

# LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES TO ENCHANT THE NEW AMERICAN “WAR ON TERROR”: IMPLICATIONS IN BEN AFFLECK’S TESTIMONY

**Hana Riani**

*Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of English, Sousse, Tunisia*

**Abstract:** *This article accounts for the process of legitimization as a mere instrument of control in society where symbolic power is manifested. By conducting a critical discourse analysis in combination with frameworks for analyzing legitimating devices in discourse as developed by Theo van Leeuwen (2007) and Antonio Reyes (2011), this study scrutinizes the legitimation strategies used in Ben Affleck’s speech before the American House Foreign Affairs Committee on Congo crisis (2011). The paper also investigates the linguistic devices leaned on by this social actor to advance particular political ends. The results from the qualitative analysis have shown that this activist establishes links with his audience outlining common values firmly grounded on US history, cultural tradition and political ideologies. His reasoning constructs specific understandings of US involvement in the new “war on terror” legitimized through (1) hypothetical future, (2) rationality, (3) voices of expertise and (4) altruism.*

**Keywords:** *legitimation strategies, Ben Affleck, political discourse, ideology*

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**About the author:** *Hana Riani holds a PhD in American Culture Studies. Her study foci are primarily: Neo-Imperialism, Soft Power Politics, Gender and Celebrity Studies, and Political Discourse. Her research interests and academic fields are also rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis especially modern rhetoric. Hana Riani teaches American Culture, History and Politics. She participated in several international conferences pertaining to her research interests. e-mail: hanariani@outlook.fr*

**ORCID iD:**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7785-9572>

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## **Introduction**

Political discourse on the Third-World has been reverberated with an unprecedented vigor. With the acceleration and escalation of events in Iraq and Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, American political actors have been involved in a linguistic war not less vicious than military war. To this end, the interventionist scenario has always been operating in the American statecraft discourse towards the Third-World. Spurred by their nation's ideologies orchestrated on the premises of the American Creed, American presidents, for instance, have enmeshed their discourses with rhetorical motives that appropriate US logic to enact statist power. These motives for interventionism center on symbolic vindications that American political actors have mustered for eradicating America's enemies and global threats. The reasons for embarking on the rescue mission have always functioned rhetorically. To demonstrate actions, the justification embedded in legitimization has "one particularity, namely to invoke publicly shared and publicly justifiable, and sometimes even highly formalized, codified, institutional system of beliefs, values and norms, in virtue of which the action proposed is considered legitimate" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 109). To this end, political actors draw on presupposed connotations that are built on shared mental models about their country's historical past as something to be transgressed (van Dijk, 2006). In fact, the influences of American ideologies, centering on the US as a nation of laws and as a beacon of salvation, continue to normalize the power that the US still holds in politics. However, this tradition to rationalize US foreign policy is not only articulated by US official political actors. Culture as a factor in state behavior and as endemic to the construction of identities has become a new site for representation where "the nationhood of a particular nation is maintained through its popular culture" (Dittmer, 2005, p. 626). The essence of political discourse is to have recourse to the power of persuasion based on various rhetorical strategies to verbalize intentions. The genre of celebrities' discourse becomes one of the key elements of political discourse. In fact, the relocation of likely discourses into the realm of politics and foreign policy can be conceptualized to Michel Foucault's notions of "biopolitics" and "biopower" to rethink American power relations beyond the state as a centralized body and apparatus of interests and strategies (Coleman & Agnew, 2007, p. 656). Power, therefore, does not only involve the use of force but more crucially may affect the minds of people by activating certain ideologies that are incorporated in the shared mental models between the discourse makers and the recipients. Considering all the interrelations that are persistent between politics, culture and language there is little doubt that the celebrity-activist discourse can be brought into close alignment with the rationalities of the nation's political

strategies. In this regard, the present study aims to investigate the extent to which legitimation strategies used by Ben Affleck reinforce ideologies geared towards motivating state action. To achieve this, the present paper identifies the legitimating strategies adopted to present the Congo crisis to the American House Foreign Affairs Committee, investigates the linguistic devices used to reinforce the tenor of the arguments and evaluates its effects on audience. It explains the use of these discursive structures and strategies through examples of speeches in Ben Affleck's testimony acting as "the historically constituted matrix within which are articulated all those dreams, schemes, and strategies" (Rose & Miller, 2003, p. 175). Thus, the research would hopefully illustrate how legitimizing the new American "War on Terror" masquerades as practices of governance imbued with political ideologies.

