adaptation to 'Westernness' as a goal to achieve. It thereby explicitly and implicitly served to justify colonialism and has continued to legitimize domination (Said 2003 [1978]). In his 2003 preface of 'Orientalism', Edward Said wrote: "I wish I could say, however, that general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam in the United States has improved somewhat, but alas, it really hasn't" (Said 2003 [1978]: xiv), referring to the

I will frequently use the term 'West' or 'Western'. This shall not imply an ontological status of this category, reinforce a 'Western' identity or a binary between 'West' and 'Non-West'. It also shall not imply that there can be a clear-cut distinction between what defines 'Westernness' as opposed to 'Non-Westernness' as it has relied on co-constitution and communication (Bilgin 2009). Furthermore, I acknowledge that the distinction of 'West' and 'Non-West' puts the 'West' at the center and the 'Non-West' on the margins (Minh-ha 1989). The aim was to use these terms critically. They are set in citation marks to illustrate that I do not support this binary construction of the world, but my aim is to showcase how such an imaginative geography (Said 2003 [1978]) is entrenched in Global North imaginations and discourses.

orientalist discourses in the context of the so-called War on Terror.

Said neglected the gendered dimensions of orientalist discourses but has inspired others to fill the gap (Khalid 2011: 18). There are many strong feminist contributions to postcolonial theory, but they have commonly not received sufficient attention or credit in IR (Lewis & Mills 2003: 1). Feminist thinkers have been continuously trying to mainstream the issue of gender in postcolonial approaches. One feminist approach in this realm has been to focus on studying women's experiences with colonialism and imperialism. Another has been to decenter the male subject in colonial and imperial contexts – to deconstruct its supposed neutrality and generalizability (ibid.: 2). The main theoretical contribution of feminist postcolonial approaches is the intersectionality of gender, 'race', and class – and how these identity categories produce differences in discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw 1989). "Feminist postcolonial theory has engaged in a two-fold project: to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism" (ibid.: 3). The second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was based on and put forward by white, 'Western' feminists, and universalized and essentialized their experience, thereby marginalizing other, including black and postcolonial feminists as well as their struggles (ibid.: 4). Second wave feminism included a critique of power and privilege in the patriarchal system that did not consider positionality (Jones 2011: 32). A seminal contribution in this realm has been put forward by Adrienne Rich (1984) who has stressed the importance of location, meaning that experiences are situated and marked by 'race', class, and power. Other important contributions that have underlined that those complexities cannot be ignored and should be included in the conceptualization of gender have been put forward by Mohanty (1988) and Min-ha (1989). Audre Lorde (1984) is a scholar advocating for white women to acknowledge their relative privilege in the patriarchal system that is upheld by exploiting female black, indigenous persons, and people of color. In her short essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1982) she called out feminist academia for its arrogance in regard to the dismissiveness of input from poor, black, and or queer women and generally women from the 'Non-West'.

Kimberlé Crenshaw who has coined the term 'intersectionality' has stressed that gender cannot be understood without considering 'race' and class and one must conceptualize it accordingly (1989). The feminist critique of gendered stereotypes of weak, domestic women and powerful men is critiqued by black feminists as not applicable to their experience. "Black men and women live in a society that creates sex-based norms and expectations which racism operates simultaneously to deny; Black men are not viewed as powerful, nor are Black women seen as passive" (Crenshaw 1989: 155). This leads to another issue, namely that some white feminists deny black women's suffering as they are not expected to adhere to these 'feminine' stereotypes (ibid.: 156). Another example of a different understanding of gender, to what is prevalent in 'Western' feminist contributions, has

been put forward by Smith (1999). She outlines that in indigenous cultures, communities were often egalitarian, and women were participating in political processes and were not reduced to domesticity in pre-colonial times. This renders the association of the 'Western' socially constructed 'feminine' attributes unfitting in those cultural contexts, thereby Smith argues that the aim is not to overcome but to return to a pre-colonial conceptualization of gender (ibid.).

