Epistemic Authority, Lies, and Video:
the Constitution of Knowledge and (in)Security
in the Video/Security Nexus

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Abstract

This article analyses how videos of violent protests become politically powerful arguments able to intervene in debates about security. It does so by looking at a series of videos taken by police authorities and protesters during street battles in Copenhagen in August 2009, when protesters opposed the forced eviction of a group of Iraqi asylum seekers from the Brorson Church. It zooms in on how politically acceptable knowledge about the event is constituted in dialogue between the videos and the surrounding mediascape. The study thus aims to shed light on the question of how videos of violent politics are present in politics, arguing that this happens only through being remediated *as* politics – and that the underlying epistemic regime governing how political knowledge is arrived at plays a key function in transforming videos from individual representations to politically relevant knowledge. In analysing how both police and protesters enact strategies that condition the possibility for images to figure in and impact post-conflict debate, the article explores how both governance and resistance is currently constituted by means of images. It ultimately considers what this means in terms of the conditions of possibility of video-mediated resistance.

Contributor Note

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The video-battle for Brorson

Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

Jacques Rancière (2006: 13)

The present article analyses a number of videos taken by the police authorities and protesters during street battles in Copenhagen in August 2009, when protesters tried to block the forced eviction of a group of Iraqi asylum seekers who had taken refuge in the Brorson Church after being denied asylum in Denmark. Digging through videos shot by the protestors and police alike, it probes forms of visual surveillance and counter-surveillance, attempting to get a grip of the conditions of possibility for activist photographers and media to challenge and make visible state-sponsored forms of visual and physical repression and use it in a debate conducted in terms of security. Deploying a visual semiotics framework, it conceptualises public political debate as governed by an epistemic regime – a set of codes that act as differentiating legitimate political knowledge claims taken seriously in public debate from knowledge claims not taken seriously. It argues that this regime is internal to public debate and reconfigured in what is here termed 'epistemic battles', that is, controversies in which the definition of knowledge and boundaries of represent-tation are at stake. Investigating in detail what happened in two epistemic battles related to the visual documentation of the forced eviction of asylum seekers from the Brorson Church, it shows how the authority of images as knowledge is re-negotiated vis-à-vis the authority of trusted societal institutions as a source

of socially accepted knowledge about security matters. The interrogation shows how the dialogue between images and media discourse not always admits images as faithful witnesses; that when images do become powerful, it tends to be when constituted as a witness; and that the 'evidence' episteme makes it difficult for video to speak about more abstract political topics such as, in this case, immigration policy. Security, thus, is easier represented visually when personalised and visible, rather than when abstract and intangible (cf Andersen and Möller 2013).

The article proceeds by first outlining the situation in which the confrontations occurred – the *mise en scène* – followed by an analysis of the visual strategies enacted – the *mise en média*. Finally, the paper analyses two 'epistemic battles' occurring when widely circulated videos from the Brorson confrontations puts the status of the visual artefact as political knowledge at stake.

The first of these is the attempt by a victim of visually documented police abuse to direct the interpretation of the video depicting her suffering and constitute it as symbolic of the violence committed when deporting refugees. Drawing on Peircean visual semiotics, this part considers the efforts of the visual protagonist to cede the representational and ethical space to the Iraqi asylum seekers and what this tells of the processes involved in rendering images as political knowledge.

The second epistemic battle revolves around the unprecedented and powerful role played by the video medium when the Copenhagen Police decides to publish its video surveillance footage. The prevailing tradition in Denmark had been for the police to not publish such

police video recordings – publishing this video was unprecedented. Drawing on a semiotic interpretation of Rancière's thoughts on the politics of aesthetics and the distribution of the sensible, this part shows the importance of the local epistemic regime in conditioning the epistemological strength of video.

Looked upon as a site for studying pictorial politics, the Brorson confrontations present a rich web of relations involving visual representation. The confrontations highlight how images are able and allowed to speak effectively in a political debate, how visual governance and resistance is conditioned on the way in which images are read, and how efforts at governing or resistance work through the visual appearance of things. Even if governance and representation are intertwined – since visual governance efforts are seen here as efforts aiming at producing or avoiding the possibility of certain visual representations, it is useful to keep them analytically distinct not least since events never unfold as they were thought to. This also allows for differentiating analytical considerations of how situations are made to look (presented in the third section) from the semiotic process of how the visual representations of those situations are subsequently allowed or made to speak in distinct ways (the fourth section).

The former of these concerns works more explicitly with the organisation of the material world out of concern for how it appears (Andersen et al. 2014), whereas the latter works with what Haraway (1991: 187) calls 'semiotic technologies for making meanings'.

