IN SEARCH OF ANTAGONISTIC OTHER
TROUBLING THREATS AND NON-INTERVENTION

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Abstract

This research underscores the complexities of constructing hegemonic narratives in the face of geopolitical dynamics surrounding military crises. Departing from conventional analyses focused on securitization theory, strategic narratives, or David Campbell's framework of identity construction in response to external perils, this study draws upon the concept of hegemonic practices as elucidated by Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Through an exploration of how political actors employ discursive strategies to construct hegemony, the research centers on the Western political elites' efforts to establish political hegemony to rationalize military intervention in the Middle East. Utilizing the notion of the antagonistic Other, which posits two mutually constitutive Others where one is perceived as the source of violence against the other, representing civilians, this paper examines the political discourse surrounding two concurrent events in the Middle East: the conflicts in Syria and Libya. The analysis reveals that while the Western political class constructed a political hegemony around Libya by portraying Muammar Gaddafi and the victimized civilians as opposing Others, a similar narrative failed to materialize for Syria: Western powers encountered expected challenges in articulating a clear antagonistic Other, on account of the position of Russia and other countries representing non-Western political culture. Throughout the period of 2011–2014, Bashar al-Assad, despite his role as the Syrian president, was not consistently portrayed as the source of antagonism towards civilians.

Keywords:

hegemony; antagonism; discourse; Other; Libya; Syria

Referring to the West's hostility against Libya, Alex Bellamy argued [Bellamy 2011; Bellamy and Williams 2011] that the military operation represented a novel occurrence of swift military intervention against a state's sovereignty. This event differed in significant respects: despite previous UN assertions regarding the necessity of safeguarding popula-

tions in Somalia[1], Rwanda[2], or Sudan[3], the subsequent peacekeeping missions were not as impactful and were not carried out against the will of the ruling government. Various scholars have examined the factors contributing to the absence of intervention or delays in other contexts. For instance, the reluctance to engage in military intervention following the Libya campaign is evident in the case of Syria. The repercussions of such interventions were perceived as potentially more detrimental than the pre-intervention circumstances, a viewpoint reinforced by the firm political stance adopted by Russia and China, amplified by the outcomes of the Libyan operation. Furthermore, the United States' reluctance to undertake further military ventures played a significant role in the decision to refrain from intervention[4].

While there exist various materialist explanations for circumstances that preclude military intervention (none of which will be debated in this paper), the focus of this article is on the political task of formulating a convincing case for intervention, as well as analyzing what makes such a case poorly constructed. The latter was depicted in Lee Seymour's paper as "b*******ting": creating a disconnect between the strong language leaders use during the crisis and the failure of these threats to achieve the desired diplomatic / military outcomes [Seymour 2014].

This article focuses on the political debates surrounding international violence and endeavors to mobilize political support for intervening in ongoing crises. Specifically, it examines Western communicative efforts aimed at consolidating power by unifying diverse interests under a shared political agenda of military aggression. By communicative efforts, we refer to the creation of a discursive hegemony designed to legitimize a military interference. The hegemonic practices of Western elites that justified intervention in Libya (2011) and Syria (2013)[5] include creating a figure of antagonistic Other[6]: the Other (A) (Oppressor) and the Other-(B) (Oppressed) that go along in an antagonistic pair[7]. This article concludes that in February-March 2011 in Libya, Western political leaders effectively portrayed the crisis as necessitating a military response. Nonetheless, research on the Syrian crisis reveals that despite Western attempts to depict Al-Assad as a menacing figure, the space for the Other (A) in the Western political discourse remained void.

This paper is structured as follows: First, it provides a review of existing strategies for articulating hegemony, introducing the concept of the antagonistic 'Other' in political discourse. The second part of the paper offers a comprehensive description of the research design. Subsequently, the third section delves into the examination of the discourse surrounding the Libyan civil conflict and the Syrian crisis. This study incorporates an analysis of NATO leadership speeches and transcripts from United Nations Security Council meetings spanning from 2011 to 2014. To accomplish this, it utilizes both quantitative and discourse analysis methodologies, particularly employing Voyant Tools, a web instrument that is frequently [Black 2016] employed in such studies.

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[1] S/PV.5083 // The United Nations Documents. 2004. URL: https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.5083 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[2] S/PV.3392 // The United Nations Documents. 1994. URL: https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.3392 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[3] S/PV.4978 // The United Nations Documents. 2004. URL: https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.4978 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[4] To see more on these arguments and their rebuttal: [Bellamy 2014; McHugh 2021; Nuruzzaman 2013; Thakur 2013].

[5] A caveat. This paper does not attempt to construct alternative explanation for the failure of military intervention. In the case of Sudan [Seymour 2014], Rwanda [Piiparinen 2006] or Syria [McHugh 2021] the underlying reasons of these failures were different.

[6] For insight into distinction between agonism and antagonism in Mouffe's writings see: [Tambakaki 2014].

[7] The cases of the Libyan and Syrian conflicts have been selected primarily because the events in the two countries unfolded simultaneously, both were the source of a comparable number of victims within the period 2011—2014, but in one case there was no intervention. This allows me to conduct a comparative discourse analysis.