In this essay, the concept of gender will be used to describe the power relation that is based on the socially constructed association of women and femininity and men and masculinity (Sjoberg 2015: 440). This follows an understanding of gender as an analytical category, and the prevalent power asymmetry between women and men in the patriarchal system as a "governing code" (Peterson 2019: 172). Gender in this understanding is the code which positively attributes and privileges what is seen as masculine (rationality, agency, productivity, politics) and stigmatizes what is seen as feminine (emotionality, domesticity, reproduction) (ibid.). Femininity and masculinity are to be seen as racialized, whereby the named attributes describe how white men and women are seen. White men are constructed to be at the top of the hierarchy, followed by white women. Black, indigenous men or male people of color are often overtly masculinized to a point where they are constructed as 'barbaric' or 'savage' on the other hand they can be depicted as feminine due to passiveness or powerlessness (Khalid 2011: 20). Black, indigenous women or female people of color are often represented as overtly feminine and can be fetishized, objectified, sexualized, and infantilized more than white women – hierarchically positioning them below white women (ibid.: 21).

This notion of gender is also reflected in the 'myth of protection'. Portrayals in line with the 'myth of protection' have (re)gained relevance due to the R2P and the resulting the need to legitimize wars as 'good' and 'just'. In this context, the textual and visual representation of endangered civilians, which are often understood interchangeably with women and children in need, has become prominent (Heck & Schlag 2012: 892-893). Gendered oppression has been one aspect of representation that has increased the acceptance of military interventions by 'Western' publics, as for example in relation to the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan (Åse 2018: 275). "Thus, women's and girls' physical vulnerability and subjugation around the globe are used as a motif to justify violent military action on the part of the US and its allies" (ibid.). These considerations show the need to deconstruct representations in line with the gendered and often racialized 'myth of protection' and to overcome these forms of portrayals, and thus the violence they contribute to.

(VISUAL) SECURITIZATION

Securitization is a concept mostly associated with the so-called Copenhagen School and the researchers Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan. Following Buzan et al.: "'Security' is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above

[normal] politics" (1998: 23). In this tradition, security is a speech act, and securitization is the discursive process of framing a referent object as existentially threatened, which is then accepted by a relevant audience (*ibid.*: 26-27). Securitization theory has been an influential approach that has been adapted and critiqued by a wide range of scholars. In the following paragraph, an overview over (critical) contributions that focus on visual, feminist, or postcolonial aspects of the theory will be presented.

Michael C. Williams was one of the first scholars who prominently called on the 'Copenhagen School' to include visuality in the theory of securitization (2003). He emphasized the importance of televisual images for contemporary political communication - the centrality of media representations for what is to be understood in the realm of 'security' and how security relations are conducted (*ibid.*: 512, 524). Besides critique addressing the focus on speech acts as too narrow, 'classical' securitization theory has received criticism for being Eurocentric (Bilgin 2011: 401), not applicable to gender issues (Hansen 2000b), and most recently for its "racist foundations" (Howell & Montpetit-Richter 2020: 3). Lene Hansen has pointed out that due to the focus on speech acts, those who are rendered silent are not conceptualized as having security issues. Therefore, they are - according to 'classical' securitization theory - "prevented from becoming subjects worthy of consideration and protection" (Hansen 2011: 285). Another issue is that Buzan et al. assume collective referent objects which are identity based. This is rarely applicable as gender issues often create individual rather than collective problems (*ibid.*: 287).

Howell and Montpetit-Richter have criticized the theory more fundamentally. The authors criticize its theoretical basis for being racist as it entails a civilizational conceptualization of politics with its idea of 'normalcy'. Moreover, they claim that its conceptualization of security neglects everyday racist and colonial violence, as threats according to the Copenhagen School must be articulated and accepted by a relevant audience, which is rarely achievable for marginalized groups (Howell & Montpetit-Richter 2020: 11). Furthermore, they criticize that this has consequences regarding the normativity and methodology of the concept, which they denounce for adopting a universalizing white perspective that is not reflected upon (*ibid.*: 12). The critique of an issue being raised above 'normal' politics and based on the idea of a 'Western' democracy needs to be reflected upon and adapted when applied in other contexts (Vuori 2008). The use of the term 'normal' should be avoided, as such a normalization reinforces existing power structures, which is why I will not use the term but define the above 'normal' as a dismissal of an open political debate due to social pressures produced by othering narratives. Securitization, hereafter, is understood as the process through which a referent object is simultaneously visually, discursively, and audibly constructed as existentially threatened. Because of this construction of an existential threat, a politically open debate is dismissed since it would be judged as morally wrong (Heck & Schlag 2012: 894).