A semiotic take on picturing protest

At the most basic level, a semiotic take on picturing protest implies a concern for on the one hand how signifiers are circulated in picturing protest, and on the other hand how these signifiers are made sense of. Signifiers are the starting point for signs, since the sign is made up by the unison of a signifier – be that for example word, smell, visual detail or physical object – and a signified, which is the concept or meaning to which the sign refers. Peirce (1991) devises three basic modalities of signification based on the way the connection between signifier and signified works: the 'iconic' modality works through resemblance – the signifier looks like the signified. The 'indexical' modality of signification represents through a seeming causal connection with what is represented, as when 'smoke is an index of fire, a sign *caused* by the thing which it signifies' (Bignell 2002: 15). Finally, in the 'symbolic' modality the signifiers bears no resemblance to what they signify but 'represent their Objects essentially because they will be so interpreted' (Peirce 1991: 270). Analysing images as 'exercises in knowledge production' (Shepherd 2008: 214) directs the focus to how knowledge is exercised; and especially to how power is embedded in how the social production of accepted knowledge takes place some ways rather than others. The implication of the Peircean typology is that visual artefacts can change their meaning according to the epistemic modality they 'employ' or in which they are 'read' (see also Eco 1985: 177). The modalities of visual signification are the most basic semiotic technologies for visual meaning making, and are combined in 'ways of seeing' that structure how images are read (Berger 1972). Ways of seeing are deeply implicated in Foster's classic definition of

the scopic regimes regulating visuality as 'how we see, how we are able, allowed or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein' (1988: ix). As we shall see in the first epistemic battle analysed here, the re-configuration of signs from one combination of modalities to another, from one way of seeing to another, is far from easy.

Beyond the different modalities of visual signs, the ability of protest imagery to have any effect is conditional on how the mediated political space is receptive to some forms of knowledge, and thus some forms of power, rather than others. This could be for example how the political debate admits religious authority, scientific authority, personal authority, and what could be called modes of witnessing such as eye-witness, divine insights, image, and statistics. Such receptiveness, I argue, is conditioned by second-order semiotic regimes in which interpretative semiotic codes guide not the reading of the image itself, but the reading of competing epistemic authorities. Drawing on Rancière's (2006) theorisation of aesthetic regimes that modulate what is and can be seen and said, I term these second-order semiotic regimes 'epistemic regimes'. They work by creating a 'distribution of the sensible', 'a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience' (Rancière 2006: 13). They co-determine 'what images are, what they do and the effects they create' (Rancière 2009: 95) vis-à-vis other epistemic modalities involved in security debate.

Yet, whereas Rancière conceptualises aesthetic regimes in relation to broad and stable societal phenomena such as

the transition from figurative to abstract art (2006: 15) here, epistemic regimes are seen as local and inherently unstable – as all semiotic technologies – and thus need to be situated in the local and dynamic context in which they are constantly re-articulated. In a study of regimes of security in a Canadian airport, Salter develops the idea of 'local' regimes of truth (2008: 322) showing how in the communication processes that constitute security as a political field, communicative moves of security are set in local regimes of truth rather than following from a standard grammar of securitization (cf. Buzan et al. 1998). This process, it is argued here, is played out in what is termed 'epistemic battles': contestations in which the configuration of 'truthiness',[1] and specifically the knowledge effects images create, are at stake. The second epistemic battle analysed here is concerned precisely with the epistemic authority accorded to different sources of authority in politics: words, images, institutional authorities, etc. But first I will outline the background against which the battles for Brorson are fought.

Situating the analysis: The mise en scène of the Brorson conflict

This section outlines the main elements of the physical and discursive context in which the confrontations play out. It contains first a sketch of the discursive background of the Brorson confront-ations, and then a brief analysis of the physical preparations for the

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[1] 'Truthiness' as a term was re-invented by US comedian Steven Colbert, satirizing US President George W. Bush's reliance on gut feelings instead of facts in justifying political actions (Colbert 2005). It was adopted as the word of the year in 2006 by Merriam-Webster and in 2005 by the American Dialect Society (Merriam-Webster 2006).

confrontations around the eviction of the asylum seekers from the church.

By mid-2009, Denmark had been governed since late 2001 by a coalition government led by Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen (who was later to become NATO Secretary General) leading a minority coalition government consisting of *Det Konservative Folkeparti* (Conservative People's Party) and the PM's party, *Venstre* (Denmark's Liberal Party). A minority coalition, the government relied extensively on the support of *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party), a nationalist party, to achieve legislative majority and parliamentary support. One of the central planks in the coalition platform – and the major condition of support from the supporting nationalist party – had been a very restrictive immigration policy. The Danish immigration debate had taken on a security character in the decade preceding the Brorson incident (Gad 2010), as it had in Europe generally, operating in a grammar of fear, threat and (in)security (Huysmans 2006). Denmark had been a party to the war in and occupation of Iraq since its inception, and a number of Iraqis had fled to Denmark, seeking asylum. In 2009, heated debate emerged around the issue of whether Denmark should forcefully repatriate to Iraq the many Iraqi asylum seekers denied refugee status. From the outset, the debate was laced with security arguments, pitting those advocating the danger of allowing refugees to stay in the country against those advocating the dangers faced by refugees when repatriated, arguing also a moral responsibility to care for those displaced by the war in Iraq in which Denmark was actively participating.