Introducing Antagonistic Other

Hegemony around the Other

This paper builds upon the discursive form of hegemony, omitting the classical "materialist" interpretations of this concept due to space constraints [Snidal 1985; Hopf 2013]. Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist understanding of hegemony emphasizes the discursive nature of the social world, structured by articulatory practices that shape meanings and identities. Through this framework, the ruling political class constructs all aspects of reality, granting them discursive significance. Essentially, this approach challenges the division between discursive and non-discursive domains of society, leading poststructuralists to consider overemphasizing the materialist or ideational aspects of reality as a flawed epistemology.

Hegemony is built on drawing borders between the "inside", where the Self articulates and maintains social order, and the "outside", where the Other exists. In fact, hegemony functions as a historical underpinning of sovereignty [Morozov 2021], world order[8], culture [Ostermann 2016], or political power [Holland and Fermor 2020]. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe propose that hegemony cannot exist without establishing antagonistic relations with the referent point, which shapes the hegemonic order [Laclau and Mouffe 1985]. The emergence of antagonism leads to the formation of an identity with defined boundaries [Edkins 1999]. According to Laclau and Mouffe, a peasant is defined in relation to a landowner. When the landowner evicts the peasant, the peasant loses the attributes that differentiate them from the landowner and therefore ceases to be a peasant [Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 125]. Any negation expressed in the antagonistic logic cannot be brought to its logical conclusion – since the discourse is made up of conflicting and diverse elements, therefore, it can never be whole and complete: "there is no single underlying principle fixing – and hence constituting – the whole field of differences"[9].

The literature on hegemony extensively emphasizes the complex nature of its ontological categories, often employing various analytical approaches. For example, Ty Solomon investigates the portrayal of Iraq's policies as a security threat by the U.S. following the 9/11 attacks. This depiction involved equating the U.S. ("us", "civilization", "good") with Iraq, which was characterized as "evil". The term "evil" served as a central point in discussions related to "terrorism" and the "war", and it was closely linked with terms such as "barbarism", "terror", "savage", and "murder" in official discourse [Solomon 2009: 277].

Eva Herschinger's concept of equivalent hypostasis illustrates how terrorism and drugs are discursively connected to global adversaries. This connection creates an antagonistic boundary where drugs and drug trafficking are presented as threats to civilization, leading to a perceived need for a comprehensive battle against these perceived evils, referred to as "humanity's war on drugs", in order to ensure survival [Herschinger 2012: 80].

Chris Methmann examines discursive hegemony through the concept of empty signifiers. He views abstract terms like environmental protection or sustainable development as empty signifiers that evolve in meaning over time. This evolution helps to explain why fundamental aspects of the world economy, such as growth and free trade, persist without challenge despite conflicting with goals of environmental protection in the pursuit of climate protection [Methmann 2010: 369].

Thomassen explores Laclau's idea of hegemonic articulation using the concept of heterogeneity. Heterogeneity introduces a dynamic between Self and Other that goes beyond their antagonism, remaining an essential aspect defining their antagonistic identities. Thomassen illustrates this with the example of the *lumpenproletariat*, emphasizing its role in revealing the limitations of how the proletariat and bourgeoisie relate to each other[10].

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[8] Its either construction [Wojczewski 2018] or contestation [Aydın-Düzgit 2023].

[9] Ibid: 111.

[10] Ibid.

Hegemony around the Other-Other

Hegemony as a political tool, wielded by elites in power struggles, exhibits adaptability, as demonstrated in the literature review earlier. It takes on various forms such as equivalent relations, antagonism, and heterogeneity. This paper, conversely, employs a poststructuralist lens to analyze the case of military hostility, examining how hegemony is articulated in relation to the Other, delineating discursive boundaries of antagonism.

Here, antagonism becomes evident in the relationship between two components that make up the Other: the Oppressor Other (A) and the Oppressed Other (B). These facets of the Other still maintain an equivalence, being connected by their geographical location and political circumstances. Typically, the conceptual "dictator" governs the country and/or pursues the political goal of suppressing and/or assaulting the population. Meanwhile, the population either resides in the territory, flees from it, or suffers due to the dictator's actions. The dictator is often held accountable for war crimes and/or for turning the domestic political situation into a humanitarian crisis. However, while this equivalence is upheld, these elements share a deeper interdependence: they mutually constitute each other and function as inseparable components of the Other, against which the Self constructs and consequently solidifies a hegemonic relationship.

One might question the appropriateness of introducing an additional discursive mechanism, such as antagonism between two facets of the Other, given that the Self already establishes an antagonistic boundary. However, my argument posits that the Other is susceptible to becoming an unstable entity, potentially escaping the hegemonic control exerted by the Self.

The clarity surrounding the attribution of atrocities, whether they are ascribed to a well-defined perpetrator or presented as targeting specific civilian groups, can become uncertain. In response, military intervention serves as the quintessential means of projecting political authority. As noted by M. Finnemore, while the legitimate justifications for military interventions have evolved over centuries, the fundamental essence of exercising political authority over another government (rather than territory) has remained unchanged [Finnemore 2004: 10–11]. By employing the term "hegemony", we depart from the premise that political authority must, at least temporarily, revolve around stable discursive features of the crisis, along with a consistent conception of the military target.

