

Victims or Hysterics? Armed Rebels, or Violent Extremists? Translation and the Different Narratives of the Syrian Uprising

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that the appropriate
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Dedication

For my forever inspiring and encouraging husband, Saleh, whose unwavering support helped me get through the toughest of times.

To my beautiful boys, Khalid, Abdullatif, Muhammed, and Abdulrahman, who stood by my side all through my journey, made it the more remarkable, and, although were a bit cheeky, did a tremendous job putting up with their always busy mom.

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Abstract

The study proceeds from the observation that the coverage of the Syrian uprising, which has entered its eighth year, has fluctuated greatly, not only within the different news media, but, even within the same news medium. The research questions of different narratives of the Syrian uprising are related to the changing circumstances of the uprising or with the news media agenda. Also, since translation plays a pivotal role in covering conflict, a specific focus was placed on the study of the role of translation in either creating a more realistic outlook to the conflict or as another tool for supporting news media agendas.

Since most news media claim objectivity, they would normally present a variety of perspectives. Thus, this research aims at finding the hidden messages within news media texts from the BBC and Al Jazeera English websites stretched over a long period of time from March 2011 until June 2012 covering a variety of topics. The most significant of these were the news media's initial reaction to the uprising and violence brought upon the Syrians and the formation of armed rebellion.

Findings of the research indicate that, in the initial stage of the revolution, both the BBC and Al Jazeera blamed the regime for the violence although the BBC still placed hope on the reforms of the regime, and was, on occasions, understanding of an Islamic threat often declared by the regime. When some protesters carried arms, differences grew between the two news media. The BBC eyed the armed rebels suspiciously and saw the Islamic extremism threat looming behind their words and actions, while Aljazeera was more understanding of the severity of the situation that propelled some protesters into choosing armed rebellion. Also, while the BBC focused on the Sunni military resistance and ignored any role for the Alawites in the uprising, this focus on the narrative regarding only the regime, and the opposition fighting it. While ignoring an important faction in the conflict served, on the one hand, to present the Alawites as victims who had no say in the matter and helped to demonise the armed resistance as a threat towards minorities, Aljazeera, on the other hand, sought to reach out to both Alawites in the opposition, and those who supported the regime, creating a fuller picture of the events and actors involved. These differences were, indeed, also reflected in the translations. Although both news media seemed affected by their ideologies, comparing the fabula and the story, the real events taking place and the stories that were circulated showed that Al Jazeera was more objective than the BBC. Not only did it

not rely on presumptions, but it spoke to, and most importantly for this research, translated for, more parties in the conflict.

The contribution of this research lies in the creation of a new analysis model combining both theories of narrative and critical discourse analysis enabling researchers to assess the difference between fiction and reality in news stories and to trace ideology in news coverage as well as studying the role of translations within these texts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

In 2010, the world was shocked when Bouazizi, a young Tunisian man, set himself on fire because his vegetable cart was confiscated. Bouazizi, who held a university degree, could not find a job with his degree, so he resorted to selling vegetables to support his family.

When he was challenged, his anger reverberated through not only Tunisia, but the Arab world. Having died a few days after self-immolation, Bouazizi's action sparked an uprising that eventually toppled the president of Tunisia and turned it into a democratic country (Nti, 2013). Other countries swept with revolutions were not so lucky. In Libya, Qadafi was toppled and killed, but the country is still divided (Chivvis, 2013). Egypt enjoyed democracy for a short period of time when President Morsi took power after being elected by the people, only to be removed in a coup by the army that brought dictatorship back to the country (Jumet, 2017). Sadly, the Syrian uprising has been dragging on for more than eight years with no end in sight. The Syrians had the same grievances as the Egyptians, Libyans, and Tunisians, but they were silenced under an extremely repressive regime. A significant moment came when school children in Daraa' scribbled revolutionary slogans they had learned by watching TV coverage of other Arab uprisings on the school walls to which the regime reacted by arresting and torturing them. When their parents asked for their children's release, they were humiliated by the governor of Daraa'. This prompted people to protest and ask for reforms. The protests were faced by a brutal crackdown prompting protesters to ask for the fall of the regime (Al Om, 2018); some carried arms for self-defence and to attack the regime, and early peaceful protests snowballed into a full-blown proxy war (Smyth, 2015). To date, 12 million people in Syria (half the Syrian population) have been misplaced, over a million have been injured, and more than 400,000 killed (Al Jazeera, April 2018; USA Today, April 2018)