### **Literature Review: Legitimization in Political Discourse**

Legitimization refers to a process by which speakers give credits to a type of social behavior whether mental or physical. The process of legitimization is enacted via argumentation based on arguments that justify the very reasons behind particular actions, thoughts, ideas or logic. In this respect, the very act of legitimization can be elicited by a variety of reasons: to consolidate power, to justify action, to maintain ideological position, to gain consent, or to achieve social acceptance (van Leeuwen, 2007). Silverstein (2004) argues that the process of legitimization is ideologically constructed and, it is identified within a social group. In a similar vein, Habermas (1988) underscores that the act of legitimization is orchestrated on the premises of facts (facto validity) and norms (normative validity of values) which fuse together in language use. Interestingly, legitimization deserves attention when related to political discourse. Cap evaluates (2008, p. 39) "legitimization as a principal discourse goal sought by political actors". Indeed, in a political discourse language and politics are merged as politics has "a linguistic, discursive and communicative dimension" (Chilton, 2004, p. 4). In this regard, language plays an important role to convey the political message where "language choice is manipulated for specific political effects" (Wilson, 2001, p. 410). It is from this discourse genre that political actors consolidate and justify their political agenda or ideological position. In fact, political discourse is also argumentative in nature as it involves an appeal to reason (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Fonseca & Ferreira, 2015). To this end, politicians enact their legitimation strategies by showing that they conform to certain norms and social values (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 3). Accordingly, they tend to reach an understanding with their audience through the use of different strategies (Fairclough, 2013). These include persuasion, which is an "act of conversion ... convincing others, changing their views, shifting their ideal points along the imagined line" (Diamond & Cobb, 1999, p.

225). Building on shared ideologies and beliefs, a likely discourse can “influence the audience through its logical order, through the fundamentals that generate a discourse” (Sălăvăstru, 2009, p. 17). Targeting common ideologies fall within the camp of a legal-rational legitimacy enacted by means of argumentations that explain the social actions. In fact, legitimization strategies are based on discursive structures paralleling the specific ideologies of “who belongs or does not belong to us, and how we distinguish ourselves from others by our actions, and norms as well as resources” (van Dijk, 2000, p. 43). As legitimization is identified as a type of justification, it is built “in connection with courses of action: we ought to do  $x$  (or action  $x$  is legitimate) because it conforms to certain norms or values that we adhere to” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 109). Thus, political discourse is characterized by the way meanings are discussed and interpretations are made in a specific context. The backbone for legitimization is a shared common base of values, beliefs and cultural knowledge (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002, p. 2; Fetzer, 2013, p. 6). As Chilton and Schäffner put it:

It is shared perceptions of values that define political associations. And human endowment for language has the function of ‘indicating’ – signifying, communicating what is deemed according to such shared perceptions to be advantageous or not, by implication to the group, and what is deemed right and wrong within that group (2002, p. 2).

Within this line of reasoning, political decision may be considered legitimate only when action is justified solely on the basis of accepted values (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 243). In this regard, enacting legitimization via shared values and beliefs affects the ways political discourse is interpreted and processed. Hence, it is argued that arguments cannot be convincing without a justification. Arguments must be prescribed a legitimate cause to be persuasive. At this stage, speakers legitimize their policies, decisions or actions by employing numbers of strategies “which can be used in either predetermined or unprompted way” (Kareem Ali, Christopher & Nordin, 2016, p. 78) in an attempt to reinforce the tenor of their arguments. Therefore, what stands out and makes the legitimization effect possible and powerful is the presence of justification. Besides, legitimization discourse cannot manifest itself in a vacuum (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92), but always takes shape and power in a certain discursive environment and context (Alfonso et al., 2004, p. 11). One of these contexts of legitimization is political context. Accordingly, this study, presents the strategies of legitimization and its linguistic realization in Ben Affleck’s testimony aimed at presenting Congo crisis to the American House Foreign Affairs Committee.

In political discourse, previous research on legitimating strategies has mainly examined these particular notions in political speeches (Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Said, 2017) and in discourses analyzing key events such as war on terror, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, economic crisis and social revolutions like the Arab Spring (Chouliaraki, 2005; Dunmire, 2007; Fonseca & Ferreira, 2015; ReyesRodriguez, 2008; van Dijk, 2005). The present study adds to the above literature on legitimization by studying these legitimating strategies in relation to the Congo crisis handled by Ben Affleck in his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Unlike the existing research on the key concepts in question, which has either applied van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimization strategies or Reyes' framework, the present study makes use of both van Leeuwen's (2007) and Reyes' (2011) strategies to scrutinize the legitimating strategies as well as the linguistic devices that reinforce the tenor of the American activist's arguments.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social actors, such as governments and politicians have recourse to a variety of strategies for legitimization to reach their targets (Fairclough, 2010). The focus on the interactions between discourses, politics and power in various contexts calls for a CDA methodology to reveal what ideological and hegemonic practices are embedded in the discourses. CDA linguists and practioners analyze discourse to "explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 93). Based on this reasoning, identifying legitimating strategies implies delving into the layers of discourse to dig up the ideological aspect involved in language use. According to van Leeuwen (2007, p. 39), legitimization provides "answers to the question 'Why should we do this?' and 'Why should we do this in this way?'". Finding adequate answers requires delineating the type of reasoning of the form "we ought to do *x* because of *y*" to convince audiences that particular actions or decisions are right" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 110; Fonseca & Ferreira, 2015, p. 685). Hence, persuasive devices developed by van Leeuwen such as *authorization*, *moral evaluation*, *rationalization* and *mythopoesis* are used to account for why a particular action should be enacted in a specific way (2007). These strategies are defined as a "way in which language functions and is used for the construction of legitimacy" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 988). In van Leeuwen's view, they can "can occur separately or in combination... and they are all realized by specific linguistic resources and configurations of linguistic resources" (2007, p. 92). This theoretical framework is advocated in this study so as to scrutinize the discursive strategies accountable for producing the social acts of legitimization

in the discourse of the American activist. It is chosen since it encapsulates variously concrete and inclusive strategies. These strategies are:

### ***Authorization***

It entails the process of legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and of persons in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested. It is divided into six subcategories. The first of which is *personal authority* based on the person's account of rank or institutional role (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 106). The second subcategory is *expert authority*. It is based on the expertise of the person or their role institution (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 107). *Role model authority* is legitimized in people's mind to justify actions decisions based on leaders' opinions where their behaviors and ways of thinking are a solid reference (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 107). However, *impersonal authority*, *authority of tradition* and *authority of conformity* do not refer to the authority of persons. The first of these three, *impersonal authority* refers to the authority of laws, regulations and rules (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 108). The *authority of tradition* encompasses appealing to tradition, habits and customs as sources of legitimation "it has always been that way", "We should keep doing it". *The authority of conformity* refers to the use of arguments such as "everybody has done it", "it is what the majority of people does".

### ***Moral Evaluation***

It refers to the process of legitimation by reference to discourses of value. This category consists of three subcategories: *evaluation*, *abstraction and analogies* (van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 109-112). *Evaluation* is the use of evaluative adjectives and words to characterize a process of action and justify something (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 110). Another form of this category is naturalization where undertaken actions are part of a "natural order" (ibid. 111). *Abstraction* refers to practices in abstract ways to "moralize" them and link them to discourses of moral values. *Moral evaluation* is also enacted via analogies. Associating an action with another based on its favorable or unfavorable outcome is, thus, employed (p. 112).

### ***Rationalization***

This category of legitimation is put forward when political actors present the legitimation process as a process made with evaluated and rational procedures. *Rationalization* entails two subcategories through which social practices are legitimized: *instrumental rationalization*, and *theoretical rationalization*. *Instrumental rationalization* is the main sub-category found in Ben Affleck's discourse. It is divided into three categories: *goal-oriented*

instrumentality: conscious or unconscious intentions, motives or goals are used in discourse so as to legitimize particular social practices. *Means-orientation* instrumentality: in this type of legitimization, the stress is on action as a means to a particular end. In *effect-oriented* instrumentality the result or effect of an action is stressed as a medium to legitimization (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 134). However, *theoretical rationalization* is more related to the process of naturalization. Thus, when naturalization presents the “natural order” of doing something, theoretical legitimization offers explanations, definitions, and predictions (p. 116).

### ***Mythopoesis***

This legitimization is realized by specific linguistic toolkits and involves legitimization propagated through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions. It has two subcategories *moral tales* and *cautionary tales*. Accordingly, in moral tales persons are being rewarded for legitimate actions whereas cautionary tales convey what “will happen if you do not conform to the norms of social practices. Their protagonists engage in deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 118).

This study also embraces the legitimating strategies outlined by Antonio Reyes that correlate with van Leeuwen’s framework. According to Reyes, the answers to van Leeuwen’s questions “why should we do this” or “why should we do this in this way”? are provided through discursive action. His work highlights that agents can easily legitimize political events because the discursive toolkits needed can be evoked to summon that they are already pervasive and recognized in society (2011, p. 781). He maintains that:

The process of legitimization is enacted by argumentation, that is, by providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc. In addition, the act of legitimizing or justifying is related to a goal, which, in most cases, seeks our interlocutor’s support and approval (2011, p. 782).

Reyes emphasizes the following five strategies of legitimization: legitimization through *emotions*, legitimization through *a hypothetical future*, appealing to *rationality*, appealing to *voices of expertise* and presenting the desired outcomes as *altruistic*. Two strategies, namely *rationality* and *voices of expertise*, are not explained as they bear resemblance with van Leeuwen’s (2007) strategies of *rationalizations* and *authorization*, respectively. Below I provide a definition of the three remaining strategies while contextualizing them within van Leeuwen’s framework.

### ***Legitimization through Emotions***

It refers to appeal to others' emotions in order to legitimize and build certain constructions of (un)reality (Reyes, 2011, pp. 785-786). Practically, this can be achieved by highlighting the negative representations of others' values and actions, or the positive representation of "our" actions and values which influence the cognitive structure of audiences' emotions. Politicians resort to this technique linguistically through "constructive strategies". By means of argumentative strategies, linguistic structures and rhetorical devices, social actors try to justify, legitimize and naturalize the exclusion, and demonization of others (Wodak, 2001, p. 72). These discursive strategies are applicable when legitimization triggers emotions of fear, destruction, and death or also hope.

### ***Legitimization through a Hypothetical Future***

In legitimization through a hypothetical future, politicians shed light on present problems and decisions as tied to past deeds and, thus, require undertaking imminent actions to avoid the same problems in the future. To put the emphasis on the desirability of particular actions and decisions, political actors impose the probability of future threats to legitimize actions in the present. By employing the future, they lean on specific linguistic devices and structures such as conditional sentence types: if + past [protasis] → would + infinitive without to [apodosis] or if + present [protasis] → will + infinitive without to [apodosis]. Being the case, these actions are caused by past events or deeds that can engender future consequences (Fonseca & Ferreira, 2015; Reyes, 2011, p. 793). To this end, hypothetical future problems are linguistically constructed by using conditional structures and modals "would" and "could". Besides, politicians can also display the hypothetical repercussions of not following their proposals without using modality which indicates their strong commitment to what they are saying as their statements are advanced as facts (Thompson, 2004; Reyes, 2011). According to Reyes (2011, p. 796), this strategy helps "achieve political goals by presenting hypothetical assumptions as factual reality ... a lack of modality adverbs and modal verbs ... calls for imminent action".