When the Other remains unformulated, the political class risks losing legitimate control over the holistic and stable discourse. This discursive permeability leads to attempts to establish parallel hegemonic orders around the same crisis, bypassing the existing political authority and neglecting the essential elements of a political discourse around international violence. It is the antagonism within the discursive figure of the Other, using the argument of Laclau and Mouffe [Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 124–27] that works as a "countervailing force" thereby establishing the relations between (A) and (B) that rationalize military hostility. Creating an antagonistic Other through discursive hegemony is a challenging political endeavor. In the following section, the paper explores several cases where the Western diplomats failed to establish a comprehensive discourse that legitimizes military hostility. For instance, in the face of widespread human rights abuses, domestic and intergovernmental debates may emerge, weighing democratic, peaceful change against social engineering facilitated through military measures [Hildebrandt 2013]. Similarly, when a genocide occurs in a distant country, crafting an interventionist discourse may prove challenging, as it might not directly relate to national security concerns [Maxey 2020].

International Threats and Non-Intervention

In this section, we delve deeper into cases that highlight the risks associated with the cases of failed attempts to construct hegemonic discourse[11]. We exemplify this concern with

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[11] An excellent piece challenging my argument though is Maria Leek and Viacheslav Morozov's study on the European Union's response to the events in Libya, where it is argued that the EU articulated an equivalence relationship between Libyans and Europeans. From their perspective, the delineation was

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instances of crises in Rwanda and Sudan, where despite the presence of violence, military intervention was not pursued. In these case studies, we draw upon the research conducted by Lee Seymour [Seymour 2014] and Tendai Chari [Chari 2010], who examined the intricacies of constructing political discourses in both conflicts. We complement their findings by evaluating these articulations using transcripts of Security Council meetings from 1994 and 2004 (the year of escalating violence in Darfur).

Lee Seymour identifies several factors that hindered the U.S. mobilization to address the violence in Darfur. Specifically, U.S. attempts to label the situation as genocide [Seymour 2014, 580–85] were delayed and poorly executed, lacking the necessary persuasion to rally supporters around a common interpretation of events [Black and Williams 2009: 199; Hamilton 2011: 39]. Upon closer examination of the discussions within the UN Security Council, it becomes evident that U.S. diplomats failed to garner political support for their campaign, thereby struggling to construct an antagonistic Other around the unfolding genocide. U.S. diplomats asserted that the actions of the Sudanese government and its Janjaweed proxies had resulted in 30,000 deaths in Darfur since February 2003, causing over 1 million individuals to flee their homes, with approximately 200,000 crossing the border into Chad. They stated that the Sudanese Government "has done the unthinkable. It has fostered an armed attack on its own civilian population. It has created a humanitarian disaster".

However, these statements faced challenges from representatives who did not frame the Sudanese government as (A), thereby struggling to establish an alternative articulation.

In the same discussion, the representative of the United Kingdom expressed a desire for collaboration and cooperation with the Government of Sudan on behalf of the "international community". Additionally, the representative of Germany emphasized that the Government of Sudan "bears responsibility for ensuring the security" of the 1.5 million people at risk in Darfur and for facilitating the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid. Other member states of the UN Security Council welcomed the Sudanese government's implementation of the peace agreement and Security Council Resolution 1556 (2004).

The example of the Rwandan genocide suggests that in the context of competing hegemonic articulations, the Other (A) may not exist at all. In his study of media content related to the Rwandan genocide, Tendai Chari demonstrates that the international community has been influenced by Eurocentric stereotypes regarding Rwanda and Africa in general. These stereotypes include tribalism and age-old confrontations between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes, which led to offhand violence. However, the killings were actually planned and coordinated [Thompson 2007: 192].

An examination of discussions within the UN Security Council from January to December 1994 reveals that the figure of the antagonistic Other never received a comprehensive articulation in the political discourse of diplomats. Isolated attempts to construct the Other (A) remained disjointed. The ongoing "carnage and slaughter"[12] against "thousands of hopeless civilians"[13] lacked a clearly defined perpetrator. Throughout the year, two attempts were made in the Security Council to identify such a source: Rwanda's Foreign Minister Jérôme Bicamumpaka (himself subsequently accused

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drawn between the Self and the Oppressor (A), hence, a clear-cut articulation of Libyans antagonizing the Oppressor in the article was not explicitly specified. Instead, the focus was on the debate regarding the EU's self-repositioning vis-à-vis the unfolding crises. Morozov and Leek analyze the intra-EU discourse on the European "global" outlook, linking the Union discursively to those involved in the civil uprising, suggesting that "the streets of Cairo and Alexandria bring to mind Prague and Bucharest in 1989". Consequently, the attack against Libyans was portrayed as equivalent to an attack against Europe and its values. The EU itself was depicted as the Oppressed (B). See further: [Leek and Morozov 2018].