Many attribute the Syrian quagmire to the brutal crackdown of the regime on peaceful civilians, the interference of neighbouring countries, the Russian support of the regime, and the passive reaction of the international community, which went no further than sanctions and condemnations; both have proved ineffective (Philips, 2016). Following the news on Syria, it caught my attention that many news media demonised the regime and portrayed it as the main cause of the Syrian trauma supported by human right reports that kept recounting the

number of people killed and tortured, and those who have disappeared at the hands of the regime. However, the focus on the regime, the crimes committed by it, and the victims of war seemed to wane after the rebels started to carry arms. Later on, when extremist groups, including ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and Jabhat Al-Nusrah and Ahrar Ash-Sham (Darke, 2016; Smyth, 2015) infiltrated the revolution, they caught the media's attention by storm (Kahf, 2013). This has intrigued me and prompted me to study how the media approached the intricacies of the Syrian uprising from the start and how their stories developed along with the real developments on the land in Syria. At times of conflict, perspectives are very important because they justify actions of war such as invading or intervening to save the victims of hostility. An important issue regarding the Syrian conflict was that if news media reached out to parties of the conflict and victims of war and translated their conversations, whether these translations bridged gaps and provided a comprehensive understanding of the situation or whether they were utilised in as much as they supported the news media perspective.

1.2 Rationale of the study

In this study, I attempt to investigate the coverage of the news media of the uprising in Syria, particularly the evolving narratives of the developing event. I will compare the narratives of two news media regarding the Syrian uprising and determine the difference between them over time. I will also look at whether these narratives reflected the real events on the ground or were created alongside presumptions.

Many studies have dealt with media bias regarding news coverage mainly through critical discourse analysis (CDA), but this study deals with the unfolding coverage of conflict. It looks through the initial reaction to the events and whether these reactions have changed over time. This study specifically observes the news media reaction to the Syrian uprising that was unexpected, even though the Arab Spring had swept neighbouring countries. It also looks into the reaction of the news media to the armed rebellion. An important aspect of my observations within the news is blame. The uprising started with peaceful demonstrations against a regime that responded brutally. It started with two parties, the peaceful rebels and a brutal regime. Pinning the blame on the regime was straightforward for most news media. Things seem to get more tricky when rebels carried arms, and, although the rebels' simple

weaponry were no comparison to that of the regime, which started with snipers shooting indiscriminately at protesters and developed into the tank shelling of whole neighbourhoods, the armed rebellion seemed to have drawn media attention away from regime brutality to mistakes committed by the rebels.

There is also disproportionate coverage of violence committed by Islamic State as opposed to violence committed by the regime of Bashar al-Assad and his allies. In the first six months of 2015, the Assad regime killed more than six times the number of Syrians than Islamic State during the same period, yet the majority of these crimes went unreported (Williams, 2016).

Blame is not straightforward, especially when there is no direct evidence to justify it. Narrative theory helps to trace perspectives advocated by texts by looking at aspects such as selectivity, and causal emplotment in the texts (Baker, 2006a; Somers, 1994). Selectivity involves the selection of voices and events and whether these voices are foregrounded, given plenty of space, or backgrounded, given limited space in the text. More importantly, causal emplotment is what decides how the selections are eventually interpreted. Causal emplotment can affect interpretations through other selections and comments. This is the first study that investigates news coverage through narrative theory throughout a long period of time, tracking changes in perspective not only across two news media, but also within each medium. It ranges from March 2011 to June 2012 and refers to every article related to the events in Syria on the BBC and Al Jazeera websites.

This period was chosen because it reflected important developments in the uprising that erupted in March 2011 and developed into the armed rebellion covered in November 2011 onwards. The period ends with the coverage of the Houla massacre, committed in May 2012, during which the news media speculated over who could have been responsible for the massacre (Adams, 2015; Goldsmith, 2018).

Moreover, it is important to note that narrative theory is very much related to framing. Selectivity and causal emplotment are framing techniques in themselves as they both make up the road map through which readers can interpret the events. Indeed, causal emplotment cannot do without other framing techniques, including labelling, videos, photos, and annotated links as they, together, contribute to the creation of the whole picture.

