

# 10 Imaging security

## A visual methodology for security studies

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### Introduction

On 2 May 2011, President Barack Obama officially announced that Osama bin Laden had been killed by US special forces, concluding his speech by saying, ‘on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to Al-Qaeda’s terror, justice has been done’ (Obama 2011). Earlier that day, a photo purporting to show a dead Bin Laden, his face smeared with blood, had circulated through the internet and news outlets. This image, however, was a digital collage. In an interview, President Obama said his administration would not publish a photo of the dead body. He argued that the image embargo was to prevent pictures from being presented as trophies or seen as offensive to Muslims, and that the burial of Bin Laden’s body at sea would avoid the memorial opportunity of a gravesite. This denial of a documentary picture – an iconoclastic act by the US government – was supplemented by the later release of a series of documentary videos from Bin Laden’s hideaway in Pakistan showing him as an old man watching TV and some photos from the mission, his house and the ‘crime scene’. Beside the release of these images, which were arguably official ‘stand-ins’ for the missing documentary photo of the dead body, *Time* magazine found its own iconic substitute for the events: the front cover of a special issue published on 20 May 2011 featured a painted portrait of Bin Laden crossed out with a dripping red X (Time 2011a). With this image, Bin Laden was included in a series of *Time* covers featuring America’s most wanted enemies all crossed out with a large X: Abu Muzad az-Zarqawi (19 June 2006), Saddam Hussein (21 April 2003), the Japanese flag (20 August 1945) and Adolf Hitler (7 May 1945) (Time 2011b). Despite the fact that the actual killing of Bin Laden remained invisible, this cover image symbolized more than his bodily death; it restored a state of security and collective identity for the US society and marked a crucial victory in the ‘war on terror’.

This story exemplifies that the question of images poses an important dimension of (international) politics. In recent years there has been a growing academic interest in the visual politics of security, in particular since the iconic images of 11 September 2001. It is often assumed that images construct social reality and influence political decision makers, that visual representations are central when

legitimacy is claimed in the ‘war on terror’ (Shepherd 2008). In addition to this, images are used to enforce and criticize contested policies and their usage has repeatedly been accused of propaganda efforts and digital manipulation. The question how powerful images are, however, is nothing new. In the case of the copied dead Bin Laden picture, many essential aspects come together: it is a digital montage, it spread rapidly in the social media networks, it provoked harsh criticism in the Arab world and facilitated a reflection on the legitimacy of the US operation where Bin Laden was killed. Images of dead people are a distinct and ambivalent genre. On the one hand, they give visual form to the limits of inciting sympathy and mercy but also satisfaction when tyrants and dictators are shown dead.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the artificial picture of Bin Laden’s dead body partly invoked a discourse of war imaginaries showing (presumably) justified enemies as well as (presumably) innocent atrocities while the *Time* cover’s X treatment of his death incorporated him into America’s most wanted enemies. Bearing such polyphony and ambiguity of the ‘war on terror’ in mind, it seems that President Obama and the editors of *Time* magazine thoroughly understand that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’.

While the relevance of visual culture to International Relations (IR) and security studies is apparent, it has been a rather recent development to discuss the conceptual and methodological challenges of researching images. I argue that acts like these, of (not) showing and (not) seeing a picture of the dead Bin Laden, direct our attention to the performative power of visual culture. Picture theory, an approach well-known to art historians and students of visual culture, conceptualizes this genuine power of images as an *iconic act* (Bredenkamp 2010). The main merit of such an approach is twofold: first, it takes visibility seriously, acknowledging that images have an inherent, symbolic meaning. Thus images are neither subordinated to discourse nor do they serve as mere illustrations or representations of reality; second, picture theory does not deny the discursive embeddedness of images and thus draws our attention to the relation between visibility, discourse and power. It points out how imaginaries are invented, mobilized and re-inscribed by and through the discursive and iconic practices at play (Heck and Schlag 2013).

