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The preemptive voice of enemy images: The before-and-after motif in news coverage of women homegrown terrorists

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Abstract

This essay is about images of the enemy. But a particular enemy and a peculiar motif of representation: the woman homegrown terrorist and the before-and-after image as they appear in US online and broadcast news. The case of Shannon Conley, a young white American who attempted to join Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2014, is used to examine these against an already-gendered orientalist discourse about women and terrorism. The before-and-after motif includes the composite image as well as its disaggregation into juxtapositions and sequences, some of which use surrogate images. I utilize the 'voice of the visual' against the temporality of preemption to parse out how the before-and-after image 'speaks security'. In the context of a paradigm centered on anticipating threats, I argue the motif invites viewers to re-examine the 'before' image and ask what they might spot in it to help forestall such a transformation, next time.

Keywords

Before-and-after image, enemy images, homegrown terrorism, ISIS, preemption, women terrorists

On 8 April 2014, a young white American woman from Arvada, Colorado, was arrested while boarding a flight at Denver International Airport. Shannon Conley was trying to make her way to Syria (via a flight to Turkey) where the 19-year-old planned to join

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Figure 1. Shannon Conley, before-and-after.
Source: Denver Post.

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and marry a 32-year-old Tunisian fighter she had met online. The case and its details were made public only 3 months later when court documents were unsealed. After agreeing to a deal with prosecutors, Conley pled guilty to terrorism-related charges. She was sentenced to 4 years in prison on 23 January 2015.

This article is about images of the enemy as they appear in US online and broadcast news. Specifically, it is about the particular enemy that Conley embodies and a gendered motif of representation: the woman homegrown terrorist and the before-and-after image. The article begins by reviewing scholarly thought on the use of images in conflict – of the racialized enemy, homegrown terrorists, and women, more generally – as well as the news media-government relationship in this operation. With women homegrown terrorists, we see a reversal of a key war on terror liberation motif: instead of women tearing off their veils (Stabile and Kumar, 2005), the before-and-after image presents an American donning the hijab (Figure 1), transforming from the girl next door into a potential terrorist. Second, I outline the method used to study images across online platforms and broadcast media as well as their accompanying narratives. Using the Shannon Conley case, the three following sections examine several dimensions of the before-and-after image: the composite image's presentation alongside gendered narratives; its disaggregation into juxtapositions and sequences, some of which use surrogate images; and how it 'speaks security' (Hansen, 2011) – that is, participates in security discourse – through a discussion of its 'voice' (Zelizer, 2010). I argue that in the context of a security regime centered on anticipating threats (Massumi, 2015), particularly one in which citizens are regularly called on to surveil their everyday surroundings, the before-and-after image does not simply guide viewers through a monstrous transformation from 'before'

to ‘after’, but invites them to return to the nondescript ‘before’ image and ask what they might spot in it to help forestall future transformations.

War, images, women

War needs images (Butler, 2010). This axiom rings truer still in what Zelizer (2016) calls ‘unseen war’, a global conflict that most members of a collective will not directly experience. The level to which the war on terror is ‘unseen’ is unequally distributed, but in the American context, jihadist terrorist attacks on US soil are rare. The images that fill in emerge from government and terrorist propaganda as well as the news media; stories and images that are then shared on social media. For instance, while most Americans will never watch a beheading video, online news media covers these acts widely if in varying detail.

The images found in news media are not disconnected from those central to government discourse about terrorism. Journalism and media scholars of the war on terror have further challenged the myth of oppositional media (Hallin, 1984) by showing consistencies between US media and government narratives and, at times, open collaboration (Cloud, 2004; Fahmy, 2005; Griffin, 2010; Stabile and Kumar, 2005). The problematic nature of the media-government relationship has received much scholarly attention in analyzing the media’s role in the build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Grusin, 2010; Hayes and Guardino, 2010; Kellner, 2005; Schwalbe et al., 2008). Indeed, military and media are deeply entangled in imaging/imagining ‘unseen war’, with the media being ‘vital . . . in war’s prosecution’ (Zelizer, 2016: 6079) and an important site for the production of images that ‘speak security’ (Hansen, 2011; Heck and Schlag, 2013).