As part of the government's preparations for a forced repatriation, Iraqi authorities had been invited to Denmark to interview refugees who had been denied refugee status in Denmark in order to determine whether they were indeed Iraqi. Those deemed so were to be sent to Iraq in accordance with an agreement between the Danish and Iraqi governments, either through the voluntary acceptance of a 'repatriation package' or, if necessary, by force. Iraqis would be sent to those areas deemed safe for repatriation by the two governments. Yet the Danish opposition pointed out that these areas did not appear very safe when viewed from Denmark, raising doubts as to the motivations of Iraqi authorities signing the agreement and determining the origin of refugees.[2]

As of May 2009, a group of 282 Iraqis had been denied refugee status and were thus to be repatriated to Iraq, either leaving Denmark voluntarily with a lump sum of money and a repatriation plan to start life in Iraq or, if not leaving voluntarily, to be deported and left to their own means. By late May, most of the refugees had gone missing, a few had taken the voluntary repatriation offer, and some 60 individuals publicly took refuge[3] in a church – first in Vor Frue Kirke (Church of Our Lady), the cathedral in central Copenhagen, and

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[2] The agreement included some form of compensation for Iraq to 'take home' refugees, and was nested within other government efforts to aid Iraq.

[3] The supporters of those taking public refuge in the church invoked a contested centuries-old tradition of 'church refuge', according to which individuals can seek refuge in the arms-free space of the Church to avoid persecution. This tradition was reported in the Danish media as being somewhat dubious: a centuries-old but non-codified tradition; some media asserted that the tradition has never existed. Beyond controversy, however, is that its governing council, the parochial church council (consisting of and elected by members of the local parish), invited the Iraqi refugees into the church.

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from late June in the much smaller parish church, Brorson Church, in Nørrebro, a Copenhagen neighbourhood renowned for its ethnic diversity and its left-wing activists. The 'double refuge' of the Iraqis – both seeking asylum in Denmark and seeking asylum from the Danish government in a church – was aided by *Kirkeasyl* (Church Asylum), an NGO created for the purpose of helping prevent the repatriation of the refugees to Iraq, by relying on the moral and traditional authority of the church as an institution.

On 13 August 2009, after intense public debate about the Iraqi refugee issue throughout the summer, Copenhagen police started carrying out the forced repatriation orders by breaking the church refuge. As the police operation started shortly after midnight on 13 August, protesters gathered outside the church and engaged in civil disobedience actions, trying to block the police from removing the asylum seekers. The Copenhagen police searched the church and arrested 19 male adults taking refuge there, and after hours of forcefully breaking up the human roadblocks formed by protesters, the arrested asylum seekers were taken away at around 4.30 AM in police busses to a special prison for refugee seekers, in Ellebæk, to await deportation.

Mise en media: anticipating images

With the intense public debate before the eviction of the Brorson Church, the actual operation came as a surprise to no one. Even if the precise timing and tactics were kept secret, the situation and the media reverberations it would generate could be anticipated by both police and activists. This section analyses how the visual structuration of the

conflict became key to the strategies of both police and protesters, probing Shepherd's contention that '[b]oth oppressive and progressive politics are reliant on the truth claims symbolized by the power of photographic imagery' (2008: 214).

Activists opposing the forced repatriation policy were enacting a strategy based on careful attention to mediation and visual governance. Firstly, the rationale behind asylum seekers seeking 'double refuge' was from the outset one of making visible the invisible human side of restrictive immigration policies (Larsen 2011). Secondly, visuality and visibility were central to their efforts: apart from nursery and food, activists provided the asylum seekers with a less ordinary 'refugee camp' kind of help: a media team, taking care of receiving maximum exposure of the double refuge, filming, the everyday life of the group, and making a public point of being constantly on the ready with video cameras inside the Brorson Church, to prevent a 'dark' police operation. Ensuring that the eviction would be filmed was also a way of ensuring that it would be debated. As multiple scholarly works over recent years have documented, 'previously marginalized individuals can now narrate the events themselves and become recognized not only in social media but also in the global and national mainstream media' (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013: 2011).

Thirdly, activists not officially affiliated with the *Kirkeasyl* network had publicly pledged to use street protests to try to block any police action, organising text-messaging-networks to alert activists if the church was being evicted (Larsen 2011), thus setting the scene for almost certain clashes between protesters and

police. This strategy both alerted news media in advance of the protest and promised to deliver dramatic images with high newsworthiness. The strategies of the ad-hoc NGO, the double refuge, and more radical protesters were, thus, from the beginning, laced with elements that would render the visual imprint of the conflict appealing to news media and give activists some degree of control of the visual imprint of an eviction from the Brorson church.