In this chapter, I will present a brief state of the art of what is increasingly described as a new, ‘iconic’ turn in critical security studies.<sup>2</sup> Such a turn not only strengthens interest in the well-known question of the power of images, but directs our attention to the constitution of visual regimes in our (post-) modern time. What we are seeing (or *not* seeing) and how ‘things’ are shown is highly influenced by discourses which enable and constrain what can be meaningfully said and known (for a similar approach, see the contributions by Fierke and by Methmann and Oels in this volume). Thus, the ‘iconic turn’ does not stand in opposition to what is called the ‘linguistic turn’ in IR but complements it. A turn to visibility, in particular pictures, is highly relevant to IR and critical security studies because it helps to reveal the social constructedness of security in a broader way. It opens the rather narrow perspective on speech acts and gives more attention to the symbolic and cultural practices which constitute the very meaning of security in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

The first part of the chapter provides an overview of this recent turn to visibility in IR and discusses the different epistemological and ontological positions which come along with picture theory. In addressing the more precise term of an ‘iconic turn’, I will give a brief overview of an iconic act theory for theorizing images for security studies in an innovative way. However, the most profound challenge to security studies’ growing interest in visibility is that of methodology. How to take images seriously? How to analyze images as images *and* as being embedded in discourses and practices? The second part of this chapter will address these aspects and outlines a user’s manual.

## **Imaging security**

In recent years, IR scholars have addressed the relation between visibility and politics in different ways and this literature is steadily growing (most recent: Hansen 2015). Within the field of critical security studies, these debates have furthered our conceptual and methodological understanding of the alleged ‘power of images’, including political memory and war photography, political cartoons, cartographies, films and popular culture, and in particular images from 11 September 2001.<sup>4</sup> The social constructions of securities and insecurities are increasingly dependent on the availability of images: images of the risks and dangers, enemies, casualties, violence, pain and suffering, all with the potential to mobilize public support for contested political decisions. These images are now not just produced by professional journalists any more but are often shot and uploaded by citizens setting the news agenda in Western democracies (Mortensen 2011). Most scholars would agree that, to a broad extent, images shape and frame our understanding of political conflicts. Students of media studies have argued that images, thanks to their effect on public opinion, play a crucial role when governments decide whether to give aid to other countries, use force to end human rights violations or withdraw troops after military interventions. However, the so-called CNN-effect is an oft-cited but rarely proved hypothesis in IR.<sup>5</sup>

Keeping the influence of media representations on politics (and *vice versa*) in mind, it has become commonplace in critical security studies to state that security is a social construction (see Chapter 3 by Fierke and Chapter 8 by Methmann and Oels in this volume). The invocation of security, as Ole Wæver prominently argued, is part of a securitizing move wherein normal procedures of political decision-making are seen in the light of an existential threat to a referent object (Wæver 1995).<sup>6</sup> The conceptual and empirical debate on securitization theory has developed into an extremely fruitful research field in the last 15 years. Scholars are paying more and more attention not only to speech acts in a narrow (linguistic) sense but also to symbolic and visual constructions of security. Lene Hansen and Michael C. Williams in particular have argued that securitization theory should move beyond its exclusive focus on speech acts (Hansen 2011; Williams 2003). Taking these approaches into account, images can play two different roles in processes of securitization and de-securitization: images might become securitized as representations of referent objects, as found in Hansen’s

analysis of the Danish cartoon crisis. Then, visual securitization directs our attention to processes, ‘when images constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defense or when securitizing actors argue that images “speak security”’ (Hansen 2011: 51). Moreover, there might be images that possess the power to securitize referent objects, such as the *Time* cover of a tortured young Afghan woman or as the Doomsday clock of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists exemplifies (Heck and Schlag 2013; Vuori 2010). Thus there is strong evidence for a growing tendency towards recognizing images as a genuine research object in IR generally and in critical security studies in particular (Andersen et al. 2015; Hansen 2015). While the social sciences have a long tradition of analyzing media representations and their impact on national and international politics, this new interest in visibility moves beyond a merely illustrative usage of images and directs our attention to the symbolic and iconic dimension of visual culture.