THE SPECIFICITY OF THE VISUAL

After the end of the Cold War, there was increased scholarly attention on conventional media outlet's influence on public and political audiences' opinions on global events in IR (Robinson 1999: 301). CNN's coverage of the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991 "marked a turning point in the history of communications" and thereby sparked researchers' interest in examining the influence of media outlets (Gilbao 2005: 28). There is a wide range of contributions on what has been coined the 'CNN effect'. These contributions enabled a rise in scholarly attention on visuality in IR since the turn of the century (Bleiker 2009; 2018; Heck & Schlag 2012; Möller 2013; Vuori 2010). Some scholars therefore identify a 'visual' or 'aesthetic turn' in the discipline (Bleiker 2019: 116), which also inspired a reformulation of securitization theory resulting in the development of the concept of visual securitization.

Lene Hansen provides a framework for analyzing visual securitization as an "ontological-political condition" (2011: 52). She argues that when analyzing visuality one needs to consider its specificity. Hansen names three features that characterize this specificity: immediacy, circulability, and ambiguity (Hansen 2011: 55). The immediacy of the visuality is constituted by its authenticity and identification by viewers, meaning that it evokes an instant response (*ibid.*: 56). The circulability refers to the material-technological possibility of spreading photos and videos fast and easily. This also applies to text, but what is distinct about the visual is that it does not depend on the viewer speaking a specific language but that it can be 'read' by anyone who is able to see (*ibid.*: 57). If visual representations are not accompanied by text, they are especially vulnerable to ambiguity as people can understand representations differently, because interpretation is dependent on context (*ibid.*: 58).

The visual's ambiguity reflects the importance of its discursive and visual embeddedness that needs to be considered. Hansen proposes an intertextual framework consisting of four elements that should be analyzed when studying visual securitization: "the image itself, its immediate intertext, the wider policy discourse, and the texts ascribing meaning to the image" (*ibid.*: 53). It is important to note that the term 'text' refers to what is written and spoken. Hansen's work was conceptualized for images, but it can also be used to analyze video (Rørbaek 2012). The analysis of film material is complex as it transports meaning through the interplay of text, audio, and visuality (Heck 2017: 385). To give a holistic analysis, one must take all these modalities into account.

According to Hansen, forms of othering are the most typical visual representations for securitization. Othering is a process of representation and identification in which a self and an other are constructed as opposites. This entails the creation of a hegemonic relationship, whereby the other is constituted as inferior to the self. It is often represented as demonic, barbaric, and evil, or insignificant, weak, and feminine (Hansen 2011: 59). Securitization (re)enforces othering processes by invoking

threat, danger, and emergency regarding collectives. Furthermore, it implies that it is "'our' responsibility to act" (ibid.: 60). In the following part I will analyze if the representation by CNN follows a racialized and gendered narrative. Furthermore, I will examine whether Iman al-Obeidi was constructed as a threatened referent object representing the Libyan people. I have previously outlined the importance of conceptualizing gender and 'race' together to not dismiss positionality in the patriarchal system and to grasp how gendered and racialized hierarchies are constructed. I will analyze if CNN's portrayal of Iman al-Obeidi follows a three-foldedness of a 'Western' 'just warrior', a female 'beautiful soul', and a 'Non-Western' villain, which historically has been a common underlying narrative to legitimize 'Western' intervention and domination (Tickner 2001).

The 'humanitarian' reasoning for the 2011 intervention reflects the need for an emotional response by the audience. The 'Western' audience needed to feel a certain amount of empathy towards the Libyan civilians to favor a supposedly costly intervention to help people they have never met in places they have never been to. As outlined, this is why analyzing the visual aspects of a representation of a civilian are important, as the immediacy of visual representations is especially relevant in creating an emotional response in viewers (Hansen 2011: 56).