In times of conflict translation is, specifically, of utmost importance. Most news media would venture to places of conflict and translate conversations with parties in the conflict and with victims of war (Baker, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2016; Fahmy, 2004; Inghilleri, 2008, 2009, 2012; Tymoczko 2000, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009). This can give the news media a lot of credibility as translation is generally looked upon as an objective activity that bridges gaps and enables an objective understanding of the events covered. Unfortunately, translation can also be manipulated through selectivity, causal employment, and framing (Baker, 2006a, 2007, 2010). Not only are news media selective in relation to who to reach out for, but they are also selective over which parts of a conversation should be translated. More important than the selection, is the causal employment and framing of the selected translation. Translating for victims of war, for instance, may not necessarily entail empathy, but can be framed in ways that belittle their suffering. Thus, this study pays significant attention to the role of translation in maintaining narratives in the news.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study has adapted the narrative theory to the context of the news and its translations, and has paved the way for other research related to news coverage through narrative theory.

Moreover, this study combines aspects of both narrative theory and CDA, enabling researchers to investigate news more thoroughly. The analysis model created in this study also enables researchers to look out for implicit bias and attitudes that are not usually spelled out clearly, but are suggested, to the readers. It also allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the role of translation in the creation of news stories.

Not only does this research provide analysis tools of great benefit for other academic researchers, but it is also of great use to readers as it teaches them to be critical and to identify unsupported claims when they happen by looking for evidence for any suggested interpretations by the media. Readers can compare the coverage of one media to another and, thus, identify selection and omission in the stories. Readers can also resist the interpretation imposed on events and voices selected by recognising the fake connection between reported events and other unrelated events that may be reported under the guise of extra information.

Readers will also be able to identify extra comments and framing, and separate them from reported events to arrive at their own judgement of those events.

1.4 Conceptual framework

This research makes use of the narrative theory first developed by Somers (1992) and Somers and Gibson (1994), and, later, adapted to translation by Baker (2006). Adapting the narrative theory to translation, Baker discusses four types of narratives: personal narratives, public narratives, conceptual narratives, and meta narratives, which are the most dominant circulating in society. Moreover, Baker (2006) discusses eight features of narrativity and how they can be utilised in translation. Baker did not design a model specific to a certain media or genre, but discussed these features generally, in relation to any medium or genre.

Moreover, there was no specific consideration of the news context in her discussion. Added to that, many of the features are so related to each other that they could branch out of each other rather than discussed separately. However, Baker introduced a new theory into translation studies and may have wished to discuss all of the details, leaving the door open for other researchers to make use of these features. Also, while Baker discussed framing through narrative theory, I argue that narrative features are, themselves, framing.

Thus, since my research deals with news media, I have found that selective appropriation and causal employment are the most important features of narrativity, specifically in the news context. I have also included another separate feature – temporality – which I made branch out of causal employment. Framing was investigated from a CDA perspective. Thus, I have created a model that combines both the narrative theory and critical discourse analysis; combining the two theories has helped in the creation of a very precise model of analysis of news stories and translations within them, in which framing is the starting point of the analysis as it provides readers, as well as researchers, with the main point of view to be represented in the story. This is then confirmed through the selectivity of events and voices and their causal employment, and the manner they are weaved into the news story to suggest certain narratives.

1.5 Scope and methodology

This research investigates the media coverage of the Syrian uprising through a period extending to one year and four months from March 2011–June 2012 in order to observe the unfolding narrative. The study investigates and tracks the media’s reaction to the Syrian uprising erupting in March 2011, and also the media reaction of the armed rebellion that started to get media attention in November 2011. Two media websites have been chosen for this research: the BBC, and Al Jazeera. These websites were chosen because they reflect actual TV coverage at the time and also feature opinion articles. Coming from different parts of the world, these two news media are excellent sources for comparison as they usually have different perspectives of events. Studying them through my narrative and framing model, will not only enable me to study different perspectives, but also how they were achieved. Moreover, this research will speculate on the possible influence of the foreign policies of the host countries, the UK and Qatar, and the ideology of both media over the perspectives advocated in them.

I have created an analysis model for this research, which includes two features of narrativity and framing. These features are selective appropriation and causal emplotment. The two features of narrativity and framing make up three main nodes of the analysis. Events and voices, branch out of selective appropriation, while temporality branches out of causal emplotment. Temporality is made up of external and internal retroversion (Bal, 2004), i.e. events that took place at the same time of the main event and those taking place earlier. Under framing comes paratextual elements (titles, subtitles, and the lead) and internal elements, including labelling, videos, photos, and annotated links.