Contemporary security centers on preemption (Massumi, 2015), anticipating and forestalling the next attack (Aradau and van Munster, 2012), which requires the increased securitization of social life, that is, the rendering of an ever-expanding array of spaces and routines as matters of security. A key strategy here involves triggering affective responses in the public in order to keep its members alert and primed, at the ready to fulfill their duty. For example, the United States’ (now replaced) color-coded threat level system functioned to heighten one’s awareness that if she saw something, she ought to say something. Grusin’s (2010) notion of premediation captures how media practices are vital ‘techniques of power’ in this process. News images and models of potential but not yet present disasters (e.g. the path of a hurricane or estimates of damage) help maintain the base level of public anxiety on which the mitigation of threats depends. It is not necessary here to suggest that governments order or sanction particular media strategies. Rather, in thinking of governmentality as dispersed rather than centralized (Grusin, 2010), representational practices often reflect, align with, and buttress state aims. To connect the before-and-after image to security, I build on extant scholarship on images regularly found in news media coverage of terror: those of enemies and their victims.

War requires images of the enemy. Even in times of bounded war, when one state officially declared war on another setting off fighting on a delineated battlefield (as romanticized as this notion may be), enemies had to be visually communicated. The artifice of this practice is evident in the dehumanized and animalistic enemy images of World War propaganda, structured along clear binaries. The us/other divide articulated

through race, country, religion, or values externalizes aggression, evil, and blame (Spillman and Spillman, 1997). These images mobilize citizens, stimulating a willingness to either simply endure conflict or more actively enlist, kill, and potentially be killed. The prominence of racialized and orientalist images of the terrorist built on these patterns is well documented in contemporary security thinking (Volpp, 2002), news media coverage (Griffin, 2010; Popp and Mendelson, 2010; Steuter and Mills, 2010), and popular television and film (Alsultany, 2012).

From the outset of President Obama's tenure, images of threat distinct (yet overlapping with) binary-others gained traction in security discourse. The representation of 'homegrown' terrorists, distinct from domestic terrorists only in that they aim to further the goals of a 'foreign' ideology (i.e. jihad), blends markers of otherness and likeness in presenting a furtive threat that might look or act 'like us'; the urgency of preemption only intensified by a threat that might explode onto the scene in the places one least expects (Szpunar, 2018). Yet, work on homegrown terrorists that touches on journalism tends to focus on men (e.g. Chuang and Roemer, 2013). And, indeed, when those deemed terrorists happen to be women a different set of assumptions and strategies of representation are deployed.

Brunner (2007) sums up the 'counterterrorism literature' on women terrorists well, highlighting how its occidental lens depoliticizes violence committed by women. Beyond a misguided move to attain equality in patriarchal societies (e.g. Ali, 2006), their motivation is often reduced to personal loss, familial honor, or a desire for fame (e.g. Bloom, 2007). Women terrorists are also seen as victims, exploited by organizations to get more media attention (by smashing Western expectations) and to fill the ranks when the supply of willing men dwindles – which is, in turn, used in propaganda to shame men into action (see Ali, 2006; Bloom, 2007; Stack-O'Connor, 2007). Media coverage largely follows these trends. Nacos (2005) posits six common frames: physical appearance; family life; women's equality; toughness vis-à-vis men; boredom, naïveté, or psychological issues; and love interests. Her framework has been widely applied (e.g. Auer et al., 2018). In the US context, Conway and McInerny (2012) found that Colleen LaRose (also known as 'Jihad Jane') was largely discussed in terms of her appearance, family life, boredom/naïveté, and love life. The dominant frames accompanying Conley's image(s) were those of love and naïveté (see below).