For heuristic purposes, one might distinguish between two different approaches to visibility within the field of critical security studies. On the one hand, links to surveillance studies and the work of Michel Foucault on governmentality have become more prominent in recent years; regimes of seeing and being seen, regulation, control and the disciplinary effects of visual technologies are of interest here (Andersen and Moeller 2012). On the other hand, the more prominent and broader approach to visibility has been an interest in popular culture, which started in IR in the mid 1990s. Movies and photography, and occasionally pieces of art and music, are used to illustrate IR theories. Research approaches often come either with a primarily pedagogical impulse, to illustrate how power, gender, war and otherness are visually constructed (Engert and Spencer 2012; Holden 2006; Offermann and Engelkamp 2012) or with a critical move to re- and deconstruct visual representations and their political implications (for example: Bleiker and Kay 2007; Campbell and Shapiro 2007; Shepherd 2008; Shim 2013; Veeren 2011). While media and visual culture studies are still leading this research field, more and more IR students are becoming interested in the visual construction of security. Thus, the iconic turn complements the linguistic turn by expanding its core argument of ‘*x* is socially constructed’. It is not a rejection of discourses, but an inclusion of forms of articulation other than the spoken and written word (on language and materialism, see also Chapter 3 by Fierke).

Such an approach to visual security, however, raises some difficult questions: Is there a difference between an iconic act and a speech act? And what is unique about images, are they special at all?

### **The iconic turn, or: ‘what is an image?’**

It was Susan Sontag’s seminal essay *On Photography*, first published in 1977, which prompted a growing academic interest in the political power of images, in particular documentary photography (Sontag 1977). Sontag wrote: ‘Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it’ (Sontag 1977: 5). Nevertheless, she also admitted that

taking pictures is not an innocent act of objectivity. Rather: 'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power' (Sontag 1977: 4). In her essay, Sontag goes as far as to argue that taking pictures is an 'act of non-intervention' expressing a voyeuristic interest in the *status quo*, whether it is someone's joy or pain (Sontag 1977: 12). Sontag's remarks resonate with the typical reading of poststructuralist thinking in IR, in particular what Foucault argued about the nexus between power and knowledge. There is no objective and/or neutral depiction of 'reality' – mimesis is an illusion and a powerful myth of IR's 'scientific' approach (Jackson 2011: 9). With these debates in mind, a mimetic approach to visuality has been largely dismissed, either by referencing its epistemological naiveté or to the replicatory potential of digital technologies.<sup>7</sup>

While Sontag seems to be highly critical of photography as a form of knowledge and an instrument of emancipation, students of visual and cultural studies have developed a more analytical approach to visuality since the 1950s (Mirzoeff 2002, 2009). From their perspective, it is assumed that pictures and films are part and parcel of societal and political power relations. Contingent visual regimes influence the way societies interpret norms and values – for example what counts as 'beauty' or a 'just war' – visual media constructs images of 'Otherness' and enmity, and photography documents the good and bad shades of life, often with contentious political implications.<sup>8</sup> The recent turn to visual artifacts in IR and security studies revives the prominence of (critical) constructivist approaches in the social sciences and humanities while moving beyond their often narrow focus on language and text-based discourse.

At the beginning of the 1990s, cultural theorist W. J. T. Mitchell proclaimed the 'pictorial turn' and stated that '[a]lthough we have a thousand of words about pictures, we do not have a satisfactory theory of them' (Mitchell 1994: 9). Such an interest in pictures, images and visuality, however, should not be misunderstood as in opposition to the linguistic turn so much as a *re*-turn to the metaphysics of presence and correspondence (Mitchell 1994: 16). While Mitchell emphasized the discursive embeddedness of images, Gerhard Boehm has argued that images possess a self-contained visual quality that cannot be subordinated to discourses and genealogies. In other words: if one takes the renaissance of images in IR seriously, the turn to visuality constitutes a turn to the performativity of the image as an iconic act. There is something done by seeing/showing an image and this power grows out of its original *visual* forms (Boehm 1994, 2007).

The art historian Horst Bredekamp, who is closely associated with the German discipline of *Bildwissenschaften* (picture theory) that Boehm belongs to, compares the act of showing an image to Searl's influential definition of a speech act. Searl's example was that something happens when one utters the words 'yes, I do' in a specific context, i.e. two people become wife and husband. Bredekamp argues that an image supplements the speaker, that the image literally speaks to the audience and thus performs an act by showing and seeing

‘some-thing’. The image embraces a kind of ‘auto-activity’, an agency which cannot be reduced to the creator or the recipient of visual artifacts (Bredenkamp 2010: 52).