1.6 Research questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions through the narrative model created in this research:

- 1- What are the narratives of the BBC and Al Jazeera regarding the Syrian uprising and how could these media support their narratives?
- 2- What is the role of translation in supporting the ideologies and narratives advocated by these news media?

1.7 Outline of the study

There are seven chapters in this study, including the introduction and conclusion.

Chapter One is an introductory statement, which discusses the context of the study and its rationale. It also sheds light on the significance of the study, the methodology applied, and the scope of the data. Moreover, it recounts the research questions and, finally, produces an outline of the thesis.

Chapters Two and Three establish the literature that the analysis of this study is drawn from. Chapter Two discusses cultural translation studies, which focus on the effect of culture and ideology on translation. It discusses manipulation in translation (Lefevere, 1992) and power relations (Cunico & Munday, 2007). It also sheds light on how manipulation and power relations have affected translation of popular works such as *Don Quixote* (Pym 2005; Rutherford, 2007) and Anne Frank's diary (Lefevere, 1992). The chapter also discusses the integration of sociology in translation studies, especially Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field (Elgindy 2013; Hanna 2016; Hermans, 1999; Inghilleri 2003, 2012; Sheffy 2005; Simeoni, 1998). A more recent trend in sociological translation studies is the sociological narrative theory, first elaborated by Somers (1992) and Somers and Gibson (1994) and then adapted by Baker (2005, 2006) to translation and, more specifically, to translation in conflict in which Baker argues that translation does not necessarily bridge gaps and illustrates how translation can be manipulated through eight narrative features. This chapter reviews four types of narrative discussed by Baker (2006) and only three features of narrativity more relevant to my research. Also, part and parcel of the study of translation in conflict is a discussion of political translation studies charged by many scholars (Banhegyi, 2014; Brownlie, 2007; Gangon, 2006; Salama-Carr, 2007, 2011; Schäffner, 1998; Tang, 2007; Tymockzo, 2003; Venuti, 1995).

Chapter Three discusses framing both from the narrative perspective and critical discourse analysis. It starts by tracking the development of narrative theory from Goffman's (1974) concept of frame. Many scholars were inspired by Goffman's framing theory, which emphasised the passivity of frames (Lakoff, 2010; Tannen & Wallat, 1993). However, Entman (1993, 2004, 2007) and Baker (2007) consider framing to be a conscious and deliberate activity. This chapter also discusses framing from a narrative perspective (Baker,

2007) as it is very related to framing from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2004). The chapter also discusses translation and activism and how framing can be utilised by activist translators attempting to create resistant narratives. It concludes with a discussion of the differences and similarities between narrative theory and CDA. I have concluded that framing from a CDA perspective is more useful for my analysis and the narrative features selective appropriation and causal emplotment are framing features themselves.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are the methodology and analysis chapters. Chapter Four discusses the analysis model I have created by combining two main narrative features and framing from a CDA perspective. It discusses and justifies my choice of data and the period of study. The data selected are the BBC and Al Jazeera websites' coverage of the Syrian uprising from its eruption in March 2011 till June 2012. It also discusses the tools I have used for the analysis, which are Google advanced search and NVivo.

Chapter Five presents the analysis from a narrative perspective regardless of translation. The detailed analysis of March 2011 when the uprising erupted, and of November 2011 when armed rebellion was first covered, created the cornerstone of the narratives I assumed these two websites were advocating. This has not only set the main themes and narratives of these media, but paved the way for the study of the role of translation in sustaining the narratives advocated by the BBC and Al Jazeera all through the period from March 2011–June 2012 in Chapter Six.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by highlighting the major findings of the research.

Chapter 2: Translation and Conflict

In this chapter, I will discuss the place of culture and ideology in the study of translation, leading to a discussion of political discourse and the political role or responsibility of the translator when translating conflict. Then, I will discuss sociological narrative theory, Somers' (1992) dimensions of narrativity, Somers and Gibson's' (1994) features of narrativity, and how they relate to translation (Baker, 2005, 2006). By exploiting features of narrativity, translators are believed to be able to either participate in the circulation of powerful narratives or to undermine them.

2.1 Ideology and cultural translation studies

Since 1976, translation studies scholars have moved on from the purely linguistic studies of translation and debates about the fidelity or equivalence of translation and, as a result, looked for other disciplines to inform their research on translation (Bassnett, 1998). A significant move in the twentieth century was towards cultural translation studies, in which translation was not an innocent act devoid of ideological perspectives or immune to the effects of the culture within which the translator resides. In relation to ideology, moreover, those scholars looked at the basic power relations within the translation process (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998).