[12] S/PV.3368 // The United Nations Documents. 1994. URL: https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.3368 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[13] Ibid.

of complicity in genocide) attempted to blame the Rwandan Patriotic Front, but received no response from other Security Council members. Additionally, starting with Resolution RV.3400, most participants in the meetings raised concerns about the unacceptability of hate propaganda by Radio Colline Mille. However, it was not specified who was affected by this propaganda or *who* committed crimes against the Tutsi tribes.

Research Design

This paper's major focus is studying debates within NATO and the UN Security Council, exploring the competition among various hegemonic practices in advocating for a military intervention. Starting in 2011, Western political class centered his attention on the antagonistic Other, framing it as the "Gaddafi murderous regime" that had "brutalized" civilians "who had never thrown a single stone" and who were seeking freedom and democracy. This clear-cut portrayal of the bad guy oppressing the good ones became the persuasive narrative that facilitated intervention.

In contrast to the Libyan case, the discourse among Western diplomats regarding the Syrian crisis encountered opposing persuasive discursive practices, despite some efforts to depict Assad as an odious Other (A). This paper argues that the decision for non-intervention resulted from conflicting hegemonic struggles surrounding the appropriate international response to the unfolding crisis. Diplomatic representatives, notably from Russia and China, and also including Brazil, India, and South Africa, did not attribute Assad as the source of violence against the population, fundamentally disrupting the antagonism within the discursive Other and, therefore, challenging Western hegemonic practices. Importantly, this verbal strategy was not connected discursively to the "Libyan precedent", i.e., the disappointment with the aftermath of the Libyan operation [Bellamy 2014]. As a result, (A) and (B) were not engaged in antagonism as constituents of the Other. Violence in the Syrian crisis remained depersonalized, meaning that the notional (A) was not causing the suffering of (B). At various points between 2012 and

2014, Assad was depicted as Syria's legitimate leader with whom negotiations were deemed possible (although very difficult).

For this paper, a substantial corpus of texts encompassing statements made by NATO officials and texts from UN Security Council meetings between 2011 and 2014 was examined. For the «Libyan» discourse, a total of 490,588 words were processed, while for the «Syrian» discourse, a larger corpus of texts, including statements by NATO officials and texts from UN Security Council meetings from the same time period, totalling 1,123,000 words, was analyzed. The approach involved working with multiple texts to establish formalized categories around (A) and (B) by examining images within various narratives.

To develop these categories, we analyzed the discourses related to Syria and Libya, resulting in a glossary of keywords shaping the discourse on threats. These identified expressions served as the categories for further analysis in a larger sample of texts for each year. In defining antagonistic images, we simultaneously searched for synonymous words and determined their frequency. Recurring categories highlighted the predominance of specific images in the text, typically consisting of approximately 20 representative collocations per corpus. We used *Voyant Tools*, a web-based instrument commonly employed in social sciences for text analysis.

Libya: Antagonistic Other and Discursive Hegemony

The Libyan conflict stands out as a unique case in the history of military interventions. Never before had the UN Security Council officially adopted resolutions allowing other states, against the official position of the Libyan government, to launch a military operation aimed at protecting the population from the actions of the dictator [Luck 2011; Dunne and Gifkins 2011; Bellamy and Williams 2011]. During the entire UN discussion on this matter, countries such as the United States, France, Germany, Colombia, Lebanon, and Rwanda invoked the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) principle, while other states, including Russia and China, voiced concerns over the

actions of the Libyan government [Tang Abomo 2019].

In February 2011, the situation in Libya escalated swiftly, resulting in a civil conflict. Between February 17 and 23, law enforcement authorities intervened to disperse rallies in various Libyan cities, including Tobruk, Bayda, Al Qubbah, and Derna. During this period, several hundred protesters lost their lives[14]. Muammar Gaddafi, the then leader, made statements indicating his determination to address the unrest, expressing his intention to mobilize large numbers to restore order in the country[15]. It is challenging to pinpoint the exact moment when the hegemonic practices of Western political class began to focus on constructing the antagonistic Other. The texts under consideration consistently discredit the Libyan leader as a political actor endowed with agency in Libya's unfolding chaos[16].

Between January and February, the overwhelming majority of texts rapidly shifted to portray Gaddafi as the antagonistic category (A) within the Other, labeling him as a "dictator" or a "brutal/murderous dictator". In the total corpus of UN and NATO texts, the term "dictator*" (including variations like "dictato-rial" and "dictatorship") was mentioned 35 times. For example, one statement asserted, "If we are careful not to act too late, the Security Council will have the distinction of having ensured that in Libya law prevails over force, democracy over dictatorship, and freedom over oppression"[17].

Western diplomats articulated discursive hegemony along two crucial lines. First, they portrayed Gaddafi's actions as intentionally aimed at exterminating the country's population. Phrases such as "colonel Gaddafi's forces are continuing to target the civilian population as we speak"[18] and "Taking every measure possible to prevent Gaddafi's brutal and systematic attacks on his own people"[19] were widely used to this end. NATO's actions were framed as intended solely "to stop the brutal campaign of violence by the Libyan regime against its own people"[20]. While this interpretation of Gaddafi's actions frequently referenced various documents, including the 2005 World Summit, no direct charges of genocide against Muammar Gaddafi were found[21].