Women feature in war on terror coverage and war propaganda more generally as victims. There are two important threads here. First, the white woman figure in US and European propaganda has long been a 'symbol of the nation' and, connectedly, a (potential) victim in need of protection (Shover, 1975: 481). Propaganda from both World Wars is replete with images of white women threatened or taken hostage by animal-like enemies. Connectedly, nationalist war discourse positions women as inherently passive and susceptible to deviation and disease (Rajan, 2011). This point is poignantly depicted in a 1965 US propaganda film titled 'Red Nightmare'. A 'genuine American' named Jerry Donovan wakes up to find something off about his all-American small town. He only fully realizes the problem – that it is under Communist control – when his white daughter (willingly) leaves home for a commune (Department of Defense, 1965).

Second, in the war on terror the need for protection has been projected onto 'other' women. Afghan and Iraqi women have been positioned in the news media and government discourse as being in need of saving from their men and themselves, buttressing

calls for intervention (Cloud, 2004; Heck and Schlag, 2013; Kumar, 2004; Stabile and Kumar, 2005). While there are many layers to the coverage of women as gendered and racialized victims, particularly important are visualizations of their liberation. The politics of the veil are well documented (Scott, 2007); orientalist discourses project onto the hijab ideas of oppression, danger, and allure. Unsurprising then, is that the liberation of Afghan women after the (momentary) fall of the Taliban in 2001 was depicted by a flood of 'images of women ripping off their veils' (Stabile and Kumar, 2005: 773).

Shannon Conley's case reverses this image: a white American woman dons a headscarf. A white woman homegrown terrorist, simultaneously the symbol of the American nation and its internal susceptibility to disease presents enemy and victim in one body. Indeed, the white female convert presents an 'unmanageable type of feminine identity' (Rajan, 2011: 136). As an instantiation of what Alsultany (2012) identifies in post-9/11 US discourse as 'going Muslim' (p. 110), it is a phenomenon regularly met with shock, evident in public reactions to so-called 'Jihadi Brides'. As such, 'Western references to white women converts to Islam almost always ponder images of them with or without the veil' (Rajan, 2011: 136). Conley is presented in media accounts through both in the before-and-after image.

Tracking images: Method

The top image result for an online search for 'Shannon Conley' is a composite image (Figure 1).[1] The image on the left – the 'before' image – is her 2010 high school yearbook photo; the image on the right – the 'after' image – shows her donning a headscarf and military fatigues circa 2014 when she took part in the US Army Explorers program (evidently to gain military training). This article attends to appearances of the composite image in Figure 1 and its disaggregated use in sequence alongside text and within broadcast (video) reportage (i.e. when it was broken up into its individual components, 'before' and 'after'). This includes surrogate or stand-in images for both halves. Another 'before' image used extensively is a 2012 photo taken from Conley's Facebook page. It shows Conley, wearing a T-shirt and cargo pants, alongside family. Some outlets blur the faces of her family, others do not (Figure 2); often, the image is cropped to include only Conley's face. The 'after' image is often replaced by images or video footage from ISIS propaganda. Nevertheless, the logic of the before-and-after motif guides the juxtaposition and sequence of all of these images.

Analyzing news images in the digital age across platforms is no easy task given the 'ephemeral nature of the web' (Keith et al., 2010: 89). The difficulties are of particular significance for qualitative approaches. Understanding the power of images requires an analysis of the contexts (including other texts and images) in which they appear and circulate (Mitchell, 2011). This includes issues of sequence as images of the enemy are not limited to single still photographs; they include moving images and combinations of still and moving as is often the case in television broadcasts and online articles.

Given these challenges, this study takes a multi-layered approach. First, Figure 1 was inputted into the TinEye Reverse Image Search (www.tineye.com). TinEye is the creation of a Canadian company designed to help track 'the appearance of an image online'

Figure 2. Conley Facebook 'before' image.
Source: Buzzfeed.

(TinEye FAQs, n.d.). The service finds not only exact matches but also altered and cropped versions of the image searched. Each search result is listed alongside the image found in that result, be it exact or modified/cropped. A search for Figure 1 returned 203 results: 79 were listed alongside Figure 1, while 69 and 55 were presented alongside the 'after' and 'before' image, respectively. After eliminating duplicates, broken links, and sources based outside of the United States, as well as verifying the content of the links, the remaining results included: 10 sites that use Figure 1; nine sites that disaggregate Figure 1 but use both a 'before' and 'after' image (in various sequences); three sites with only the 'after' image; and six sites with only the 'before' image. Indeed, the ephemerality of the web is an issue with 83 of 203 links being broken or no longer working (77 were duplicates).