Both cultural studies and translation studies practitioners recognise the importance of understanding the manipulatory processes that are involved in textual production. A writer does not just write in a vacuum: he or she is the product of a particular culture, of a particular moment in time, and the writing reflects those factors such as race, gender, age, class, and birthplace as well as the stylistic, idiosyncratic features of the individual. Moreover, the material conditions in which the text is produced, sold, marketed, and read also have a crucial role to play (Dizdar, 2012, p.136).

Ideology has usually been donned as a negative attribute. Bassnett and Lefevere (1998), for instance, approached ideology as the manipulative feature of translation in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Frame*, edited by Lefevere (1992). However, it does seem that Lefevere regards ideology and manipulation as two different entities since he defines ideology as the grid consisting of opinions and attitudes acceptable at the time (p.41). Through that grid, translators try to manipulate the texts. Van Dijk observes that ‘few of “us” (in the West or elsewhere) describe our own belief systems or convictions as “ideologies”’.

On the contrary, Ours is the Truth, Theirs is the Ideology' (1998, p. 2). Indeed, ideology is not necessarily evil; ideologies are, in fact, 'general systems of basic ideas shared by members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations and control their discourse and other social practices as group members' (Van Dijk, 2011, p. 380). It is therefore at the level of discourse that concealed manipulation, as just described by Lefevere, takes place.

This concealment of power relations is, not surprisingly, even more effective in translation because the reader is usually unaware of the changes made within the translation. Thus, Cunico and Munday (2007) indicate that 'translated texts are seen as symbolic forms, located in specific social, temporal and geographic contexts, which, performed by translators and editors and fostered by translation policies, (re)construct meaning that can either support and strengthen existing ideologies or resist them' (p. 142).

Thus, looking at translations of Don Quixote, it can be noticed that ideology has very much affected the translations. The classic was, for the first generation of readers, a hilarious story of the crazy actions of an old buffoon, but through Romanticism in the eighteenth century, the comic was turned into a tragedy 'about a hero dedicated to a noble and doomed quest for spiritual ideals in an uncomprehending materialistic world' (Rutherford, 2007, p. 72).

When Rutherford desired to write a *Don Quixote* that was as funny to the contemporary English readers as Cervantes' was to the Spanish readers of his time, he faced a number of challenges. According to him, Cervantes' jokes could not be reproduced as they were, because actions that were funny in Cervantes' time would have been considered rather vulgar and cruel by modern English people. Also, scenes of violence were considered ugly, but not pitiable, by the original readers. According to Rutherford, in seventeenth-century Spanish culture there was no place for pity because things happened as a result of stupid actions; people were responsible for what they brought upon themselves and the old buffoon, therefore, became crazy as a result of his excessive reading and lack of sleep. Also, mocking deformity was justified because Cervantes' contemporaries considered deformity to be a product of one's own evil. Now, the English reader would not find them humorous, but pitiful (Rutherford, 2007).

Thus, Rutherford, after much consideration, set to create his own jokes, and, unlike other translations, he declares that ‘every joke in Cervantes must be a joke in mine, not as in most post-Romantic Quixote translations, a pale shadow in the face of a meaningless non-joke, literally translated...also there would be no explanatory endnotes of any kind, that my Quixote must make sense in itself’ (Rutherford, 2007, p. 77).

One may not need to declare any intention to modify the translation or its context as Rutherford did to impose ideology. For example, Grossman, as a Jewish translator of Don Quixote, has given too much information in her footnotes about the Jews and Hebrew, according to Pym, which reveals her ideological identity as she tries to remove dust from facts that might be, for some, unknown or long forgotten about the history of the Jews (Pym 2005). Although Grossman, in contrast with Rutherford, was more modest and presented herself as an objective producer of Cervantes’ work in another language, this ideological stance surely credits her with ‘some authorial identity’ (Pym, 2005, p. 79).

Anne Franks’ diary is another interesting case for the ideological modifications manifested in the different translations of the book. What the English reader may not know about Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, in which she described her life in hiding because, as Jews, she and her family could end up in the notorious German concentration camps, is that the English translation of the book is very different from German translations and also from the Dutch origins that were published in 1947. According to Lefevere (1992), when Anne’s diary was recovered from their hiding annex after the whole family was discovered and sent to a concentration camp, it contained sexual allusions and gross descriptions of female body parts. These were thought inappropriate for a 1950’s audience and were removed from the Dutch text published in 1947.