### ***Altruism***

This strategy reflects van Leeuwen's strategy of "moral evaluation" in a way that it refers to a system of values. This strategy refers to the legitimization of actions by identifying them "as actions beneficial to others. Doing things for others ... presents the action as beneficial for a community and circumvents judgment about the selfishness of the speaker" (Reyes, 2011, p. 801). In other words, politicians legitimize their decisions and actions by showing that they ensure and promote the well-being of other groups or communities.



## **Research Objectives**

The article embarks on its analytical journey in an attempt to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the legitimating strategies used in the discourse of the American activist to present and handle the new “War on Terror” in Congo.
- To analyze the linguistic devices that reinforce the tenor of the legitimating strategies.
- To emphasize the functions of the legitimization strategies and their linguistic realizations in Ben Affleck’s testimony.

## **Data and Methodology**

The corpus of the present study consists of the testimony made by Ben Affleck before the House Foreign Affairs Committee to present the Congo crisis on March 8, 2011. More specifically, the data comprises the statements in which he tackled the issue in question in an attempt to legitimize US intervention in the region. The data has been retrieved from US foreign affairs website [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov). The total number of statements analyzed in this study is 32. In line with the research objectives and the nature of data used, qualitative CDA methodology has also been applied. Particularly, this framework has the potential to reveal the extent to which ideological and hegemonic practices are embedded in discourse. CDA practitioners emphasize that language use in discourse entails ideological meanings (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Scrutinizing how the celebrity-activist discourse produces power relations by studying language can raise “a critical consciousness” *visa-vis* the ideological power embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 2013, p. 3). To this end, the investigation of the linguistic structure paves the ground to extracting the ideological implication of discourse (Fairclough, 1992). This would bring acumen into the formation of particular ideologies articulated through linguistic devices. In tandem with the linguistic realization of language in this political actor’s discourse, van Leeuwen’s (2007) and Reyes’ (2011) legitimization strategies are used. This particular framework has been employed as it is deemed more suitable for the objectives of this research, and helps yield an in-depth analysis of the data. Instances of legitimization strategies, their linguistic realizations and the functions fulfilled by the strategies are given and elucidated.

## **Data Analysis**

Representing himself as an advocator of peace in a volatile region, there is an expectation that Ben Affleck will use various rhetorical strategies to legitimize

the US “soft war on terror” to contain Congo’s crises. The following section scrutinizes the use of legitimating strategies in the statements made by this American activist. The data is analyzed leaning on an eclectic framework combining van Leeuwen’s (2007) and Reyes’ (2011) legitimization strategies.

### ***Findings/Results: Sketching the New “War on Terror”***

The study illustrates how the American activist uses intertextuality to justify actions and decisions regarding the Third-World. The framework applied to his discourse is an adaptation of the strategies advanced by van Leeuwen and Reyes delineated in the literature review above. My framework points out to the presence of four key strategies that this political actor relies on to advance his arguments and legitimize actions: 1) *proposals of a hypothetical future*; 2) *rationality of the decision process*; 3) *voices of expertise* and 4) *altruism*. These outlined strategies are informed by van Leeuwen’s *authorization, rationalization and moral evaluation*.

#### ***Strategy 1: Legitimization through a Hypothetical Future***

The American political discourse espouses a coherent worldview where past events work as a cognitive archive based on which future political goals are measured. In fact, legitimization often occurs through a time frame where past, present and future are interconnected. The present is portrayed as a turning point as far as rational decisions and actions are concerned. These actions are evaluated according to a cause (which occurred in the past) and a consequence (which may occur in the future). In other words, the renegotiation of the past as a cognitive reference point is a determinant force to resolve the present problem, to frame decisions and to trigger imminent action in order to avoid the manifestation of the same trouble in the future. When it comes to legitimating US intervention, the strategy involving different hypothetical futures was a device used by Ben Affleck. Regarding facing terrorism threats with its outcomes, it seems that Ben Affleck sees inaction against them as part of a plan to increase threat beyond the region. He warns that a retreat from help equals not only making DRC a potential hotbed for terrorism but also destabilizing US interests and security:

- (1) If Congo continues on its current path, women like Laba Kamana will perish under the weight of armed groups.
- (2) My testimony today is, in short, a plea to you to insist that the Executive Branch takes the necessary steps to implement the key provisions of the 2006 law. I strongly believe that if we continue to place the Congo on the back burner of US policy it will come back to haunt us.

- (3) But if our foreign policy does not reflect those principles it undermines our ideals.