Iconic acts are thus socially and politically consequential performances because they constitute a powerful relation between the producer, the image and the spectator. This relation regulates how we see what we see. It’s because of this ontology that we should care about images as images instead of analyzing them exclusively as representations of or illustrations within discourses. Theorizing images as iconic acts helps explain the mutual process of showing and seeing, in particular how images are constituted through their *relation* to spectators and producers. Thus, images are neither reduced to objective representations of a subject/object nor overrated as a substitute for ‘reality’ itself.

Although references to visibility have increased in IR, scholars have only implicitly theorized the images – or to be more precise, the icon – as a genuine research object (Hansen 2015). The image is mostly seen as an representation within a larger discourse and interpreted as an symbolic expression of how images are part and parcel of social constructions. Although such a perspective has strengthened our knowledge of the political implications of visibility, it often subordinates images to discourse. Taking the image seriously requires a methodological sensibility to the performativity of iconic acts as acts of showing and seeing. This statement implies that images – in particular pictures – are not mere depictions of ‘reality’ (either true or false) but construct powerful reality frames within their symbolic forms (Butler 2010). Their ambivalence and affectiveness makes it even more difficult to systematically interpret the various meanings they produce and their possible ‘impact’ on politics. As discourse analysis requires a methodology of how to interpret spoken and written words and sentences, a turn to visibility obligates us to reflect on how to analyze the iconic dimension of images and pictures, their stylistic and symbolic forms. The second part of this chapter deals with this question in more detail and suggests a visual methodology, which should not be seen as a value-neutral technique but rather as a way of critically engaging with the visual politics of security (Aradau and Huysmans 2014).<sup>9</sup>

### **Visual methodologies, or: ‘how to interpret images?’**

There exist a variety of visual methodologies which appear to be obvious candidates for analyzing and interpreting images (Rose 2012). Scholars have recently attempted these methodological questions in different ways (Andersen et al. 2015; Moore and Farrands 2013). In this contribution, I will focus on the intersection between two approaches: discourse analysis and iconology. Most interpretative methodologies intend to conceptualize the image in relation to the social, political and cultural discourses which give them meaning and power. They differ, however, in the extent to which they focus on the site of the image’s production, the site of audiencing or the site of the image itself (Rose 2012: 43).

By site of production, Gillian Rose refers to the circumstances under which an image is produced and how these circumstances might themselves produce effects. The differences between digital and analog media, for example, have fostered a debate on the manipulation and simulation potential of images. Some scholars go so far as to argue that how an image is produced, in particular its technologies, determines 'its form, meaning and effect' (Rose 2012: 20). Because most images are produced to be seen, the site of audiencing directs our attention to a 'process by which a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances' (Rose 2012: 30). Hence, reception analysis has a long tradition in media studies, emphasizing common and diverse practices and structures of 'reading' images.

To my mind, the most neglected site of how IR and critical security studies have approached visuality has been the image itself as a research object (Rose 2012: 27).<sup>10</sup> Here, composition, style and symbols play a crucial role in producing visual meanings. Understanding images and their often-contentious and poly-phonic meanings is to some extent comparable to learning a language, including its grammar, vocabularies and practical usage. Thus, understanding an image requires knowledge not only of structural visual elements but also how they are (and have been) used differently. Most approaches to visual representations in IR and security studies focus on the site of audiencing and the question *what kind* of visual meanings and narratives images construct. For example, the growing literature on movies mostly addresses questions of how identity, gender, and war are socially constructed and how movies express some of the key concepts IR and security studies grapple with (and thus are useful in the classroom). While movies are seen as one expression of these socially constructed concepts and IR theories, their original visual qualities as films (*mis en scène*, time and space etc.) are barely of interest. Interpretation is mostly done with the help of discourse analysis, in which the image is conceptualized as part of structures of meaning in use, and the researcher discloses the production of power relations, dichotomies and hierarchies. While the broad inter-textual approach on discourses makes a turn to images easy, most discourse approaches to visuality run the risk of underestimating the visual qualities of the image itself, i.e. its iconic and symbolic characteristics. This narrow focus could easily be overcome by using an existing methodologically refined approach, iconology, as a toolbox to direct our attention to the genealogy and usage of symbolic forms. A connection between the insights from discourse analysis and iconology might help us more fully understand the political power of images.