The main elements in the Copenhagen Police strategy was to video document the operation, to enter the church not in riot gear but in short-sleeved shirts and soft hats, and solely to arrest able-bodied males. Firstly, the police strategy to make extensive video documentation of arrests resulted in the large amount of footage that would later become the turning point around which the second epistemic battle analysed in this paper revolves. Later press enquiries as to the motives driving this extensive documentation prompted the police to include a peculiar (non-)denial of this as a visual governance tactic, stating that 'The Copenhagen Police in planning the police action, as stated earlier, only wanted to make video documentation to illustrate the police action in Brorson's Church' (Københavns Politi 2009).[4] In research interviews for this article, however, police planners were clearly aware of a preventive effect of video documentation – that it would limit disobedience and violence against the police by easing its prosecution and

punishment – and referring all questions about the publication of video to the top police management (Cph. Police 2011).

Secondly, instead of entering the church wearing protective riot gear, the police were kitted out in short-sleeve shirts and soft hats in the summer night. As police spokespersons explained (Hansen 2009), this was a measure often enacted to reduce the likelihood of confrontations (Cph. Police 2011). Yet immediately after the first critiques of the operation, both police spokespersons and government ministers made much of the short sleeves and soft hats, using this image as an immediate visual rebuke of those arguing that the police were acting with a brutality inappropriate for dealing with non-violent asylum seekers (BT 2009; Hansen 2009; for a critical reaction, see Rehling 2009).

Thirdly, the police followed a strategy to only arrest the one-third of the asylum seekers that were able-bodied men – publicly explained as the result of a presumption that the rest would follow on their own (Cph. Police 2011). Following the heated debate, police planners could reasonably expect a number of images of police confronting protesters as well as arresting, and perhaps violently subduing, the targeted asylum seekers. Visible traces of an operation targeting only able-bodied men would indeed be viewed very differently in the securitized immigration debate in mainstream Danish media than would images of a similar situation involving police officers handcuffing, physically restraining and forcefully subduing women and children (cf. Campbell 2003). By ensuring that those video-documenting the protest would be depicting police officers in short sleeves and soft hats facing upset Middle Eastern-looking men, this strategy enacts

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[4] Internationally, the uprising in Burma in 2007 and its portrayal as a freedom quest employing resistance-by-depiction (Østergaard 2008) had drawn attention to how authorities enjoying a monopoly of large-scale physical violence could be defeated or humiliated by not being able to compete in the visual representation of such violence.

a version of the immigration debate compatible with the view that Danes must be protected from immigrants. By contrast, a police operation arresting children and old women would produce images with signifiers favourable to views of refugees as vulnerable and in need of shelter rather than posing any threat to Denmark. Simultaneously, as emphasised by the police spokespersons describing it as having been done out of humanitarian concerns (Steen 2009), it would cast the Copenhagen Police as the benevolent protector rather than persecutor of the weak, visibly in need of refuge and help. The three elements discussed point to how the strategies of the Copenhagen police anticipate the visual imprint of the operation, enacting operational strategies that are favourable to a visuality[5] of the operation that render asylum seekers dangerous and police benign, and give the police some degree of control of the visual imprint of an eviction of the Brorson church.

In sum, in setting the scene for 'the battle for Brorson', both protesters and police seem to have anticipated that controlling the visual representation of confrontations would be as important as the actual occurrences themselves and integrated concerns for the visual imprint of the conflict in their planning of 'operations'. The strategies demonstrate, whether intended or not, an acute attention to details that are important to the visuality of the battle for Brorson, of the political dynamics of visually mediated violence and suffering, and perhaps of the extent to which images, in public memory, become all that is left after the fact of security encounters (Möller 2007), making the confrontation as much a battle for visuality as for the

physical domination. This awareness echoes Campbell's characterisations of post September 11th military operations as 'designed for the visuals they could produce' (2003: 60), and shows that such concerns are not only those of warring states who have probably always engaged in propaganda wars in addition to physical confrontations, but that protesting civilians and governmental authorities are now battling for the visual representation of political violence and confrontation as much as they are battling for the physical enactment of dissent.

Epistemic battles and the image-as-knowledge

With a series of videos published by both police and protesters at the centre of the public controversy about the violent confrontations between police and protesters, the Brorson case presents two battles about how and under which conditions public videos are able to pass the rather hard test of becoming widely accepted knowledge that is deemed relevant to a debate about security politics – a sphere of politics to which lay people rarely have access (cf. Buzan et al. 1998).