Second, the discourse emphasized that Gaddafi did not respond to calls to cease his aggressive actions and had lost every legitimate

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[14] Libya: Security Forces Kill 84 Over Three Days // Human Rights Watch. 2011. URL: https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/18/libya-security-forces-kill-84-over-three-days (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[15] Libya and War Powers // The US State Department. 2011. URL: https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/l/releases/remarks/167250.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[16] With two noticeable exceptions. First, in early 2011, the NATO leadership stated, reiterating rather literally the "Sudanese" rhetoric: "The Libyan authorities have a responsibility to protect the population; they should fulfil the legitimate demands of the Libyan people; and allow a peaceful transition to democracy". См.: Joint Press Briefing on Events Concerning Libya // NATO. 2011. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_72290.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023). Also, the same discourse occurred in the UN: "But the ultimate decision lies in the Qadhafi regime and their acceptance that democracy must take place, that it is not acceptable to use their military to harm their population and population centres". См.: S/PV.6498 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6498 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[17] S/PV.6498 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6498 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[18] Joint Press Briefing on Events Concerning Libya // NATO. 2011. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_72290.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[19] Opening Remarks by NATO Secretary General // NATO. 2011. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_72418.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[20] Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in Libya // The United Nations. 2011. URL: https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2011-03-24/briefing-security-council-situation-libya (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[21] In the UN, "genocid*" was mentioned four times, exclusively within the above-described discourse on a legal regime that must protect people from genocide. The texts in the NATO archive contain 15 mentions of the "genocid*" category related exclusively to the genocide policy of the Serbian authorities against Kosovo.

right to govern the country. The international community was described as "outraged to see that in Libya, the Gaddafi regime continues to defy worldwide condemnation, with systematic attacks against its own people and a brutal disregard for fundamental rights"[22]. There were repeated statements asserting that Gaddafi should resign or leave his office, as "his regime has lost all legitimacy and can no longer be an interlocutor for us". The corpus included 26 instances of word combinations, including phrases like "losses", "lost all the", "gamble with", and "legitimacy", in connection to Muammar Gaddafi.

The analysis of the corpus of texts reveals a clearly articulated second antagonistic category within the figure of the Other, denoted as (B), which represents Libyan civilians subjected to violence by the dictator. Western statements express sympathy for these civilians, noting that they suffered under "one of the world's most brutal dictatorships". The Libyan people are depicted as aspiring to democracy, with statements like, "Libyans are asking for democracy; they are asking for progress"[23]. The verb "suffer*" appears 14 times in conjunction with "Libyan people", "Libyans", "Peoples of Libya", as well as with terms related to Gaddafi's regime such as "Libyan forces", "pro-Qadhafi", and "Qadhafi". Similarly, the verb "kill*" is mentioned 15 times in connection with categories describing Gaddafi's regime, including "Libyan forces", "pro-Qadhafi", and "Qadhafi".

The discourse of Western diplomats portrays (A) and (B) as clearly antagonistic categories. On one hand, the image of (B) achieves its objectives exclusively through peaceful means, as they "did not throw a single stone"[24], while (A) is portrayed as having publicly "promised no mercy or pity"[25]. On the other hand, (B) is depicted as striving solely for democracy, whereas (A) represents not just a dictatorship but also a broader group of "dictatorships" willing to suppress civil society in the Middle East, especially at a time when the "wind of change" was sweeping through the region[26]. Western statements assert that "the people of the Middle East can now see clearly which nations have chosen to ignore their calls for democracy and instead prop up desperate, cruel dictators"[27]. This framing reinforces the antagonism between (A) and (B).

At the same time, it is evident that the Self (NATO and Western diplomats) is distancing itself from (B), the Libyan civilians subjected to violence by the dictator. For instance, NATO significantly limits the scope of its objectives concerning (B). Throughout 2011, NATO's discourse primarily repeated standard normative statements like, "What we need to ensure a long-term sustainable solution is a political process that responds to the legitimate demands of the Libyan people"[28] and "Any solution to the crisis must respond to the legitimate demands of the Libyan people for political reforms"[29]. However, NATO did not set the objective of actively promoting democracy in Libya. An analysis of NATO's articulation of its post-war role in Libya showed a shift from initial expectations of a "transition to democ-

[22] Strengthening European Security // NATO. 2011. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_71564.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[23] S/PV.6498 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6498 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[24] Ibid.

[25] S/PV.6498 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6498 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[26] Press Briefing by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen // NATO. n.d. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_71257.htm?selectedLocale=fr (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[27] S/PV.6627 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6627 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[28] Can be found at: NATO Nations Commit to Ending Gadhafi Rule // VoA. 2011. URL: https://www.voanews.com/a/nato-nations-commit-to-ending-gadhafi-rule-119852514/138003.html (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[29] NATO in Libya // DW. 2011. URL: https://www.dw.com/en/france-and-britain-say-nato-not-fulfilling-its-role-in-libya/a-14980521 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

racy" to a focus on "post-conflict stabilization", where NATO's role was minimized, with statements like, "When it comes to the post-conflict phase, I think it's primarily a responsibility for the United Nations, helped by international organizations, to assist the new authorities in Libya"[30].