The links retrieved from TinEye are eclectic in terms of ideology and credibility. They include a variety of extreme right-wing sources of varying popularity (e.g. Breitbart and the Clarion Project) and pop culture sites (e.g. Buzzfeed). While local news sites (e.g. *The Denver Post*) appeared in the results, significant is the absence of national network sources and newspapers of record. An independent search of *The New York Times* turned up four relevant results and only one with an image (Yourish and Lee, 2016). Therein, Conley's image is presented in a collage with 78 others perhaps making it difficult for TinEye to recognize.

The lack of network and cable news links in the TinEye search results might be accounted for by the fact that many reports on those websites are accompanied not by still images but video from previous television broadcasts (TinEye results only linked to three videos, perhaps because of indexing practices). Thus, to get a fuller picture of the news media's use of Conley's image, broadcast coverage in network news (ABC, CBS, and NBC), local Denver affiliates (ABC-7, CBS-4, FOX-31, and NBC-9), and cable news (CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC) are also examined. Television continues to be an important – and the most common – source of news, however much online sources are closing that gap (Pew Research Center, 2018). Local news has a larger audience than both network and cable news. A search of the websites of the aforementioned local and national outlets and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive (https://archive.org/details/tv) yielded a combined 61 videos from national networks (8), local affiliates (12), and cable news (41). The analyzed material includes reports about Conley and those in which she is used as an example (e.g. in reports about women joining ISIS).

To provide further context for these images, a LexisUni search for national network and cable news broadcast transcripts was conducted using the term 'Shannon Conley'. Also, the websites of the aforementioned network and cable news outlets were searched for articles. The former returned 57 transcripts, the latter 66 articles. All of the materials – images, videos, and texts – are analyzed using qualitative and interpretive methods with an eye for the visual and textual narratives through which Conley's story was told and their attendant themes and motifs. If media are implicated in security and if appeals to citizens are made through a variety of channels (Reeves, 2017), a close reading of texts and images about terror and counterterror aimed at citizens provides insight into how the before-and-after motif participates in security discourse.

The before-and-after image

The narrative frames that accompany the visual presentation of Shannon Conley are unsurprising. Two frames from Nacos (2005) are most prominent in both broadcast and online media. First, Conley's radicalization is tied to her love life. Stressed is the fact that she had 'met a man online', 'fallen in love' with a terrorist, planned to marry her 'suitor', and so on. Second, Conley is also framed as being naïve and in need of psychological counseling. The frequent mention of her age, 19, surely plays into the naïveté frame, but mention is also made of medication stopped and her sporadic movement between religions. Her parents, who worked with and tipped off authorities, called her 'clueless' and 'incredibly naïve'; her lawyer said she was 'led terribly astray'; and the trial judge ordered a psychological evaluation and personality assessment before delivering his sentence. At her sentencing, she described herself as 'naïve and inexperienced'.[2]

A few details are striking about the Conley case. First is the stress placed on the fact that the FBI had met with Conley eight times in an attempt to dissuade her from traveling to Syria. This is in sharp contrast to other cases in which paid government agents lure and goad their minority and male targets into action (Aaronson, 2013; Szpunar, 2018). Second, while Conley openly talked about her faith, overt mention of her conversion or religious practice is limited. An exception, and the most orientalist framing of her, is found in CBS-4's coverage. The Denver affiliate dubbed Conley 'Jihad Shannon',

a reference to Colleen LaRose (CBS 4 Denver, 2015); it is the only outlet to use this nickname. Last, Conley's physical appearance receives little comment. The limited overt and extended discussion of Conley's religion (save CBS-4) and appearance is likely accounted for by the extensive use of her image.