THE CNN'S REPORTING—IMMEDIATE, EMOTIONAL, STEREOTYPICAL

In the following part, I will analyze nine CNN reports that presented the story of Iman al-Obeidi, which encompasses all the AC360° shows in 2011 covering the case. Following Lene Hansen's approach, I will employ a discourse analysis. Discourse, hereafter, is understood to include textual and visual elements. Visuality is conceptualized as an element of discourse as it produces meaning through making certain aspects visible in a specific way and renders others invisible (Rose 2012: 191). Through the combination of analyzing visual and textual components, the specificity of visuality on the one hand, and the intertextuality and context on the other hand can be considered. Discourse analysis aims at critically assessing, interrogating, and challenging truth claims and dominant, taken for granted meanings (ibid.: 160). Hansen's framework is used and combined with an open interpretive approach, which is guided by the outlined theoretical framework, focusing on gendered and or racialized othering narratives.

I chose to review the news program AC360° due to its in-depth reporting style and because it was simulcast live on CNN and CNN International, thereby reaching an international and large audience of approximately 783,000 viewers per show (CNN 2011). The newscast is one hour long and at the time aired at 10 PM Eastern Time on weekdays. The analyzed shows were aired in the time span between March 29th until May 26th, 2011 (Cooper 2011). Hereafter, these shows are analyzed using Hansen's framework to detect if al-Obeidi's story was securitized. Furthermore, I will include an analysis of the gendered aspects of the representation.

Firstly, I will outline the specificity of the visual by analyzing the Reuters video. The most important feature regarding the visuality of it is the immediacy of the footage. Al-Obeidi is screaming in Arabic, crying, showing the journalists her scars - displaying the violence she has suffered. The video depicts how a servant covers her head with a coat to restrict her from speaking. It is visible that she is forcefully taken away and put in a car and that the hotel's staff pushed international journalists away from al-Obeidi (Cooper 2011a). The video was shot by journalists with hand-held cameras and, due to the difficult circumstances of filming, the video is at times shaky which furthers the perception of authenticity. A handheld shot that is shaky is a style that is sometimes used in documentary films, due to the implication of the genre the style is associated with authenticity (Ryan & Lenos 2012: 142). The footage seems unscripted, unplanned, and is displaying raw emotions which evokes an emotional immediacy and authenticity which could not have been attained by simply telling al-Obeidi's story. The circuity of the video is given as the emotionality of al-Obeidi is transported without understanding what she is saying. The ambiguity of the visual is reflected in the attempt of Libyan government forces and Libya's state media to frame the depicted incident as an outcry of a drunk "prostitute" - discrediting al-Obeidi's rape allegations and even charging her with slander (Cooper 2011b).

Secondly, I will exemplify CNN's framing of al-Obeidi's case by drawing examples from the analyzed AC360° shows. The reporting on al-Obeidi entails a dual symbolization - it presents pain and violence while also depicting strength and power (Heck & Schlag 2012: 904). Her pain and experienced violence are visually represented and thematized, while she is also referred to as a "strong lady" four times (Cooper 2011a;e) and as a "hero" three times (Cooper 2011a). Furthermore, she is described as "courageous" six times (Cooper 2011a;c;d). Her act of speaking up about the violence she had suffered is interpreted as bravery by the CNN reporters (Cooper 2011a). Depictions of plight can be overwhelming for spectators, producing excessive demands which can create apathy and lead to inaction. Through the depiction of an individual case with a strong person at its center, spectators can acknowledge the suffering (Heck & Schlag 2012: 904). This enables an "affective face-to-face relation" between al-Obeidi and the spectator (ibid.: 904).

A scene, which exemplifies this "affective face-to-face relation" was shown in the first AC360° show covering the case. It is a videoclip of al-Obeidi's family and the face of her mother is shown in a close-up. This filming technique creates a feeling of connection as the spectator feels as if she was looking into al-Obeidi's mother's eyes. This is followed by a close-up of clenched hands, which reflect desperation, with CNN reporter Reza Sayah underscoring the emotionality of the scene by narrating: "They're holding up. We expected them to be worried and they are" (Cooper 2011a). AC360° follows an engaged approach to the story. CNN reporters interview Iman al-Obeidi's parents various times. As spectators learn more personal information and see and hear people worry about her, al-Obeidi's relatability and the empathy towards her is augmented.

ed. Moreover, the show creates affectivity using audio. This is reflected in the following statement: "We decided to let you hear Iman's voice tonight without a translator. You will see on the screen - the translation of what she is saying. We want you to hear her voice" (Cooper 2011e).