Additionally, NATO distanced itself from any associative relationship with (B) by narrowing its set of direct functions primarily to reinforce its self-identification as an effective mechanism for collective self-defence. For instance, NATO highlighted its effectiveness in "Operation Unified Protector" and emphasized its role in demonstrating resolve and resilience[31].

As a result, the Self (NATO and Western diplomats) securitized the Other (the crisis in Libya), with the clear categorization of (A) and (B) as antagonistic categories within the Other indicating the international community's discursive securitization of the unfolding crisis.

Syria: the unformulated Other

In contrast to the Libyan case, there was no military intervention violating Syria's territorial sovereignty, despite the Syrian conflict resulting in significantly higher civilian casualties. An analysis of the Syrian discourse formulated by Western diplomats, primarily from the US and the UK throughout 2014, shows certain similarities with the Libyan one. In particular, there were attempts to depict the Assad regime in Syria as an odious Other (A). However, if we study the Syrian discourse from the beginning of the conflict, it becomes evident that discursive hegemony lacked a foundation in previous years. The portrayal of Assad as "odious" in 2014 was the result of years of fostering associative connections between the Syrian President and the international community. Within the context of the Security Council and NATO's political discourse, Assad was initially portrayed as a legitimate leader responsible for his people's security. This was evident in discussions within the UN Security Council, highlighting the absence of a distinct Other (A). In 2014, Western diplomats faced strong counter-hegemonic discourses, making it challenging to unambiguously define the antagonistic Other (A) responsible for significant oppressions, similar to the Libyan conflict.

In 2011–2013, the NATO corpus did not formulate Assad's image as the antagonist category to (B). Instead of attempting to establish clear antagonistic relations between the Self and (A), Assad (remarkably, as well as in the "Sudanese discourse" of the international community) was portrayed as Syria's president, who was called upon by the whole international community to help stabilize the country and comply with the legitimate demands of the Syrian people for political reorganization. The "Assad" category was mentioned 13 times, with the "President" category being mentioned six times out of those 13 as "President Assad". Most frequently, NATO's demands contained words like "address/accommodate" "legitimate aspirations/demands of Syrian people"[32]. Ten of the 19 cases of such terms being used in demands for reforms in Syria were directly addressed to the Syrian government, Damascus, or al-Assad. Nine contained abstract statements of fact, such as "I do believe that the only way forward in Syria is to [...] accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people"[33]. The NATO discourse also rather unequivocally stated the military alliance's objectives, with 15 mentions of "intervene",

[30] NATO 2020 – Shared Leadership for a Shared Future // NATO. 2012. URL: http://www-test.hq.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_85443.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[31] Opening Remarks by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the North Altantic Council Meeting in Foreign Ministers Session // NATO. 2011. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_81847.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[32] Doorstep Statement by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen// NATO. 2013. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_99866.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[33] Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen Following the First Meeting of Ministers of Defence // NATO. 2012. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_90575.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).

13 of which were formulated in the context of having "no intention to intervene militarily"[34].

Furthermore, the associative link between the Self and Bashar al-Assad emerges due to the absence of distinct indications from both the Western and non-Western political communities to delegitimize al-Assad. For example, there were 18 mentions of the word "leave" in 2011–2013, while the word "power" was mentioned only once in the collocation "leave power" in reference to Muammar Gaddafi. The word "legitimacy" was mentioned five times, while the "lost" category came up once, in conjunction with the Turkish fighter being downed by the Syrian Air Defense Force. In UN documents from 2011, Bashar al-Assad was also represented as a Syrian political actor to whom demands for Syria's political reform were addressed: "President Al-Assad's Government needs to respond to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people with immediate and genuine reform, not brutal repression"[35], while violence in Syria remained impersonal, even though the Syrian government was certainly recognized as being responsible for its escalation ("We equally regret that the Syrian government has repeatedly failed to heed the many calls urging an end to the violence and the undertaking of a genuine, credible, and inclusive political process"[36].)

As indicated above, those debating the Syrian crisis at the Security Council were not able to clearly define the antagonistic Other (A) in relation to Other (B). For instance, in 2011, Russian diplomats stated that the humanitarian tragedy was not caused by the central government: "Armed groups supported by smuggling and other illegal activities are providing supplies, taking over land, and killing and perpetrating atrocities against people who comply with the law-enforcement authorities"[37]. This discursive counterhegemonic practice was successfully employed by Russian and Indian representatives in 2012[38]. While not explicitly articulating (A), Russian diplomats resorted to similar discursive practices to those used by their European counterparts in 2014 regarding (B): "We convey our condolences to Mufti Ahmad Hassoon, who is well known in the East for his active efforts to lay the foundations for tolerance and international dialogue, in connection with the death of his 22-year-old son in a terrorist attack on Sunday"[39]. There were descriptions of the suffering of Syrian civilians, with the hardships of war, extremist groups, etc., identified as the causes of their suffering: "The 2 million citizens of Aleppo, who suffer from terror imposed by extremist terrorist groups..."[40], "Since June, the crisis has intensified. The depth of suffering of the Syrian people is truly dreadful and worsening daily"[41]. However, in their counter-hegemonic discourse, non-Western diplomats in the Security Council vehemently divested al-Assad of his status as the antagonist of (B). There were 174 mentions of "suffer*" and not a single association with the actions of Bashar al-Assad. There were 228 mentions of "kill*" and only two associations with the "Assad" category as an actor ("Bashar Al-Assad [...] continues to kill his own people"[42]), one association with the actions of the Free Syrian Army ("wit-

[34] NATO – Delivering Security in the 21st Century // NATO. 2012. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_88886.htm?selectedLocale=uk (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[35] S/PV.6524 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6524 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[36] S/PV.6627 // The United Nations Documents. 2011. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6627 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[37] Ibid.