1. The semiotics and remediability of suffering

The first epistemic battle revolves around an episode of visually documented police beating of a female protester, and concerns mainly the remediability of (female) suffering and the configuration of signs to reveal different truth claims. The morning after the confrontations, a video of a young woman being struck eight times with a police baton was widely circulated online and quickly

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[5] By visuality, I refer to the way in which seeing and the visual history of the situation is constructed (cf. Mirzoeff 2009).

spread to mass media. The woman in the video, Christina Søndergaard, became the topic of numerous interviews and news pieces the next day. Newspapers' online opinion polls asked news consumers to judge the appropriateness of the police conduct in the light of the video, and the woman herself was interviewed about her experience in live current affairs TV programmes.

While initial coverage focused on the female protagonist in a spectacle of suffering, she, by stating in interviews that 'I think it is a far more serious crime to deport people to a country in which they risk being killed' (Jely 2009: 2:15), attempted to shift the discussion to the political project in which she inscribes her suffering. By pointing to the less spectacular but potentially more important suffering imposed on Iraqis being deported to a country in a state of civil war, she tried to shift the security impetus in the situation from one of individualised police brutality to one of war and the administration of violence in refugee politics.

Figure 1. *Image used in reportage of police officers beating the young woman Christina Søndergaard. Cropped screenshot from the video (Jely 2009, 1:06).*

In doing so, she is trying to change the semiotic configuration of the widely circulated video in which she appears, from a configuration as evidence of an individual episode of violence to a symbol of a politics without care. This involves changing from a configuration of the sign as indexical-iconic to symbolic. The configuration of images as visual evidence requires rendering the recording process insignificant through the perceived causality between what is in front of the camera and what is recorded – an aesthetic described as immediacy (Bolter and Grusin 2000) and endlessly asserted. Yet the indexical reading, the perception of the camera as capturing (Sontag 2004) rather than painting or in other ways actively constructing something external is only enough to render the choices made in constructing the images unimportant. To be evidence *of something depicted* requires a combination of the indexical with an iconic reading, emphasising the resemblance of signifier and signified. In this reading we are allowed to *see* what is going on in a distant time and place since it *resembles* how everyday sociality looks. Together the transparency of visual mediation and the resemblance of representation to everyday visuality become the conditions of possibility of visual evidence. Yet 'it is not only the photographic ontology of the film that constitutes evidence of a crime but also its public display' (Grusin 2004: 33). While the publicity is secured in Søndergaard's case with the widely remediated video and follow-up stories, using the video as an articulation of how a refugee politics devoid of care for individuals inflicts suffering in the pursuit of political goals also requires viewing it as symbolic in the Peircean sense. The symbolic configuration of the sign allows the signifier to symbolise relations that are not immediately visible, as when letters or sounds in language symbolise concepts. The symbolic configuration of

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images is widely known in images of security even if, somewhat confusingly, visual artefacts gaining extraordinary *symbolic* representational power are labelled as *iconic* in both popular and scientific discourse (e.g. Brink 2000; Hariman and Lucaites 2007; Mortensen 2011). A recent example is the video of 'Neda', a woman bleeding to death in a video from the Iranian post-election uprising in 2009. Rather than documenting the death of an individual, the image rapidly became a symbol in which we (in the west) could see the brutality of the Iranian regime towards peaceful protesters even if the video in an iconic reading did not show either protesters or regime perpetrators (Andersen 2012; Mortensen 2011).

What is at stake in Søndergaard's attempt to verbally direct the interpretation of the video of her is an attempt to fix the ambiguity of what the image signifies, disciplining it by limiting its interpretative space using verbal interpretative statements. In doing so she is attempting to change not only what can be seen in the image, but also the spectator's relation to it.

Firstly, it would change the relationship between spectator and image. Shepherd points out that what is at stake in images of the War on Terror is indeed 'to fix the viewer(s) of the images in a specific relationship to the images themselves' (2008: 218). In Søndergaard's battle to change the signification of her suffering, it is not only the reading itself that is to be fixed, but the relationship between spectator, signifiers and signifieds: the main issue at stake is whether viewers see the images as a spectacle that can at most incriminate an individual police officer or as images of the brutality of Danish politics; and thereby as something that involves themselves.

Seeking to change the image from an iconic to a symbolic reading thus seeks to change or question how viewers are implicated or not.

But as the relative scarcity of strong symbolic images suggests, the constitution of images as symbolic of larger political issues is anything but easy. To achieve this, a video has, firstly, to benefit from a high remediability, i.e. a high degree of congruence with the selection criteria and formats of the media that are important to its spread (cf. Bolter and Grusin 2000). The video of Søndergaard arguably has a high degree of remediability since a young woman suffering police brutality nicely fits the requirements of a Danish mainstream news media operating in a competitive environment and increasingly using citizen footage, and struggling with demands for cheap and fast production (Kristensen and Mortensen 2013; Lund 2002b). The format of online protest video can be adapted to the news easily and cheaply and the format itself carries a symbolic weight independent of its content, a weight that makes it attractive to remediate for both media and political actors (Andersen 2013).