The news program further enables an emotional reaction by the viewers by transmitting a feeling of threat and emergency. Three decisions underscored this. Firstly, parts of the initial Reuters video are replayed in each show covering the story. This reflects that the program emphasizes the visual depiction of pain and threat. Secondly, the audio of the video is never muted, although a narrator's voice-over frequently is audible simultaneously. Therefore, al-Obeidi's fast talking and loud screaming is audible, transporting pain and urgency to the viewers. Thirdly, threat is textually constructed through emphasizing that al-Obeidi's life is in danger (e.g. Cooper 2011e).

US VERSUS THEM

The creation of an emotional relationship can enable a process of identification. It creates a desire for justice for al-Obeidi, as well as a feeling of responsibility to protect her. This, in turn, enables othering processes as it creates a strong opposition against those who have caused Iman al-Obeidi pain (Heck & Schlag 2012: 904).

Those who have caused the pain, the rapists, are identified, not as individuals but they are continuously called Gaddafi's "troops" (Cooper 2011 a;i), "men" (Cooper 2011a), "militia" (Cooper 2011b;d), "forces"(Cooper 2011i), "brigade" (Cooper 2011a) or "soldiers" (Cooper 2011a;c;i) in the reporting. They are always associated with the Gaddafi regime, not acting as individuals but as parts of the government. The rapes are interpreted as a "story of government brutality" by AC360° (ibid.). Hence, the act of speaking up about them by al-Obeidi is presented as an act of rebellion against the dictatorship. An example of this is the caption "Taking on Gaddafi's regime – One woman's disturbing charges" (ibid.). Al-Obeidi stated that the rapists were part of "Gaddafi's brigades", but this does not necessarily imply that the reporting needs to associate soldiers' raping with the head of state. By associating the regime with the alleged gang rape, the regime becomes the other. As those acts of sexualized violence are horrifying, the other is implied to be barbaric and evil.

Iman al-Obeidi is emblematic of a 'Western' image of the situation on the ground in Libya. Garraio states that "[...] through al-Obeidi, Libya becomes an entity in need of protection by the international community" (2012: 125). Through the emphasis on the emblematic nature of al-Obeidi's case, the spectators likely associate her being violated, threatened, and endangered by the Gaddafi regime with the situation of a majority of Libyan civilians. Thereby the Libyan civilians implicitly become the threatened referent object.

Securitization, according to Hansen, signifies that something becomes 'our' responsibility. Al-Obeidi's safety became the 'West's' responsibility. Othering processes co-constitute the construction of a self. In this case, the self is the 'West' and

the protection of al-Obeidi constitutes it as 'good', opposed to the 'evil' Gaddafi regime. 'Western' actors are constructed as the protectors of al-Obeidi, as 'Western' journalists were the ones who kept track of her well-being and 'Western' diplomats provided her with asylum. This is reflected in Anderson Cooper's statement: "She's defied [government officials] by talking to us" (2011d). Or in the way her arrival in Tunisia is narrated:

Freedom has never tasted so good. Outside the safehouse, diplomats are helping secure her safety. [...]. Since she arrived here at the French embassy in Tunis [...] the lady who came to symbolize the Libyan struggle is now for the first time getting the help she so long craved. (Cooper 2011h)

Through these opposing collectives which are constructed, the discourse shifts away from the issue of sexualized violence in war or militaries, towards the (il)legitimacy of the Gaddafi regime and in turn the legitimacy of the ongoing military intervention by NATO forces (Garraio 2012: 126).

In the AC360° shows the reporting on the case of al-Obeidi is intertwined with that on the state of the war, although the segments of the show covering the Iman al-Obeidi case do not entail a discussion of it. In all nine analyzed shows, the Libyan War is thematized in another segment of it. And it often directly precedes or follows the al-Obeidi story: "Tonight, with Libyan opposition forces retreating and blaming NATO for not bombing enough, we begin with the plight of a woman in Tripoli" (Cooper 2011e). In five of the segments on the war, it is stated that the rebel forces against Gaddafi are struggling (Cooper 2011a). There is frequently a call for more military engagement by NATO. In two of the shows there are expert discussions on the topic of increased military engagement in Libya (Cooper 2011b;d). "One thing is clear; the opposition says the coalition needs to step it up. Opposition fighters say when they put their faith in God, they were winning. Now they put their faith in NATO, they're losing" (Cooper 2011e). The reports focus on the rebels' lack of forces and capabilities, implying a need for more military engagement by NATO (Cooper 2011b;d). Furthermore, the question is raised if the US should be more active due to its availability of advanced military equipment (Cooper 2011d).