### ***Discourse analysis***

In the last two decades, IR has witnessed a proliferation of discourse approaches within its many subfields, including critical security studies (Holzscheiter 2014; Milliken 1999). Often associated with the label 'post-structuralism' a main goal of discourse analysis is to reconsider the implications and consequences of textual representations for the possibility of action, which means understanding the

constitutive relation between agency and structure (George 1994: 191). Although there are many differences between authors who use discourse analysis, the perspective is broadly based on three assumptions: First, discourses are systems of signification where the dominant narrative 'is a representation that arrests ambiguity and controls the proliferation of meaning by imposing a standard and standpoint of interpretation that is taken to be fixed and independent of the time it represents,' as Richard Ashley has put it (Ashley 1989: 263). Representations try to fix meaning in relation and difference to other signifiers (Hansen 2006: 20, 41–6; Milliken 1999: 229, 231–4). In other words: meaning is always about power because these relations lead to (implicit) value judgments whereby one side of the opposition is privileged over the other (Ashley 1988: 230; Milliken 1999: 229, 231ff.). Second, a discourse is productive because it defines subjects authorized to act through knowledgeable practices. A discourse regulates what can be meaningfully said and produces groups and spaces as objects which can be acted upon. Thus, discourse analysis is interested in the ways 'in which power works to constitute particular modes of subjectivity and interpretative dispositions' (Doty 1996: 4). Hence, subjects and objects are more the effects of discourses than pre-existing facts. Third, while discourses might rely on a strong continuity of central representations, their structures are essentially contingent and dependent on the play of practices, i.e. how words are used (Doty 1996: 6). Because language as a differential system lacks an unquestioned foundation of meaning, disciplinary practices, by excluding alternative discourses and thereby limiting the contingent play of practices, are essential to stabilize representations (Ashley 1989: 263; Milliken 1999: 230, 240–4). Well-established hierarchies between a developed ('Western') world and an undeveloped ('non-Western') world, for example, have been a widely used disciplinary practice which made interventions possible, even legitimate. Such representations naturalize self/other relations and might give actors a reason to act in a specific way. Discourses, however, are not exclusively about disciplinary practices in which hierarchy and dominance is imposed on social relations. Heterodox practices direct our attention to the contingency of social representations and help to understand how stable representations can be challenged, de-centered, or even replaced.

As a methodology for interpreting visual representations, discourse analysis directs our attention to: (1) power relations, (2) the construction of identities, and by default, difference, and (3) the contingent meanings audiences might ascribe to images, including the different usage of visual representations for political reasons. If we return to the fictional image of the dead Osama bin Laden as an illustration, a discourse approach could certainly highlight the ambivalence between the 'war on terror'-discourse on the one hand, and a historical 'war casualty'-discourse on the other – both discourses are mobilized by the image. While a documentary picture would be closer to a discourse on war casualties, or even war crimes of torture and killings, the symbolism of the *Time* cover clearly mobilized alternative narratives of collective remembrance within the US public. Knowing that Bin Laden is dead, seeing visual evidence doctored or not, symbolically expresses the victory over one of their most wanted enemies. Hence, some spectators see this



image as Obama's political success over Bush, who failed to catch Bin Laden, strengthening his legitimacy as President and the 'leader of the free world'. Other spectators might see this image as an evidence of the unjust and cruel policies of the US administration, killing and executing Muslims in their global 'war on terror'.<sup>11</sup> While some understood Obama's decision to deny an image of the dead Bin Laden as an act of reconciliation and respect, this also helped his administration to avoid a public debate on the mission's legality and legitimacy. Accordingly, Obama's iconoclasm responded to Bin Laden's own careful control over his public image in his video messages. Further research could focus in more detail on the intersection between these discursive and visual artifacts because images are important due to their mimetic and affective powers in shaping our knowledge and remembrance of the 'war on terror'.