Secondly, the successful leap from viewing the video as iconic in the semiotic sense to viewing it as symbolic would allow the suffering of Iraqi refugee seekers to become visible and embodied in Søndergaard's sufferings. Such a transformation revolutionises the epistemic claims of the image or video. In order for this transformation to be possible, the symbolic claims of the video have to connect successfully with a view that is a relatively prominent rendering of the situation at hand and present visual signifiers that reverberate with such a narrative. As a young woman

with a distinctively Danish appearance, the image of Søndergaard does not provide clear visual signifiers evoking the refugee issue. The connection between image and the issue it is to symbolise must therefore be asserted and sustained verbally by the suffering protagonist – a situation that is, in a semiotic sense, clearly epistemologically weaker than a situation in which the verbal claims would be backed up by clear visual signifiers establishing a chain of equivalence between the sufferer and the issue of immigration policy.

In sum, the video of the eight beatings is still regarded as the most newsworthy event of the confrontations (Harder 2010), but it is constituted as evidence (i.e. iconic-indexical) rather than symbolic in the semiotic sense. While police brutality is a theme in media coverage immediately after the situation, the headline under which the video of Søndergaard's beating appears online shifts in a matter of only a few hours. The initial headline emphasised clashes between police and protesters, but a few hours later referred police spokes-persons' assertions that they had 'tried with dialogue' (Ritzau 2009b), favouring the epistemic institutional authority of police over images of dissent. Circulated as a spectacular instance of female suffering rather than as a symbol of the suffering inflicted by the restrictive immigration policies, the video is denied access to the securitized debate around the war in Iraq and the questions related to asylum stemming from it. This outcome underlines the emotional rather than political value attributed to spectacular female suffering, the difficulty of directing the reading of a video, and the narrow conditions for access to the security debate. Ironically, the first epistemic battle thus ends up highlighting the usefulness of the Copenhagen Police strategy of only targeting able-bodied men to avoid remediable images of female suffering with a Middle-Eastern look, images that could have become constituted as symbolically representing the brutality of restrictive immigration policies.

2. Constituting epistemic regimes: authority, lies and video

The second epistemic battle revolves around the conditions of possibility for the video medium to act as knowledge in public political debates on security issues, and about its relationship to other kinds of authority that matter in public debate. The medium came to play an unprecedented and powerful role in the Brorson debate when police decided to turn their surveillance video material into decisive public 'evidence', breaking the tradition of not publishing video recordings; and in doing so, changing epistemic modalities of the debate raging in the aftermath of the confrontations themselves. This section describes the battle as it unfolds and analyses its effects along the way.

Already the morning after the forced eviction of the church, intense debate raged about the conduct of the Copenhagen Police during the arrest of the asylum seekers in the Brorson Church and the tumultuous protests outside, with the church minister, pastor Per Ramsdal, speaking out about how he had experienced riot-clad police officers and frightened Iraqis in his church when he was woken up by the noise from the eviction. Video footage from the police operation inside the Brorson Church, filmed by the refugee-support group, appeared to show barely awake, scantily clad, terrified Iraqis confronting, although

not clashing with, a massive force of police officers who would put on helmets when the situation grew confrontational.

Over the following weeks, video clips captured by protesters, the refugee support group and bystanders, as well as the descriptions of events given by the pastor, gradually undermined journalists' confidence in the versions of events laid out by police spokespersons, a narrative emphasising the perfect, careful handling of a delicate situation. Journalists questioned the police about their version of the occurrences, eventually forcing them to correct the statement that police officers were in short sleeves and soft hats when inside the church, and later severely undermining police claims to have acted without unnecessary violence in the confrontations with protesters outside the church (Gjerding and Geist 2009).

This controversy soon led the Copenhagen Police to assert publicly, via the head of the Copenhagen Police Association, that the pastor of the church was deliberately misrepresenting events (Hansen 2009); an assertion that received favourable treatment in BT, a right-of-centre tabloid newspaper, and TV-2, a private television station, (Hansen 2009), without severely undermining the pastor. As the trouble with the pastor persisted, the Copenhagen Police released their video surveillance tapes from the operation on 30th of August, breaking a tradition of only using police surveillance tapes in court, in training, and for investigation (Cph. Police 2011). The police published the tapes through TV-2 and BT, following an exclusive publishing strategy. Careful picking of outlets is a standard tool in media management strategies, designed to ensure that the source has a good idea of the kind of treatment the materials

will receive (Cook 2005), thus providing some degree of control over how they will be framed. The videos were framed by the two news organisations as 'evidence' debunking the 'lies' told by the pastor and protesters, and instantly seized on by a government annoyed by the priest's criticism of the refugee policy: 'Minister: Priest lying' (BT 2009) was the headline of a video showing the Minister of Justice reviewing the surveillance tapes. The minister used the video footage to 'observe' the difference between forms of witnessing and imag(in)ing, stating that 'the image the priest presented to the world does not match with what I see here in the video' (BT 2009: 01:30). The Minister of Integration, responsible for the deportation order the police were carrying out, delivered both the strongest condemnation and the strongest endorsement of video as truthfulness, claiming that 'it is a bold lie that the police escalated the situation. *And this video proves it*" (Clemmensen 2009, emphasis mine), while the nationalist Danish Peoples Party called for an official investigation of the priest (Ritzau 2009a).