The above excerpts (1), (2), and (3) can be seen as a way of legitimization via *'hypothetical future'*. Ben Affleck presents through conditional sentences structures the possible scenario if the US refrains from intervention. These examples shed light on how the activist attempts to achieve political goals by legitimizing actions through a hypothetical future. The past and the present act as a powerful tool to scramble with the bad outcomes of the situation and, thus, opens an ideological avenue to interpret future events (Angstrom, 2011). The future, then, constitutes “an ideologically significant site in which dominant political actors and institutions can exert power and control” (Dunmire, 2007, p. 19). Ben Affleck alludes to a hypothetical future where the threats in Congo, if left uncontrolled and monitored, would not only threaten Congolese lives (such as Laba’s life) but also destabilizes US interests in the region and questions American ideals. This creates a sense of causality in the audience as a cause-consequence relationship is woven through the conditional structure. The use of the three material verbs “perish”, “haunt”, and “undermine” with destructive implications aim at amplifying the consequences of possible threats where a retreat from help is contagious and nefarious (Laba→ US Foreign Policy/ Political stability→ US ideals).

- (4) In this time of heightened concern over Federal spending, some suggest that austerity demands we turn a blind eye to the crisis in Congo. Nothing could be more misguided. It would simply be a “penny wise and pound foolish” to allow the Congo to again fall into a state of chaos and humanitarian crisis.

- (5) And you know, Congo is on this tipping point right now. It could very easily fall back into chaos or it could move forward into recovery, and that gives me and others, I think, a sense of real urgency about this. You know, and the United States I think have a critical leadership role to play that would have a great deal to do with changing the lives of tens if not hundreds of millions of people for generations to come.

In excerpts (4) and (5), Ben Affleck projects a hypothesis through the elements of modality such as “could” and “would”. The use of the metaphorical expression “penny wise and pound foolish” in excerpt (4) evokes hypothetical consequences of not following the speaker’s proposal. He excogitates about the economic interests in the region and the importance of intervention. In excerpt (5), he raises the risky future of Congo that “could very easily fall back into chaos” if himself and the US do not embrace a decisive role to maintain Congo’s future stability.

Besides, legitimization through a hypothetical future can also be achieved without hedges or modal adjuncts. This type of legitimization is displayed by this activist when he uses a risky future to justify present decisions:

- (6) The goals of the 2006 law are still relevant today. Yet, the US has waned its attention on the real threat posed by an unsecure Congo and ceased its compliance with the law.

In excerpt (6), Ben Affleck advances his argument about a hypothesis without the elements of modality stressing the ideological concepts “*real threat*” and “*unsecure Congo*”. The actor uses threat scenario to question the accountability to the American law system as a reason for social action (Reyes, 2011, p. 782). In fact, this excerpt exemplifies the legitimization through time line:

Danger is present → threats are growing → threats of “unsecure Congo” will amplify if the US turns a blind eye to possible repercussions. At this stage, his legitimization is based on rationalization through its second type: goaloriented (van Leeuwen, 2007). He implicitly rationalizes the US retreat strategy for its negative risks. Ben Affleck, thus, expresses his commitment towards the statement. In other words, he is presenting this statement as a fact. This is also an important strategy to attain political goals by presenting hypothetical assumptions as factual reality (Thompson, 2004; Reyes, 2011).

- (7) We have this window of opportunity that is very important both here in terms of the United States government and also in terms of what’s happening in the next year before the election in Congo. And you know, Congo is on this tipping point right now. It could very easily fall back into chaos or it could move forward into recovery, and that gives me and others, I think, a sense of real urgency about this. You know, and the United States I think have a critical leadership role to play that would have a great deal to do with changing the lives of tens if not hundreds of millions of people for generations to come.

Here, in excerpt (7), the reference to a possible future is not linguistically constructed using common examples of hypothetical futures. The commonly used structure of conditionality (Reyes, 2011, p. 786) is not emphasized in this excerpt, but the allusion to a hypothetical future is nevertheless present. Instead, the foreseeing of a better future is implied in the way Ben Affleck presents the outcomes of future actions, i.e., protecting the Congo “from falling back into chaos” and, thus, “moving it forward into recovery” and “changing the lives of millions of people”. The use of the time adverbial “next year” and “right now” shows that the speaker attempts to capture the attention of his audience where present and future interpenetrate. Accordingly, the possibility of a better future, where the Congolese are protected from violence and death is implied and, in

turn, is used as a tool for justifying the importance of US present intervention. Another linguistic strategy used by Ben Affleck in order to accentuate the threat scenario is to connect the possible future dangers to the historical continuum of the country and its generation, which, too, is a common legitimating strategy in political discourse (Reyes, 2011, p. 793). Rationalizing intervention in terms of saving the lives for “generations to come”, Ben Affleck anticipates that the future is not set in stone and that to have “critical leadership role to play” would have a great deal to avoid the worst-case scenario in Congo that of the perishing of generations.

### ***Strategy 2: Legitimization through Rationality***

Ben Affleck uses appeals to rationality in his legitimating discourse. There are different ways of using rationalization to justify decisions or actions (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 113-117; Reyes, 2011, pp. 797-800). The different rationalization strategies used by this activist are the following: instrumental rationalization through *goal-orientation*, *means-orientation*, and *effectorientation*. In the following excerpts (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), and (13), Ben Affleck resorts to *goal-orientation*:

- (8) The United States and the international community must continue to be active participants in this struggle.
- (9) Surely, the United States can work with others to help fill the funding gap.
- (10) The US supported the deployment of the UN Mission to the Congo, initially known as MONUC, and continued to strongly support it as it became the largest peacekeeping operation in the world. From 2003-2006, the US stayed heavily engaged both diplomatically and financially helping the Congolese government and people find stability.
- (11) Our goal must be to avert a humanitarian disaster by proactive investment. The path to stability in today’s Congo requires fostering stable elections and preventing another disaster that could easily require hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance.
- (12) The US government must do more to support a multidimensional strategy to protect civilians, girls, women, men and boys from the onslaught of violence in rural eastern Congo.
- (13) The US must do more to support the 2011 elections. In addition to providing diplomatic support for free and fair elections, the US should

support robust election monitoring efforts by Congolese civil society and by credible international organizations.