Conley's conversion and status as 'practicing' is on display in Figure 1, communicated in the convention of the before-and-after image situated in orientalist discourse about terror. There is little written about before-and-after images of individuals in journalism studies. At the intersection of war and journalism any discussion of this motif focuses on images of targets before and after bombardment, images long used in propaganda (Moore, 2015). More recently, satellite and aerial perspectives of this kind are used to promote the (supposed) accuracy of modern weaponry (McKenna, 2006). Not only are these images controlled by the military in an effort to keep civilian death out of the media (Simpson, 2001), but in leaving out what occurred in between, aerial before-and-after images provide a closed narrative that elides questions about procedure and decision (Lukin et al., 2004).

Before-and-after images of individuals have been a point of interest in studies of the beauty industry (Peiss, 1998), medicine (Pearl, 2017), health rhetoric (Bloomfield and Sangalang, 2014), celebrity studies (Urgina, 2014), and reality and makeover television (Heller, 2006; Sender, 2012). Peiss (1998) traces this gendered imaging practice to early-20th century women's magazines and advertising. The 'before' images are almost always 'hilariously unflattering' (Sender, 2012: 31) and, following the logic of the 'big reveal' (Pearl, 2017), the focus is on positive transformation fueled by capitalist consumption (Heller, 2006). This scholarly work is complex, but most generally the before-and-after image presents a causal argument about bodily transformation (Bloomfield and Sangalang, 2014). In the context of war, such transformations are made starkly visible in the triptychs of Claire Felice and Lalage Snow, which show soldiers – Dutch in Afghanistan and British in Iraq, respectively – before, during, and after deployment (Pinar, 2011). Figure 1 presents a complementary quasi-causal argument in dyadic form, but one about a monstrous transformation from girl next door to terrorist. It is a reading that is undergirded by gendered orientalist discourses about women terrorists. The orientalist ideas projected onto the hijab imbue this composite image with not only an evidentiary value – that Conley has been radicalized – but also an explanatory value, that is, it conveys what radicalized Conley. If, as Stabile and Kumar (2005) show, images of women tearing off their veils signals liberation in security discourse, here the direction is reversed and donning a headscarf communicates one's radicalization.

Disaggregating the before-and-after image: Juxtaposition and sequence

The before-and-after image is, at its core, a matter of juxtaposition. The juxtaposition of images in journalism creates binaries (Andén-Papadopolous, 2018) and associations (Jones and Wardle, 2008) – placing the image of a Palestinian boy throwing a rock beside another of the World Trade Center exploding, for instance, problematically associates the two (Griffin, 2004: 392–393). Indeed, Figure 1 simultaneously presents a binary and an association through transformation. Juxtapositions not only create sequences (Zelizer,

Figure 3. CNN juxtaposition.
Source: CNN Tonight (2015).

2010) but occur in sequence, whether read down a page or followed over the time of a broadcast. Indeed, instead of the composite image of Figure 1 most online and broadcast reports disaggregate it and/or use surrogates. These thematic variations maintain the logic of the before-and-after motif and include the juxtaposition or superimposition of Conley's 'before' image(s) with or onto moving images of war as well as its placement into sequence with others (of Conley and of war) in both text and video.

CNN covered Conley more than any other outlet. Searches returned 38 transcripts, 13 articles, and 23 videos. It is perhaps surprising then that many of the videos – online articles are often accompanied by video from prior broadcasts rather than images – do not contain Conley's 'after' image, let alone the before-and-after image. The 'after' image first appeared on CNN on 14 January 2015 but had been available since the case was made public; local Denver affiliates used it in their initial July 2014 reports (e.g. Denver 7 News, 2014). CNN, and other outlets, communicated Conley's transformation through other juxtapositions, often using a cropped version of Figure 2. During CNN's *New Day* program on 3 July 2014, the lower banner includes Conley's face from this image while the full screen is occupied by ISIS propaganda (New Day, 2014). A 13 January 2015 broadcast shows the same cropped image splitting the full screen with an ISIS video of burqa-clad women engaged in firearms training (Figure 3; CNN Tonight, 2015). The image is also, at times, superimposed atop of ISIS videos (Figure 4). Such juxtaposition is also present in still images online. The Clarion Project – a right-wing conspiratorial group – amateurishly pastes Conley's 'after' image onto a still image of ISIS fighters. These variations on the before-and-after motif simultaneously utilize and maintain binaries, express associations, and communicate Conley's transformation.