Critics might respond that students of IR and security studies should stick to the business of analyzing 'objective' security threats. There is a widely-shared belief that the inclusion of visual data delimits the discipline at the expense of an identifiable core of 'key puzzles' that IR and security studies should deal with if they intend to be relevant to 'real world politics' (Walt 1991; see also Chapter 1 by Glaser). Hence an attitude of 'Oh, just leave images to cultural and visual studies' – the alleged experts on visuality. This is not a reliable or appropriate position for two reasons. First, no one would doubt that we live in a world where (global) media networks play a powerful role in shaping our perceptions of and attitudes towards politics. In fact, it is surprising that IR and security studies are basically latecomers to the 'visual/iconic turn'. Second, constructivism lays increasing emphasis on the social constructedness of identities and communities, gender, race, and conflicts. It remains puzzling why one essential kind of 'data' – visual representations – has only occasionally been included in constructivist (and post-structuralist) work. Symbolic forms do themselves constitute meaning and cannot be reduced to the spoken or written word alone. The main challenge for any student of IR and security studies is not whether the images have an impact on politics but *how*. How do images matter? How does the interpretation of images make a difference for understanding international relations? As Axel Heck and I have argued elsewhere, iconology is a useful approach to visual representations well-known to students of art history that might provide a methodological toolbox for taking images in IR and security studies more seriously (Heck and Schlag 2013). Iconology is not an alternative to or competitor with discourse approaches, instead it fits nicely into the overall concept of a discourse as a 'structure of meaning in use'.

### ***Iconology***

The term iconology was prominently framed by Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968), a German-born art historian and expert on Renaissance art who immigrated to the USA in the 1930s and taught at Princeton University. In his essay, 'Iconography and Iconology', first published in 1939 and republished in 1955 and 1970, he defined the latter as a 'method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather

than analysis' (Panofsky 1970: 58).<sup>12</sup> While *iconography*, the dominant method of his time, referred to the knowledge of types and styles, Panofsky advocated *iconology* as a method of synthesis for understanding the meaning of symbolic forms. Hence, the aim of iconology is to reconstruct the symbolic content of images understood in their historical and social context. As a systematic process of interpretation, iconology is based on three stages: (1) the pre-iconic description, (2) the iconographic analysis and (3) the iconological interpretation.

The pre-iconographic description deals with the apparent subject of an image and the objects which are shown to us. To understand an image in its factum, we need practical experiences in order to decode the subjects and objects at hand. Iconographic analysis understands an image based on the conventional and allegorical content which arises from our knowledge of literary sources and historical documents. While an iconographic approach stops here, and focuses on identifying and describing types and styles, Panofsky argues that an iconological interpretation goes a step further, trying to figure out the meaning of an image through its symbolic form. Iconology thus requires a 'history of cultural symbols', i.e. an 'insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts' (Panofsky 1970: 65).

Although iconology is first and foremost a method used to analyze art, its systematic three-step interpretation process is not limited to the world of museums and galleries. One could say that iconology is highly compatible with the discursive approach to visuality advocated by Lene Hansen, who distinguishes between four components of analysis: the visual itself, the immediate inter-textual context, the wider policy discourse and the constitutions of the image (Hansen 2011: 55). While iconography helps to understand the specific stylistic aspects of the image itself and its practical context, an iconological approach enables us to see how images symbolically perform how we see what we see. It's the systematic focus on visuality in its iconic, social, and historical context that makes iconology a valuable method far beyond the work of art historians. Together, discourse analysis and iconology help to understand *how images matter*. The concluding section of this chapter will address how images matter *for security studies*.

### **A user's manual – understanding *how images matter* for security studies**

It's nothing new to argue that images are an important part of politics, that they construct identities, that they influence the perception of conflicts and that they are able to foster political interventions. However, it might be necessary to take a more thorough and reflected view of visual artifacts and their alleged power in international relations to show how, under what circumstances and with what kind of consequences images matter. Picture theory and visual methodologies such as discourse analysis and iconology are starting points – not ends unto themselves. It's not that any student of IR interested in visuality should become a trained art

historian. Instead, I would propose extending available approaches to security, in particular securitization theory and its focus on discourses and practices, to the interpretation of visual data. How images matter would remain a question to be answered *in research*. Some general themes might include: (1) visual representations of insecurities, (2) visual representations of identity and otherness, and (3) visual representations of violence and pain.

First, an understanding of how dangers and risks are visually constructed is important to understand the impact images have (or not) on politics. For governments, it might be easier to legitimize a military intervention in the name of ‘saving strangers’ if disturbing pictures of human rights violations making suffering and pain visible, recognizable and to some extent intelligible are distributed through global media networks. However, the link between pictures and politics is not simply causal but rather *constitutive*. Sometimes we see images of insecurity but do not act; other times we do not see images of threats and act. While studies on the CNN-effect often imply a causal relation between media and politics, it might be more useful to analyze how insecurities are visually constructed and how they confine the limits of political agency. Take the attacks of 11 September 2001 as an example: The picture of the falling man symbolized the ontological insecurity caused to US citizens by terrorism – it made the unthinkable visible. Photographs from September 11, Moeller argues, are not only a ‘legitimacy provider for security policy but also part of every person’s visual reservoir and pictorial memory, on which the successful articulation of security in part depends’ (Moeller 2007: 179). In other words, images can also imbue a de-securitizing potential which can be used to criticize and oppose security politics.