In the excerpts Ben Affleck mentions the motives for carrying out some actions regarding Congo. In these examples, the practice/decision of the speaker is firmly grounded on explicit goals through material processes “to continue”, “to help fill”, “to avert”, “to support”, “to protect”, “fostering elections”, “preventing another disaster”. Based on this logic, *goal-oriented* rationalization is employed here by the American activist to legitimize past and future acts that are deemed rational. To this end, this strategy is linguistically realized using clauses of purpose introduced by “to”, and the gerunds “fostering”, and “preventing”. Accordingly, Ben Affleck lists the actions needed and carried out by the United States to contain terrorism and threats in Congo. Another linguistic device used at this stage of instrumental rationalization is the use of relational modality. There is a clear sense of commitment from the American activist through the use of the modal verb “must” in excerpts (8), (11), (12) and (13) which results in what Fairclough terms “obligation modality” (2003, p. 168). Through statements like “must continue”, “must be to avert”, “must do more”, the latter justifies the actions that should be taken through explicitly stating the goals.

In the case of *effect-orientation*, the repercussions and results of actions are weighted and evaluated. This claim is made clear in the following examples:

- (14) Having just returned from the Congo last month and I can assure you that Congo is on the brink. If Congo continues on its current path, women like Laba Kamana will perish under the weight of armed groups.
- (15) Congo is moving in a negative direction and it’s fragile democratic progress is at risk. If this does not change, the country risks heading into another, deeper spiral of violence which could lead to more fighting and suffering, and could risk destabilizing surrounding Central African countries like Rwanda—a country that is on its own precarious road to stability.
- (16) Starting in 2007, the U.S., along with others in the West, drew back involvement. Instead of continuing a high level of engagement to help consolidate a new, fragile democracy, Congo was treated as if it were a well functioning state from which the United Nations Mission in Congo could be safely withdrawn. This notion was quickly dispelled when rebels waged a new battle against the government in eastern Congo in 2007 and 2008 that brought another terrible round of death, displacement, and destruction.

(17) With U.S. attention distracted, the tide had turned. In 2008, the CNDP (National Congress for People's Defense) nearly overran the capital city of North Kivu and brutally massacred 150 people in Kiwanja, a town just north of Goma.

(18) An electoral outcome that is questioned, along with a depleted MONUSCO presence, could perpetuate another downward spiral of violence, division, and rupture in the Congo. The last time Congo collapsed, armies came in from across Africa and five million people died. We must learn from history.

In excerpts (14), (15), (16), (17), and (18), Ben Affleck realizes the *effectorientation* of *instrumental rationalization* by references to the outcomes of the retreat strategy in Congo. The *effect-orientation* can be seen in the linguistic choice of the lexical register of war, violence and death. In fact, the linguistic options chosen by the activist in this context create “registers” of language (Halliday, 1978, p. 8). He argues that the experiential values of vocabulary may indicate the ideological dogma and the pre-existing classification schemes used by the speaker. In other words, the choice of lexis to reinforce instrumental rationalization can be seen as being controlled by the higher level of the semantic category of register (i.e., registers of war, violence and death). Basing his logic on *the effect-orientation*, Ben Affleck rationalizes American pre-emptive actions in Congo as fundamental. Through the linguistic vein of the register of death and violence: “on the brink”, “perish”, “deep spiral of violence”, “fighting and suffering” “new battle”, “terrible round of death”, displacement and destruction”, “overran”, “massacred”, “died”, he reinforces the idea that failure to read warning signs is not only reckless, but could also lead to unfavorable outcomes. By rationalizing intervention in terms of *effectorientation*, the American activist correlates his reasoning with the broader politics of preemptive security which rests on “imagined catastrophic futures” through which precautionary policies are justified (De Goede, 2008, p. 162).

In the case of *means-orientation*, Ben Affleck focuses on aims as embedded in actions “as a means to an end” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 114). The aims he outlines here are not the ultimate goal but the medium for achieving the goal: ensuring democracy and saving lives.

(19) All we need is focus. It requires our attention and our priority. It requires a special advisor to coordinate between agencies, it requires diplomatic energy and it requires a concrete commitment.

(20) In the early 2000s, the United States government helped bring to the table the various forces then fighting in Congo. The U.S. government also

provided key funding for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration programs and played a major role in helping peace and development return to Congo's embattled Ituri district.

(21) We have done so in the past in Congo by providing hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance through the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace, and through various United Nation (UN) agencies (e.g., UNICEF).