The first wave of news coverage only included comments from government sources, and most Danish news media re-circulated the news – which, presented as sensational, involving personalised conflict, and supported by political authorities, was a perfect match with news selection criteria – before giving it their own journalistic treatment. This framing of the police videos thus dominated the first wave of news coverage (cf. Lund 2002a).

The strategy employed by one traditional authority, the police, in the face of intense and sustained criticism from another, the church minister, was to call in the authority of the autonomous

witness: video documentation. The publishing of police operation surveillance footage thus shows that, configured as 'evidence', the images were able to overrule the competing truth claims presented verbally by a competing institutional authority, the pastor. With virtually all Danish media remediating stills from or parts of the videos accompanied by government interpretation, the Copenhagen Police succeed in enlisting the capacity of images to 'simulate transparency of meaning and stimulate acceptance of the matter/reality depicted' (Shepherd 2008: 218).

Viewed as an 'exercise in knowledge production', the powerful embrace of the epistemic authority of video by the Copenhagen Police can be seen creating a 'new' epistemic hierarchy altering both the modalities of truth and the identities of those subjected to it. The success of this endeavour re-inscribes – at least temporarily – the identities of the police [truth-tellers], protesters [exaggerating claims of brutality] and the priest [liar/manipulator], constituting a 'local' epistemic regime in which further communicative moves will have to be situated. Apart from containing local redistributions of identities, the epistemic regime acts as a distribution of the sensible, distinguishing speech from noise and enacting a 'domain of the representable' in which some representations are regarded un-problematically, while alternative representations, clashing with the epistemic regime are marginalised as un-representable or noise (Butler 1997; Rancière 2006). The publication of police surveillance footage creates exactly such a regime, in which alternative visions, seen not by the faithful witness of the camera (Sontag 2004: 46) but by the always-fallible and suspect subject, the

eyewitness, are relegated to the domain of the un-representable, viewed as mere noise. Both the re-inscribed identities of actors and the new epistemic regime thus work against the verbal testimony of the pastor, erecting a double barrier against his critique.

In the second wave of remediation, in which news organisations would give the police surveillance videos their own journalistic treatment, it would appear, however, that visual governance was not without dangers, as the epistemic authority of video now endorsed by the police and government as a medium of truth came back to haunt the Copen-hagen Police leadership.

By consolidating the authority of video as an instrument of truth, the police, media and government enacted an important condition of possibility for the role video could play in deciding facts from rumours in the rest of the debate about the forced eviction. When the surveillance tapes were released, police spokespersons claimed that they were publishing 'all' of the police footage from the operation in order to allow the public to 'judge for themselves' if the accusations levelled by the Brorson pastor were accurate (Københavns Politi 2009; Gjerding and Geist 2009).

Figure 2. *Image used in reportage claiming that police officers were filming outside the church* (Gjerding et al. 2009). Source: Knudsen 2009.

Allegations by the pastor that the most confrontational episodes were left out of the video triggered very little debate,[6] underlining how the newly enacted local epistemic regime renders non-visual authority as noise and succeeds in marginalising the pastor.

Activists and journalists soon were able to exploit the epistemic strength attributed to the video, however, rather than being marginalised by it. By pointing to private videos depicting policemen with video recording devices outside the church who would appear to be recording the confrontations between police and protesters (Gjerding et al. 2009; Ritzau and information.dk 2009; Rømer 2009), they made their criticism drawing on the authorities favoured in the epistemic regime. And reading the visual image as evidence of something that had happened brought the criticism in line with the indexical-iconic semiotic configuration of the regime.

Suddenly confronting claims from a medium it had itself attributed decisive epistemic authority in the face of conflicting institutional authorities, police spokespersons entertained a series of correcting and contradictory statements about the misère. The debacle culminated with Copenhagen Police finding 'an original DVD' with footage that the documentation unit had apparently lost due to police management accidentally asking the documentation unit for footage from 'inside' the church (Gjerding and Geist 2009). Again underlining the epistemic strength of video in new local epistemic regime, police chiefs' repeated denials of having more footage were brushed aside by the

same visual arguments that had been powerless in testifying to police brutality, yet now configured as neutral evidence. As the configuration of the debate placed high value on video rendered as evidence, the police leadership was forced to take these claims seriously. This is evident in the beginning of the press release announcing the 'newfound' footage: 'The Copenhagen Police have been presented two video clips from the Internet that would show two policemen video photographing' (Københavns Politi 2009). The visual evidence, not the repeated verbal articulations of the same arguments, is invoked as decisive.