Second, visual representation of self/other relations construct collective identities and can reiterate and/or transform power relations. Hence, how ‘the US’, ‘China’ or ‘Bin Laden’ are visually represented enables and constrains policy options through constructions of identity and difference. The greater the gap between the imagined self and the constructed ‘Otherness’, the easier it becomes to legitimize extraordinary measures in order to defend one’s own community and eliminate its alleged enemies. Historical research on enemy constructions at the start of the First and Second World Wars suggests that images can serve as indicators of escalation and anchors of legitimacy (Hase and Lehmkuhl 1997). Shim and Nabers, for example, have recently argued that our imagination of North Korea as a mostly isolated and excluded pariah state is vastly shaped by visual data, including satellite pictures and photography (Shim 2013; Shim and Nabers 2012). They are interested in ‘how images determine the realm of the visible and, no less importantly, the invisible, which render specific actions and statements as legitimate or nonlegitimate’ (Shim and Nabers 2012: 7). Images of North Korea shown in Western media stipulate its military ‘strength’ and internal ‘weakness’ as the main characteristic of its Otherness, representing it as the ‘main antithesis [...] of modern globalization’ (Shim and Nabers 2012: 9). The way the US public coped with the September 11 terror attacks also reveals the variety of visual representations which are able to restore and unsettle a

collective identity: the ‘falling man’, the collapsing Twin Towers, or President Bush at Ground Zero. But this visual suite also includes images from later on in the ‘war on terror’: human rights abuses and torture in Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo (Steele 2008; Veeren 2011).

Finally, visual representations of violence and pain raise highly difficult questions of responsibility, moral obligation and even censorship in order to preserve the dignity of those who have been harmed, tortured, and killed. Media networks are often criticized for their displacement and (mis-)use of documentary photos. Image-text-relations are extremely influential when the political consequences of discursive and visual representations of insecurity, identity, and violence are at stake. David Campbell’s collaborative study on the representations of famine suggests that documentary photography regularly reaches its limits when suffering and pain are depicted.<sup>13</sup> The close-up of a ‘starving black child’ or ‘a tortured woman’ excites primarily pity, and certainly anger; however, it does not necessarily cause a political intervention. The reproduction of stereotypes and the voyeurism associated with documentary photography raises ethical and moral questions which should be reflected on not only within media networks but also by the public who consumes these images.

Students of critical security studies (and IR) have already proven that there are many ways to analyze the oft-cited ‘power of images’. A user’s manual for understanding how images matter would never be able to encompass the variety of approaches, but I would like to outline some general and essential steps to a visual approach:

- *Step 1:* According to Rose, a visual methodology has to acknowledge the different sites of visuality, i.e. the production, the image and the audience, and its different technical, compositional and social modalities. These sites and modalities share various interdependencies. However, what kind of visual data is relevant and what sites and modalities are of further interest is not a question one can answer in abstract terms, but must instead be related to the overall research question. This may seem obvious, but needs to be clearly established at the outset.
- *Step 2:* Iconology provides clear guidelines how to approach visual data through its iconographic and iconological content. It also requires a ‘reading’ of more than just the image. Other textual and visual documents become part of a research process on how symbols have been used in different social and historical contexts. One should remember that the main goal of this tool is not art historical, but to pay more attention to the performative power of the iconic act. Since speech act theory provides a specific perspective on what matters and how to analyze it, iconic acts share the family resemblance of a performative approach but require a peculiar vocabulary of description. Iconology provides one systematic and transparent tool to analyze visual data and thus counters many prejudices about the ‘non-scientificness’ of interpretative methodologies. However, it is not the authoritative and exclusive method for analyzing visual artifacts.