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THE DIMENSION ON GENDER

The overall narrative of the hurt woman in need of help is gendered and racialized, as are other aspects of the reporting, which I will argue hereafter. The representation of Iman al-Obeidi's story resembles the orientalist narrative of: "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988: 296). It fits the three-fold 'myth of protection' narrative, reflecting and reinforcing the gendered and racialized power relation.

Al-Obeidi is described as a "lady" nine times in the AC360° shows: "I describe this lady as strong and courageous for standing up for her views, but it was also I would say calm, controlled, dignified" (Cooper 2011f; also see Cooper 2011a;e;g), said CNN reporter Nic Robertson. This description fits with the 'beautiful soul' narrative, as al-Obeidi's femininity is emphasized by describing her as a 'lady'. The term 'calm' resembles peacefulness, which is another characteristic entailed in the archetype. Furthermore, the frequent interviewing of al-Obeidi's family underscored her femininity as it follows the gendered stereotype of females' family affinity. Al-Obeidi's portrayal thereby follows the 'Western' gendered identity, which, following this problematic logic, makes her "deserving of security" (Kearns 2017: 500). Although al-Obeidi is described as courageous, it is tempered as her bravery only consisted in seeking out help from 'Western' men in the constructed narrative. Although she is described as strong, she is still victimized. This can be interpreted as a further identification process, as it aligns al-Obeidi, the 'victim', with the 'Western' 'just warrior' opposed to the malign 'enemy' as courage is one of the warrior's qualities (Young 2003: 4). The 'enemy' personified in Gaddafi is gendered and racialized. The acts of sexualized violence are associated with him and his regime, which are cruel, brutal, and reflect dominative masculinity, aimed at overpowering, subjugating, and sexually capturing women (ibid.). This follows a representation of black or indigenous men or male persons of color being overtly masculine and sexual and therefore threatening and in need of 'taming', which is a representation that is rooted in colonialism. Furthermore, 'Gaddafi's men' in the Reuters video are seen silencing and capturing Iman al-Obeidi, which might reflect an orientalist stereotype of 'Non-Western' men imposing their patriarchal traditions on 'Non-Western' women who need to be liberated from them (Åse 2018: 275).

Through this gendered and racialized dimension, the othering process is underscored. The 'myth of protection' facilitates the success of securitization as it is grounded in known gendered and racialized representations and discourses of security in the

'West'. The visualization of the physically hurt female was assigned the status of iconography by some scholars, which makes it compelling to securitization (Heck & Schlag 2013: 905). This is because referencing something the audience 'knows' is seen as commonsensical and thereby more likely to be accepted (see discourses in Buzan et al. 1998: 33).

Securitization is seen as negative following Buzan et al. (1998: 29) as it is opposed to politicization - an open political process, which is commonly assessed as an integral part of 'Western' democracies. Some scholars have argued that securitization can have positive impacts as it puts issues on the agenda. The securitization of sexualized violence from the 1990s onwards has been assessed this way by many feminist scholars (see Hansen 2000a; Hirschauer 2014). The analyzed case, however, underscores a negative view on securitization. "Exposing militarized rapes does not automatically serve the cause of demilitarizing women's lives" (Enloe 2000: 109). Although al-Obeidi's emotional allegations were about sexualized violence, in the analyzed AC360° shows sexualized violence was not problematized as a widespread issue in everyday lives, the military, nor in war. As the other was constructed as malign, questioning the affiliation of the rapists to Gaddafi would have seemed to be an inadequate response. Opening discursive spaces on sexualized violence in the 'West' would have seemed inappropriate as this would have meant equaling the self with the other. Furthermore, questioning the military intervention would have seemed cruel, as spectators had observed the plight of this civilian, which was supposedly stoppable by the military intervention, as it undermined the other, Gaddafi, who is responsible for her plight.