Rationalization via *means-orientation* is constructed in favor of a conclusion. In excerpt (20), Ben Affleck produces legitimation through stressing the means to fulfill the desired goal. This is achieved linguistically through the parallel structure "it requires" in tandem with the use of the semantic choice of words that naturalize and give evidence to certain facts and claims (Fairclough, 2002). Through the use of key words "focus", "attention", "special advisor", "diplomatic energy" and "concrete commitment"; terms that qualify Americans to embrace the interventionist profile, Ben Affleck rationalizes the actions to be taken by stressing US attributes as the very means towards achieving peace and stability.

In excerpt (21), this American activist uses the *means-orientation* rationalization by mobilizing the material processes "helped bring", "provided", "played" and in excerpt (22) through the use of gerund headed by the preposition "by" as a marker of a manner clause (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 114). Ben Affleck's rationalizing strategy, which is accomplished through attributes; material processes and gerund, is, therefore, used to legitimize US role in Congo by shedding light on the effort it has put in to combat all forms of terrorism, wretchedness and extremism. In fact, instances of the use of *means-orientation* in these excerpts are maintained through time deixis such as in excerpt (20) "in the early 2000" and in excerpt (21) "in the past" to grab the audience's attention that past constructive actions of preemptive engagements and interventions proved to be effective. As seen in these excerpts, the actions and situations act as the means of producing desired outcomes such as political solutions and international cooperation. For example, the constructive actions that are stressed include cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace, and United Nation (UN) agencies (e.g., UNICEF) and the outcome is that key funding for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration programs have been provided and peace and development returned to Congo. Another linguistic device articulated at this phase of rationalization is the ideological use of deictic pronouns. According to van Dijk (1998, p. 203), pronouns "are perhaps the best known grammatical category of



the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power, and hence underlying ideologies”. In excerpts (20) and (21) the speaker utilizes the pronoun “we” (referring to Americans and the American Government) where the question of increasing peace and development in Congo correlates closely with “our” attributes and actions.

### ***Strategy 3: Legitimization through Voices of Expertise***

The strategy of legitimization through voices of expertise leans on van Leeuwen’s legitimating category of *authorization*. In the analyzed data, *impersonal authority* is emphasized by Ben Affleck:

(22) This is ambitious agenda, but it can be accomplished. In December 2005, then Senator Obama introduced a bill entitled the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act of 2006 (the 2006 law).

(23) My testimony today is, in short, a plea to you to insist that the Executive Branch take the necessary steps to implement the key provisions of the 2006 law.

(24) Washington must effectively implement the provisions in the Dodd-Frank Act designed to strengthen enforcement sanctions related to conflict minerals. Only in an equitable and transparent business environment can Congo’s mineral wealth pay for Congo’s future.

In examples (22), (23), and (24) *impersonal authority*, which refers to authority legitimization by reference to laws, provisions and acts, is employed by the American activist. By using the nouns “act”, “bill”, “law”, “provisions”, and “sanctions”, Ben Affleck legitimizes the US act of deterring terrorism by showing that it results from its commitment to the provisions of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act of 2006 and the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010.

Ben Affleck also makes use of *personal authority* in the following excerpts:

(25) The bill had a bipartisan list of Senate cosponsors, including then Senator Clinton. On December 6, 2006, it passed the House by voice vote. On December 22, 2006, President Bush signed the bill into law. The message is simple: It can be done.

(26) Then Senator Obama introduced a bill entitled the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act of 2006.

(27) To ensure that the United States steps up to the serious challenges to stability in Africa and democratic progress posed by the Congo, the

President or Secretary of State should appoint a Special Representative for the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

*Personal authority* legitimization is implemented in excerpts (25), (26), and (27) in which Ben Affleck refers to what President Bush, Senator Obama, and Secretary of State did or should do to implement the rule of law in the region. Linguistically, *personal authority* legitimization is realized in these examples through the material processes “signed”, “introduced” and obligation modality “should appoint”. The highlighting of these personal authorities along these processes is meant to foreground them as important and trusted prescribers of actions and solutions. What is significant in this regard is that Ben Affleck relies simultaneously on the discursive strategy of *impersonal authorization* by referring to endorsed acts and *personal authorization*, by referring explicitly to American political actors; a way by which to make American social actors and laws act as a reflection of order and reliability (Fairclough, 2013, p. 28).

The third category of authorization used by Ben Affleck is his appeal to the *authority of tradition*. In a political discourse, speakers often show their alignment with American values enshrined in historical documents or call for national unity. They achieve it by mentioning or quoting important documents like the Constitution. The following excerpt speaks to this claim:

(28) The values we hold as true are priceless to us. They are the soul of our nation, rooted in our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, and our Declaration of Independence. We believe in being free from the tyranny of violence. We believe in life and liberty and we believe basic human rights are not just important, not a thing to be “worked toward” but a fundamental right to be demanded for all mankind.

Ben Affleck’s authorization strategy is made via onomastic allusions as he draws on the power of the three core US historical documents: “Constitution”, “Bill of Rights” and “Declaration of Independence”. His reasoning is based on the fact that the legitimization of US foreign policy in Congo is inextricably based on US values of life, liberty, and human rights enshrined in its iconic documents. Refraining from help, according to him, equals betraying American values cemented in these historical documents. His intertextual evocation of these documents as a reference point to legitimize his claims adheres to the legitimization strategy through the *authority of tradition*. Thus, the audience is induced to view his stance as commonsense and trustworthy. Through this type of authority what can be realized is that “the achievement of these interests depends on “collective recognition” of duties, moral values and norms (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 119). Intertextuality is, thus, another linguistic toolkit used by the speaker to legitimize the US intervention. The historical re-memorization aims at justifying the idea that “the exceptional

destiny of America is to transform itself into a model nation” (Madson, 1998, p. 13).