- *Step 3*: The final, and most compelling, step is connecting the results of this interpretation of visual data with questions relevant to scholars in IR and security studies. The three general themes I suggested earlier – representations of security, identity and violence – have been of major interest in the discipline. I believe that the analysis of images, by connecting visual and textual representations of politics, can tell us a lot about these themes. Here, the iconic turn is closely connected to a growing interest in emotions, memory and legitimacy where images do play an important, yet barely factored role in constituting meaning and agency (see Chapter 3 by Fierke).

Many visually-oriented students of IR have been party to conversations in which they were urged to prove the added value of their approach and the relevance of their research questions to the discipline. It is certainly discouraging to hear that ‘your research interest is irrelevant to IR, it belongs to art history’. Yet any student must give some compelling (or at least accountable) reasons for why image analysis benefits an understanding of security politics. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the ‘war on terror’ and its iconic images is certainly one of the most persuasive arguments for the *visual* politics of security. How political decisions are legitimized and symbolic power is exercised through images gives the analysis of visual culture therefore a dedicated political heft.

## **Conclusion**

The global ‘war on terror’ has certainly revitalized the academic interest in the political relevance of images. It is, as Mitchell points out, an image of war fueled by governments, terrorists, global media networks and everyday people who upload pictures and videos to Facebook, Tumblr and Flickr (Mitchell 2011). Thanks to digital technologies, the production and distribution of images is getting easier while control and decoding is becoming more complicated. International security relations cannot be analyzed without understanding these developments and their impact on politics, in particular in Western democracies. Their publics are highly sensitive to stories and pictures they receive about conflicts and violence and they have the powers to influence their governments through democratic politics.

Looking beyond the narrow focus on speech acts – particularly in security studies and securitization theory – brings to mind how politics are *visually* constructed: the power of images to ‘speak security’. In fact, students of visual culture and art history could learn a lot from students of IR and security studies when it comes to how politics are legitimized through the mobilization of discursive and visual practices of security. While visual culture and art history deal with the ontological and methodological aspects of visibility, IR and security studies provide a clear focus on the political relevance of visual culture(s) to the possibilities and limits of agency.

## Notes

- 1 Images of dead people have been taboo in many cultures, including the taboo of showing the dying and/or the faces of slaughtered people; yet, media often show such disturbing images in order to attract attention. Accordingly, there is often a cult of the dead leader presenting his body to the public, a practice well-known to Western societies through the artistic presentation of royals and clerics since the Middle Ages.
- 2 This turn has also been labeled the ‘visual’ or ‘pictorial’ turn. I prefer the notion ‘iconic’ here because it is more precise and directs our attention to the material and symbolic dimension of a picture
- 3 Due to space limitations there will be no systematic interpretation of images and/or pictures in this chapter. For different accounts of how insights from visual methodology can be used in critical security studies, see Hansen (2011, 2015), Heck and Schlag (2013), Bleiker and Kay (2007), Andersen et al. (2015).
- 4 See for example, Campbell (2003); Campbell and Shapiro (2007); Hansen (2011); Moeller (2007); Neumann and Nexon (2006); Rauer (2006); Shapiro (2007); Weber (2006); Vuori (2010).
- 5 See for example, Robinson (2002); Carruthers (2011); Bahador (2007); Livingston (1997).
- 6 For a recent elaboration on securitization theory, see the special issue of *Security Dialogue*, December 2010.
- 7 The impact of digitization and simulation is a major theme in the work of James Der Derian.
- 8 One of the most prominent examples is Dorothea Lange’s work for the US Resettlement Administration in the 1930s. Her image of the ‘migrant mother’ has become an icon of a socially engaged form of documentary photography but also been criticized for its stereotypes and partiality. For pictures, see Lange and Taylor ([1939] 2000).
- 9 Aradau and Huysmans (2014: 598) write: ‘Understood as devices, methods are seen to enact social and political worlds. Understood as acts, methods can become disruptive of social and political worlds. This dual reconceptualization also allows us to derive an understanding of *critical methods*.’
- 10 However, Rose’s excellent introduction does not refer to IR.
- 11 It might be worthwhile to compare the different fictional accounts of Bin Laden’s hunt in more detail, in particular *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Seal Team Six* (2012).
- 12 For the work and life of Panofsky, see Elsner and Lorenz (2012) and Holly (1984).
- 13 For example, a finished project by David Campbell (‘Imaging Famine’, accessed November 2014).

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