Both online and broadcast news also place Conley's image(s) into sequences by disaggregating the composite before-and-after image. Some begin with the 'before' image, others with the 'after' image; others still cycled between the two (e.g. CBS 4 Denver, 2014; CNN, 2015). Regardless of the sequential order, what is communicated is a

Figure 4. CNN montage.
Source: New Day (2014).

particular surprise about an American who has ‘turned’. Beginning with a ‘before’ image builds up to a shocking reveal of Conley’s terrorist-chic makeover. Starting with her ‘after’ image leads to a somber reminiscence of the ‘girl next door’ she used to be, however troubled. Broadcast outlets often used surrogates for the ‘after’ image. For instance, one FOX News report begins with Conley’s ‘before’ image followed by footage of ISIS fighters (FOX and Friends, 2014). An ABC News report reverses this sequence (Good Morning America, 2014). The resulting shock is amplified by identifying Conley as ‘disturbing evidence of that new trend’ – young Western women joining ISIS (Good Morning America, 2014). In line with this logic, various broadcast and online reports also place Conley’s image into sequence with other so-called Jihadi Brides (CNN Tonight, 2014) and homegrown terrorists (e.g. Martinez, 2015; FBI Director, 2014).

Some media reports present more complex sequences. Online and broadcast examples are illustrative and provide a starting point from which to understand exactly how the before-and-after motif ‘speaks security’. FOX-31 Denver begins a story on Conley’s sentencing with intense music playing atop ISIS footage (FOX 31 Denver News, 2015). ‘Terrorists on the march’, says a voiceover as the screen shifts to Conley’s ‘after’ image. The screen then fades to Conley’s Facebook ‘before’ image. The rest of the broadcast features a reporter outside the courthouse and more ISIS video – a sequenced juxtaposition (i.e. courthouse/Syria) that itself further renders unseen war near(er) and amplifies anxieties. Online, Buzzfeed’s initial coverage (Hayes, 2014) begins with Conley’s face, cropped from Figure 2. What follows is a screenshot of her Facebook profile page featuring her chosen name, ‘Halima’, and a picture of a sun setting behind a minaret; a file photo of ISIS fighters in the group’s signature Toyota Hilux pickup truck; Conley’s ‘after’ image; and an image of marching ISIS fighters. This sequence then returns to initial image, only this time not cropped, and Conley is identified in the group shot by a red circle (Figure 2). This sequence most explicitly draws out how the before-and-after image of Conley and its variations speak security: beyond showing a troubling transformation

and in line with contemporary security discourse about flushing out threats hiding in plain sight, these representations invite the viewer (at times explicitly) to return their gaze to the before image and take a closer look at the girl next door.

The subjunctive-turned-preemptive voice of the enemy image

Coverage of the Conley case was accompanied by expressions of disbelief and shock. On 3 July 2014, an ABC-7 news presenter began her report, ‘Shy, quiet suburban girl to an accused terrorist [Conley’s before image on screen]. Look at the transformation . . .’ followed by Conley’s ‘after’ image (Denver 7 News, 2014). Before her sentencing, ABC’s Pierre Thomas asked his viewers, ‘Take a look at this photograph [Conley’s before image]. Meet 19 year-old Shannon Conley of Denver. She looks like the all-American girl next door, but the FBI says she was hellbent on going to Syria to join ISIS’ (World News Tonight, 2014). The amplification of shock through the juxtaposition of images (Olesen, 2018) is, in this context, undoubtedly built on orientalist stereotypes about who ‘looks’ like a terrorist. But speaking security is not reducible to shock. Rather, it points to an image’s potential to limit ‘available interpretations’ and, as such, generate and participate in security discourse (Hansen, 2011: 55). Images of the enemy, particularly those presenting existential threats (Hansen, 2011: 53), constitute such images. The before-and-after image’s structure provides a closed narrative (Lukin et al., 2004) and, when applied to the political transformation of friend to foe, participates in security discourse. A full appreciation of this intertextual phenomenon requires an account of the motif’s temporality and non-iconic status.