[38] S/PV.6711// The United Nations Documents. 2012. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6711 (accessed: 28.12.2023); S/PV.6810 // The United Nations Documents. 2012. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6810 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[39] Ibid.

[40] S/PV.7000 // The United Nations Documents. 2013. URL: http://surl.li/kkyr (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[41] S/PV.6917 // The United Nations Documents. 2013. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6917 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[42] Ibid.

nessed the kidnapping of a young girl by elements of the Free Syrian Army"[43])), and 24 instances of an abstract association with the "Syria" category as a setting (for example, "In Syria, more than 100,000 people have been killed since the fighting began")[44].

Within the confines of the UN Security Council in 2012, discursive articulations also faced challenges in forming an antagonistic Other. As in the NATO discourse, Bashar al-Assad was presented as an actor in Syria's political affairs, although these connotations most frequently remained negative[45]: there are 108 mentions of "Assad", 33 of which are connected with the "President" category ("We called on President Al-Assad to embark on a process of credible political reform")[46]. The Syrian president's legitimacy is undeniably disputed; nevertheless, as has been pointed out before, these attempts are few compared to the "Libyan" discourse: since 2011−2014, the UN Security Council's discourse includes 63 mentions of the "legitimacy" category, while the association with the "lost" category as applied to Bashar al-Assad appears three times.

In 2014, the crisis escalated, leading to intensified Western diplomats' attempts to articulate discursive hegemony around the antagonistic Other. For instance, the severe humanitarian situation in Syria was exclusively attributed to the actions of the Syrian regime: "Today, as long as the Assad regime stays in Syria, the bloodshed, the tears-shed, and the massacre will continue"[47]. However, even within the Western discourse, these were isolated incidents. For example, the NATO dis-

course represents Bashar al-Assad as the reason behind domestic political instability, which is described rather vaguely, "And today the Assad regime is the reason for this instability in Syria and in the region". In 2014, the NATO discourse featured only five mentions of the "Assad" word, three of them emphasized the connection of the governing regime with instability in Syria, and only one of these three directly mentioned mass killings, "And the Assad regime has killed more than 200,000 people. We're talking about mass killings. They have killed 200,000 people with different methods, with chemical weapons, with air bombardments, and with barrel bombs". It is important to note that all three categories were mentioned by Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, not either British or American[48].

In 2014, within the UN Security Council, Western diplomats attempted to explicitly radicalize discourse more than in NATO's discussions. Indeed, an analysis of verbatim records of the UN 2014 sessions demonstrates a notably clearer categorization of Other (A), "Since then, Al-Assad has waged a brutal war against his own people. He is responsible for the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world and some of the worst human rights abuses in the world"[49]. Bashar al-Assad emerges as a brutal dictator ("Syrian people who continue to suffer under Al-Assad's brutal regime")[50], a politician who intentionally blocks attempts to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria ("The Al-Assad regime has seized every opportunity to make it more, and not less, difficult to provide such crucial assistance to civilians in

[43] S/PV.6949 // The United Nations Documents. 2013. URL: http://surl.li/kkyz (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[44] S/PV.7019 // The United Nations Documents. 2013. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7019 (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[45] "It is a political crisis caused by the cruelty and callousness of the Al-Assad regime". См.: S/PV.6826 // The United Nations Documents. 2012. URL: http://surl.li/kkze (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[46] S/PV.6810 // The United Nations Documents. 2012. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.6810 (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[47] Joint Press Point with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg − Secretary General's Opening Remarks // NATO. 2014. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/opinions_113776.htm (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[48] Ibid.
[49] S/PV.7116 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7116 (accessed: 28.12.2023).
[50] S/PV.7180 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7180 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

dire need")[51], and a war criminal whose regime systematically kills the civilian population ("the victims of Al-Assad's industrial killing machine")[52].

However, these instances were met with counter-hegemonic discourse. The "suffer*" category is featured 117 times, and only one is related to Bashar al-Assad in the above-given quote (see reference 94). Out of 1,049 mentions of "civilian*", not a single one is related to al-Assad. Frequently, the UN "Syrian" discourse simply draws an abstract link between the suffering of the civilian population and the devastation of the military conflict, "The lack of consensus on Syria and the resulting inaction have been disastrous, and civilians have paid the price"[53]. Violence that brutalizes Syrian citizens is principally depersonalized, "In Syria, civilians have been subjected to brutal violence for almost three years, and there appears to be no end in sight"[54]. The sole example illustrating a vivid depiction of (B) interacting with al-Assad as (A) is a story the UN representative Samantha Power told at a UN Security Council meeting about the civil activist and victim of a chemical attack Qusai Zakarya, who had been invited to attend the UN Security Council meeting in person on May 22, 2014[55]. The US representative elaborated on the chemical attack itself, the impact of the poisonous gas on Zakarya, and referred to him as a victim of al-Assad's actions. This instance, however, is an exception from the overall structure of the 2014 Syrian discourse.