Striking in comparison are the vain efforts by journalists to confront the police without the help of visual evidence: Extensive questioning of police management about what was meant by their shifting and contradictory explanations, including the demand for an explanation or investigation of the false and misleading claims made by police management and spokespersons, achieved little beyond entertaining headlines[7]. The Brorson pastor was brushed aside when raising similar issues, as was the Police Union. This underlines how the press is remarkably less powerful in the absence of visual evidence and accentuates the powerful effects of the epistemic privilege given to video in public debate, here reinforced in the local epistemic regime enacted by the publication of police surveillance footage.

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[6] The allegations are the topic of a single news piece in an online newspaper (Batchelor 2009) but were not circulated in the major part of the Danish mainstream news media.

[7] To name one: 'According to the fifth explanation from the police, the fourth explanation was a lie' (Gjerding and Geist 2009).

Video and the constitution of knowledge: 'what is seen and what can be said about it'

Summing up the analyses of the strategies of activists and authorities, as well as of the two epistemic battles related to the Brorson Church eviction, what we see is a conflict thoroughly pervaded by the visuality of protest and security. Spanning from planning operations and resistance to these operations with a view to the images they would produce, through enacting visual surveillance and counter-surveillance in a mutual attempt to discipline confrontations by securing superiority of visualisation, the visual rendering of the conflict is carefully anticipated and actions are guided by concerns of visual governance and visual governability.

Semiotic technologies of visual governance and reliance on the epistemic authority of visuality pervade both actions of governance and resistance, enacting a mediatised visual battlefield, the importance of which far eclipses the five-hour physical confrontations, as debates move from police violence and a-political spectacles of suffering, through the constitution of police cameras as a witness of truth, to the erosion of that identity effected by the re-tooling of police surveillance by actors resisting the visual governance of the police, but acting within the local epistemic regime enacted by it. In this way the battle for Brorson is indeed structured by 'what is seen and what can be said about it' (Rancière 2006: 13)

In the first epistemic battle, around the possible constitution of the video of Christina Søndergaard's beating as either a symbol of the violence of refugee politics or as evidence of spectacular individualised suffering, it proves impossible for the protagonist to change the way of seeing prevailing in the interpretation of her suffering as a spectacle. Despite the prominent remediation necessary for turning the video into a political symbol that is taken seriously in security debate, the far-from-perfect match between the signifiers present in the video and the refugee issue she argues in favour of it being taken to symbolise renders it unable to symbolise the suffering of Iraqi refugees. Instead, it is read as a spectacular instance of police violence against a young woman, with little to no political relevance.

In the second epistemic battle, the clash of institutional authorities prompts the police to release surveillance footage. With the epistemic strength of the footage buttressed by the institutional authority of the police and immediately endorsed by the interventions of top government officials, the local epistemic regime is re-configured in favour of the epistemic authority of video, making video a modality of knowledge one can instrumentalise to denounce competing modalities. Once this shift is made, visually backed critique becomes effective vis-à-vis institutional authorities, and activists and journalists exploit it to turn the power of visual surveillance back on the police, acting on the newly re-inscribed identities of the players in the Brorson visual battlefield. In doing so, they tarnish the claim to epistemic authority of the police to a degree that it becomes a concern of the Police Union[8].

By pointing to the release of police surveillance footage and the forceful backing of its epistemic authority by

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[8] The Police Union expressed concern that the images will end up tarnishing the image of the police (Ritzau 2009c).

media, police and top government officials as engendering a decisive shift in the local epistemic regime, the analysis is able to tentatively point out how such regimes change, presenting a more dynamic and operational view than say Rancière's concept of aesthetic regimes, on which the analysis draws. The continuous but slow reproduction of the local epistemic regime by mediated acts of image interpretation and remediation echoes Cook's (2005) observations on the co-production of political news by media and the professionals of politics. In the battle for Brorson, visual governance becomes a prerequisite for visual counter-governance to become effective, configuring the local regime to make video an epistemic authority able to question the institutions of security governance. Officially sanctioned protest images can thus be seen not only as a production of spectacular imagery suppressing dissent, but also as opening up the political space to the visual as a form of knowledge production that does not rely as much on institutional authorities as does mediated speech. By exploring how resistance and (alternative) political space(s) is nowadays constituted by means of images – looked upon as a modality of knowledge production both conditioning and conditioned by the socio-political world in which it is situated and thus deeply enmeshed in questions of power – this article has intended to counter countless assertions of images as universally powerful by giving a semiotically informed take on how video participates in producing and contesting political power. Here, visual knowledge is best examined as seen through ways of seeing situated in local epistemic regimes conditioning the remediability and meaningfulness of video arguments; but such regimes are in turn also acted upon by the images and videos that participate in them.

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