Building on Sontag’s (2004) assertion that images do not issue demands on their own, Hansen (2011) notes that images can only ‘speak security’ intertextually. Thus, useful is the notion of ‘voice’ which is fundamentally intertextual (Zelizer, 2010). The voice of the visual is first and foremost subjunctive, an ‘as if’ mood that ‘expresses condition’ and communicates ‘“what could be” rather than “what is”’ (Zelizer, 2010, p. 14); in short, what ‘may be’. As an image’s ‘orientation to the imagined, emotional, and contingent cues in its environment’, the voice of the visual helps to understand how an image might be used ‘*for* a wide variety of strategies and objectives’ (p. 13). As such, an image’s meaning and completion are not self-contained but invite imagination, implication, and emotionality (p. 14). There is a tension, however, in connecting the subjunctive voice of the visual to the before-and-after image, which, even if disaggregated or sequenced, seems to denote a completed transformation. But, placed within the context of preemptive security – the ‘cues in its environment’ – it expresses a more complex temporality.

There is a productive parallel between the voice of the visual and preemption. Using the US justification for the invasion of Iraq as a case study, Massumi (2015) illustrates the subjunctive-turned-preemptive conditional logic of security, ‘could have, would have, just as good as was’ (p. 240), which ‘creates a feedback loop between futurity and pastness’ (p. 241). Saddam Hussein may not have had weapons of mass destruction, but he would have if he could have and thus preemptive intervention was/is/will be justified. On a more local level, preemption requires a public attuned to anticipating the ‘next terrorist attack’ (Aradau and van Munster, 2012). Thus, what makes it possible for security

to appropriate the voice of the visual – but by no means limit it to securitization – is a shared future tense. An operation that not only invites speculation, implication and so on, but is also intertextual in that it goes beyond one incident/frame. While the before-and-after image might suggest closure, it represents a strategy of remaining open that is distinct from polysemy (Tenenboim and Weinblatt, 2008). In its use for war:

> The photograph is a kind of promise that the event will continue, indeed it is that very continuation, producing an equivocation at the level of the temporality of the event: Did those actions happen then? Do they continue to happen? Does the photograph continue the event into the future? (Butler, 2010: 84)

Indeed, representations of Americans-turned-jihadists are often inflected with an uneasy sense of return (of dead terrorists) and, thus, a potential (but not defined) future return of more (Szpunar, 2018). Moreover, Zelizer (2010) ties the voice of the visual to Barthes' notion of *punctum*, 'what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*' (Barthes, 1981, p. 55). Thus, beyond denoting transformation, the before-and-after image and its variations draw viewers back to the 'before' image with renewed interest and *in the interest* of security, calling the public to add to the image what is already there, hiding in plain sight. In other words, this motif 'speaks security' in a climate that encourages citizens to 'see something' and 'say something' in the context of an unending war that promises future attacks. While it is too late for Conley, her image promises a return, she is 'disturbing evidence of a new trend'. Here, the subjunctive coping mechanism of journalism (Zelizer, 2010) is appropriated into, and reflective of, broad practices of security.

Equally consequential here is the 'status' of Conley's image, which is certainly not iconic *pace* Lucaites and Hariman (2001). Conley's composite image is not understood as historically significant, nor has it been reproduced and used extensively, nor is she necessarily widely recognizable. Yet, contra Hansen (2011) who ties the 'securitizing capacity' of images to 'their status as icons' (p. 54) and Mitchell (2011) for whom only iconic images have 'operative power' – like those taken at Abu Ghraib (Andén-Papadopolous, 2018; Butler, 2010) – the non-iconic images of Conley and others like her are not to be disregarded. Two points in this regard emerge from Olesen's (2018) discussion of visual practices of communicating injustice in which 'juxtaposition typically requires some kind of intervention by intimate injustice interpreters (e.g. family) who have access to these kinds of private photographs and command a high degree of symbolic capital' (p. 662). First, in the context of security, these ordinary images represent the level of participation preemption seeks: 'The first line of defense against terrorism: mom and dad' (Bergen and Sterman, 2014). Second, these contributions, whether a yearbook photo or Facebook post, are part and parcel of the aestheticization of war (Sontag, 2004) that forms publics (Chouliaraki, 2013). While the battlefield is surely the 'most poignant site of war imaginary' (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 319), its boundaries have been irrevocably blurred (p. 332). Taken together, the symbolic capital of such 'unary' photos (Barthes, 1981) vis-à-vis a homegrown threat that blends into the crowd lies in their non-iconic status, however placed within a recognizable motif. That is, it is their *non-iconicity* or 'ordinariness' – they are the types of images most people have and take regularly