The discourse surrounding the Syrian crisis underscores the intricate process of constructing discursive hegemony in response to perceived threats. Within this context, the delineation between the figures of "dictator" and the "brutalized civilian" is not inherently polarized but rather emerges as fluid signifiers with varied interpretations across different contexts. The portrayal of "Al-Assad" as a central political figure responsible for the sustained deterioration of the humanitarian situation prompts calls for political reform and the assertion of democratic principles.

Conclusion

Nations endowed with the capacity to sway the conduct of others, particularly amidst the tapestry of political discord, frequently find themselves ensconced within a perplexing position reminiscent of the archetypal protagonist in Maxim Gorky's novel, who remains uncertain about whether a boy drowned while skating: "Yeah – but was there a boy, or maybe there wasn't a boy?" The paper reveals the uneasy relationship between actual threats and the ability to articulate them as such. Drawing on existing approaches to threat construction, it proposes to examine the international community's hegemonic practices around large-scale international violence through the concept of antagonistic Other. It introduces two figures of the Other, constituting each other so that the Other (A) is the source of violence against the Other (B). Examining the discourses of the international community through the concept of antagonistic Other shows that often the researcher is confronted with the void (A).

This is demonstrated by the Libyan and Syrian crises. The Libyan and Syrian crises reveal varying outcomes in the articulation of political hegemony. In Libya, Western diplomats, seeking to justify military intervention that ultimately worsened the humanitarian situation, were focused on the antagonistic relationship between (A) and (B). Gaddafi was depicted as a "dictator", and his "militarized machine

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[51] S/PV.7216 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7216 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[52] S/PV.7180 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7180 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[53] S/PV.7109 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7109 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[54] Security Council Briefing on Protection of Civilians // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/USG (accessed: 28.12.2023).

[55] S/PV.7180 // The United Nations Documents. 2014. URL: https://undocs.org/S/PV.7180 (accessed: 28.12.2023).

that wipes out opposing civilians". The civilians, in this narrative, "have embraced the winds of democratization and are fighting the regime through exclusively peaceful means". The Syrian crisis, by contrast, presents a complex narrative that includes negative aspects of humanitarian crisis with the absence of (A). Assad, unlike Gaddafi, is potrayed as a legitimate actor for negotiation. As the conflict escalates, the conflicting picture of what is happening becomes more articulated: for American and British diplomats, Assad's image draws closer to the semantics of Gaddafi's, while for Russia, Brazil, and South Africa, Assad remains consistent with how he was perceived in 2011—2012: as the president of the country with whom it is necessary to negotiate. Consequently, the victim of the conflict, (B), whose image is shared by all participants in the discussion, continues to suffer from rather depersonalized violence.

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В ПОИСКАХ РАЗДЕЛЁННОГО ДРУГОГО
ПРОБЛЕМА ВОСПРИЯТИЯ УГРОЗ И НЕВМЕШАТЕЛЬСТВА В МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ КРИЗИСЫ

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Резюме

Исследование посвящено проблематике артикуляции международных угроз и вмешательства в международные кризисы. Оставляя за скобками традиционные подходы к исследованию конструирования угроз, как-то: секьюритизация, стратегические нарративы или конструирование идентичности по Дэвиду Кемпбеллу, автор обращается к теории дискурсивной гегемонии Эрнесто Лакло и Шанталь Муфф. В постструктуралистском прочтении концепта «гегемония» Лакло и Муфф анализируют, как политические классы формулируют дискурс, легитимирующий

политическую власть. В центре внимания данного исследования – артикуляционные практики западного истеблишмента (политического и дипломатического) с целью сформировать гегемонию и тем самым оправдать военно-политическое вмешательство в сирийский и ливийский конфликты. Развивая имеющиеся подходы к интерпретации дискурсивной гегемонии, автор вводит понятие «разделённый Другой». В интерпретации автора «разделённый Другой» выступает формой дискурсивной гегемонии политического субъекта с целью легитимации военного вмешательства. «Разделённый Другой» представляет собой сцену насилия, в которой Другой-Диктатор осуществляет насилие над Другим-Гражданином. Объект исследования – дискуссии политиков и дипломатов в стенах Совета Безопасности ООН и пресс-центра НАТО на фоне развивающихся конфликтов в Сирии и Ливии. Исследование показывает, что накануне вмешательства НАТО в Ливийскую гражданскую войну (2011) западные дипломаты успешно артикулировали «разделённого Другого», тогда как в ходе обширных дискуссий в стенах Совета Безопасности ООН западным дипломатам не удалось артикулировать гегемонию.