#### ***Strategy 4: Legitimization through Altruism***

Another way by which to legitimize actions and claims is to enchant them as beneficial to others. This legitimization correlates somehow with the “strategy of moral evaluation based on the legitimization by referencing to value-systems” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 110). The use of this strategy is shown in the following examples:

(29) It doesn’t require extreme sacrifice elsewhere in government but it can ameliorate suffering, terrible suffering in place which is, in fact, not so far away.

In excerpt (29), Ben Affleck emphasizes the objective of the political action through a correlative conjunction “does not...but”. His altruism is loaded with what Aristotle names ethos, more specifically “goodwill”. He makes it clear that intervention would ameliorate the well-being of Congolese and put an end to their suffering. By using the evaluative adjective “terrible”, he appeals to the pathos of his audience to describe the importance of such intervention in counteracting suffering and terrorism in Congo.

In excerpt (30), the logic behind helping Congo reverberates also in “the bundle of attributes thought to be characteristic of American society” (Brooks, 2013, p. 3). Ben Affleck emphasizes the intervention in terms that these are already acknowledged facts about the nature of US values. This claim is highlighted in the following excerpt:

(30) Like I said, I believe this is an issue that transcends partisanship; it’s an issue about being human being, who we are, what are our values of Americans? What do we want to leave behind? What do we want to say that our government does on our behalf?

The use of rhetorical questions in excerpts (30) aims at cognitively triggering the audience’s “belief system” as he legitimizes interventionism as a validation to US values. Thus, the purpose of rhetorical questions is to legitimize the decision by questioning another motivation behind this decision. Through a parallel structure “what are our values of Americans? What do we want to leave behind? What do we want to say that our government does on our behalf?” he appeals to the logos of his audience by drawing on presupposed connotations that are built on shared mental models about US national identity as something to be transgressed (van Dijk, 1998, p. 45). As he connects mental models about the dangers that could happen out of inaction to the level of general beliefs, presupposing that these are already acknowledged facts about the nature of the

US, reinforces his argument to “winning others consent” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 28). He alludes that the same values should be subsumed by a greater need for the US to be defined by its willingness and ability to deter dangers.

Political actors legitimize their actions by reflecting an altruistic motivation: ensuring help and saving lives. In the following excerpt (31), the image of doing good for others is displayed. The Congolese were and will be secured and helped:

(31) It is in the interest of all of us here to help the people of the Congo move forward towards democracy and respect for human rights and to move away from the multiple crises and horrors of the last fifteen years.

In excerpt (31), altruistic manifestation is triggered by the use of material processes “help” and “move”. Thus, actions are syntactically combined with a ‘goal’: to help Congolese move forward towards democracy, human rights, and away from crises and horrors.

Another linguistic device used by the activist to express *moral evaluation* is his reliance on analogy. In fact, when an action is associated with another action that has either positive or negative value, legitimation by recourse to analogies is played up (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 112). To reinforce altruistic endeavors, Ben Affleck resorts to analogy to draw on socially shared opinions entailing “common sense reasoning schemes” for the sake of persuasion (van Dijk, 2006, p. 98). The following example speaks to this claim:

(32) You know, DRC is the eighth-poorest country in the world; it is the fifth on the Failed States Index, worse than Afghanistan and Iraq and Haiti. And failure here really, genuinely, honestly could be catastrophic, you know?

The discursive strategy of moral evaluation enacted by Ben Affleck, via the subcategory of analogies, is nested with a claim based on making comparisons in order to legitimize actions in Congo. He draws on the second person pronoun “you” along the mental cognitive process “know” to build on “the cognitive and rational manner” of his audience to evaluate the negative outcomes of likely inaction in Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 58). Thus, the answer to “why must we do this in this way” is to avoid catastrophic failures such as the ones witnessed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti. The outcomes of past failures in these regions are accentuated through analogy to build on possible future threats. With these arguments, the speaker invokes an appeal to the background knowledge of the audience which, in turn, convinces them to support urgent intervention. The indexical meaning evoked by the analogy forges the argument into the “collective memory” of the audience and

participates in forming a “shared belief” reinforced by the past as “a shortcut to rationality” (Jervis, 1976, p. 220).

## Conclusion

Employing van Leeuwen’s (2007) and Reyes’ (2011) legitimization strategies, the present paper has examined the key legitimization strategies used in the testimony of Ben Affleck to present the Congo crisis to US House Foreign Committee Affairs. It has also scrutinized the linguistic devices mobilized in his statements to realize the legitimization strategies. The analysis has revealed that the American activist leans on the four key strategies of: hypothetical future, rationality enacted via *instrumental rationalization* through *goalorientation, means-orientation, and effect-orientation*, voices of expertise realized by *impersonal authority, personal authority* and *authority of tradition* and *impersonal authority* and altruism via *moral evaluation*. These strategies are articulated to naturalize the generational commitment to legitimize US involvement in Congo defining an American political and economic agenda contaminated by personal, institutional, and geopolitical interests.

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