– that amplifies the urgency for public participation, for turning back to the ‘before’ image with anticipation.

Before-and-after images perhaps do not ‘wound’ *pace* Barthes’ notion of *punctum*, that which pierces the viewer and invites/demands a reengagement with the image, but there is something useful in the notion for understanding their securitizing voice. The *punctum* for Barthes (1981) is often a detail – a belt, for instance (p. 43) – but one not placed into an image intentionally (p. 47). The before-and-after motif as composite, juxtaposition, or sequence not only shocks, but leaves the viewer ‘unsettled’ – perhaps the best way to describe ‘wounding’ appropriated for security. In the unsettled dust of the big reveal, the invitation to return to the ‘before’ image includes a demand, in line with theories of radicalization (see Patel, 2011), to inspect the nondescript and unintentional details hidden in the image of the girl next door.

Conclusion: Beyond transformation

‘Look at the transformation’, a Denver newscaster marvels in a segment about Conley (Denver 7 News, 2014). The before-and-after image has long been a device through which to communicate, most often but not always, a woman’s transformation: wrinkled eyes go smooth, one stands wearing the once-tight-now-comically-large-pants of the ‘before’ image after a diet, one’s style goes from shabby to chic. In a war on terror adaptation, and in contrast to the liberation motif of removing one’s veil (Stabile and Kumar, 2005), a young white American woman covers her head. The before-and-after image – as composite, juxtaposition, or sequence – is part of the complex socio-political process by which a citizen becomes marked as a terrorist, a process that simultaneously maintains orientalist stereotypes and expands their application. But the motif functions beyond this. Key dimensions of the war on terror effort have been the media’s increasing role in securitization and the explicit appeal for citizens to keenly observe their everyday surroundings. Forestalling the next terrorist attack could result from simply reporting that ordinary, yet unattended parcel. It is in this (intertextual) context that the before-and-after image in coverage of homegrown terrorism ‘speaks security’. Positioning Conley as part of a ‘trend’, the before-and-after image invites the viewer to return to the unremarkable, the ‘before’ image of a girl next door, and to re-view it with a preemptive eye, in the interest of anticipating the next attack.

The use of this motif in journalistic coverage of homegrown terrorism raises interesting questions. For instance, is this practice limited to representations of women? Alsultany (2012) illustrates how photos of John Walker Lindh, a white American captured fighting with the Taliban in 2001, buttress the problematic ‘going Muslim’ narrative used to tell his story (pp. 113–115). It is a story told through a well documented war on terror discourse centered on a feminized, queer, or failed masculine heterosexuality (Puar, 2007; Weber, 2017). While Alsultany does not examine Lindh’s images explicitly against the before-and-after motif, others have tied its use to the ‘feminization of personal transformation’ in other contexts (Sender, 2012: 32). While beyond the scope of this article, the intersection of these literatures suggests a productive avenue that might further build on the arguments presented here. Ultimately, the analysis of the before-and-after image challenges scholars of journalism, visual communication, and security

to further attend to the alignment of visual and narrative media practice and counterterror discourse through non-iconic images, particularly as the war on terror, almost two decades in, increasingly becomes a seemingly mundane part of the background of everyday life.

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Notes

1. Note: 'Shannon Conley' was searched without the quotation marks so as to allow results that used her middle name, Maureen.
2. Transcript obtained from court stenographer.

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