CONCLUSION

Al-Obeidi's story constituted a representation of the situation for Libyan civilians, which 'Western' audiences could draw from when making sense of the 2011 NATO intervention. The visual dimension provided an emotionality that transmitted threat and emergency inter alia through depicting al-Obeidi's screaming and crying, her being taken away by security forces and through showing her family and how the incident affected them. This enabled viewers to empathize with al-Obeidi and thereby with the Libyan people as she was constructed as an emblem. This furthered the othering of Gaddafi and 'his men' as they were the ones who hurt and silenced the person the viewer empathizes with. The self was constituted as the moral savior and the self in this story were male 'Western' journalists and diplomats who helped al-Obeidi. Iman al-Obeidi is an individual subject, but her suffering was framed as representative of wider political oppression. She embodied vulnerability, which was grafted onto the Libyan people. This constructed narrative underscored the need to 'save' the Libyan people from Gaddafi's terror in general. A collective that is threatened by an other was constructed. There has been a dismissal of political issues beyond furthering the military project in Libya in the analyzed reporting, for example a debate about sexualized violence was not sparked, although that was what

Iman al-Obeidi was speaking about. The victimization, generalization, othering, and dismissal of political debate reflect securitization. It can be assumed that this case of visual securitization affected the public's opinion on the legitimacy of the military intervention by NATO forces.

Cynthia Enloe has encouraged feminist scholars for decades to ask: Where are the women? In 2011, the Libyan women were not visible in the 'Western' reporting on fighting and international policymaking (Sjoberg 2015: 437). This was not only the case for AC360°, but, as Sjoberg writes, was a general problem in the reporting. Women were predominantly visible as victims. On the ground, however, they "[...] were not only victims of the conflict, though - they were also its fighters" (Sjoberg 2015: 438). I argued how the reporting on al-Obeidi in the AC360° shows was problematic as it followed a gendered and racialized 'myth of protection' portrayal. Iman al-Obeidi is the 'beautiful soul' who needed to be rescued by 'just warriors' - the 'Western' men who rescued her from the 'villain' Gaddafi and 'his men' who raped and silenced her.

As opposed to focusing on Libyan women who help themselves, the Libyan woman at the center of CNN's reporting received help from 'Westerners'. Active women who do not need help "are not as useful in gendered orientalist discourse as a helpless woman who needs saving, as it is the latter that justifies 'civilising' the 'Other' through military interventions" (Khalid 2011: 25). The analysis was focused on the individual, Iman al-Obeidi, as she was the woman who received the international media's attention. The victimization of women, especially of black, indigenous women or women of color, and its misuse for justifying security politics, however, is not an individual problem. This also applies to the construction of stereotypical narratives around women as well as persons from the Middle East and North Africa .

This paper aimed at critically questioning and deconstructing the gendered securitization of the case of al-Obeidi by CNN. Gendered securitizations reproduce masculine and 'Western' hegemony, thereby (re)enforcing systemic and direct forms of violence (Kolmasova & Krulisova 2019: 130). The case shows furthermore how orientalist and sexist depictions often are intertwined and, even though they are subtle, persist. The 'oriental' woman was constructed as the victim of 'oriental' men, in need of white men's assistance. This implicitly builds upon colonial, civilizational ideas of 'Western' morality and superiority, which promotes a masculinist hegemony by the 'West'. It furthermore reflects how in gendered representations hierarchies are constructed between white men and the masculine other, who is constructed as 'malign', threatening and 'barbaric'.

As Khalid states, a critical engagement with hegemonic depictions and discourses of women in conflict zones "serves to destabilise and unravel the racialised and gendered justifications for intervention" (2011: 29). These representations are deeply entrenched in 'Western' imaginations as they have been around for centuries. Which is why deconstructing these representations and exposing power relations is important to challenge and ultimately overcome the former. My work gen-

erally aims at inspiring readers to deconstruct dominant discourses and representation - critically questioning and uncovering implicit sexism and racism. Opening discursive and representational spaces is important for overcoming such discriminatory discourses and representation (Shepherd 2008: 214). The combination of a critical feminist IR approach with visual securitization was fruitful, which is why I would encourage scholars to engage in such research.

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