Later, Otto Frank, Anne’s father and the only survivor in the family, asked his journalist friend, Anneliese Schutz, to translate his daughter’s diary into German. Schutz did more than obscure the sexuality of the book; since the book was to be read by Germans, she obscured and soothed over any kind of reference to the Germans as evil or wrong doers.

The most famous of Schutz’s ‘mistranslations’ is that of the Dutch ‘er bestaat geen groter vijandschap op de wereld dan tussen Duitsers en Joden’ [there is no greater enmity in the world than between Germans and Jews] (Paape 292), which is translated as: eine grossere Feindschaft als zwischen diesen Deutschen und den Juden gibt

es nicht auf der Welt!' [there is no greater enmity in the world than between these Germans and the Jews] (Schutz 37)...This 'mistranslation' is only one among many that have been made for reasons best described as ideological...In Anneliese Schutz's own words, 'a book you want to sell well in Germany... should not contain any insults directed at Germans' (Paape, 86, cited in Lefevere, 1992, p. 66)

In contrast to the Dutch and German versions, the sexuality in the text was retained in the English translations. Also, using code switching, the English translation shows that Frank's family did not speak standard Dutch but a mixture of Dutch and German – more German for the older generation and more Dutch for the younger, in an indication that these were people who had already been ripped out of their land and were now hiding out of fear for their lives from their own people (Lefevere, 1992).

These decisions made by translators as they rewrite foreign texts are not always in the hands of the translators themselves but can be affected by patronages. The patronage, Lefevere (1992) explains, consists mainly of ideological patrons because writers, even if they are translating foreign texts, cannot go too far from the social norms of the target reader's society. There are also economic patrons, as translators, editors, publishing houses and anyone supporting the translation have to consider the economic value of the translated text, whether it can afford to be only for the elite or whether it has to sell in large quantities and attract a large audience. In the latter case, translations would be domesticated, i.e. written in fluent English with no traces of the original text (Venuti, 1995). Patronage, however, should not blind us from looking into the material specifically selected for the translation and into the role the translator has in that selection (Bassnett, 1998). Now, many translation researchers have investigated ideological issues in translation, including Abdulla (1999), Van Dijk (2002), Yang (2008), Munday (2007), Valerio (2013), McLaughlin and Muñoz-Basols (2016), Nanquette (2016a, 2016b), and Shih (2016).

This led to another move in translation studies in the 2000s or a little before, when translation studies sought guidance from sociology (Snell-Hornby, 2009; Wolf, 2012) in a move that looks more at the translator as a complete capable social entity rather than only through power relations. Some even called for the launching of *translator studies* (Chesterman, 2009).

Most translation scholars turned to Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and *field*. Field is 'dynamic and changeable and is always conditioned by the struggle among its members over different types of capital' (Hanna, 2016,p.30). Inghilleri (2012) explains Bourdieu's habitus as a 'set of durable dispositions to act in particular ways. These dispositions are linked to social agents' particular histories, including their position vis-à-vis the structure of a particular field' (p. 245). Many translation scholars were specifically interested in the translator's habitus especially after Simeoni's 1998 *The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus* where he tried to combine Toury's polysystem of norms with the translator's habitus according to Hanna (2016). Nonetheless, Simeoni's adaptation of habitus was criticised by other translation scholars who thought that his habitus was rather restrictive and presented the translator as subservient and should be able to negotiate his position according to what he deems appropriate to the translation situation (Hanna, 2016; Inghilleri, 2003). Sheffy (2005), in her study of habitus, also emphasised the translator's agency and his ability to make choices. Furthermore, Hanna (2016) stresses that the 'most important feature of habitus' is that it creates 'strategies for action, rather than rules for implementation' (p. 62).

Indeed, the agency of the translation has been salient in recent translation studies, and while many translation scholars focused on Bourdieu's social theory (Elgindy, 2013; Hanna, 2016; Hermans, 1999; Inghilleri, 2003, 2012; Sheffy 2005; Simeoni, 1998) one translation scholar, Mona Baker (2005, 2006a, 2013, 2016), might have been the first to follow the path of social narrative theory defined and elaborated by Somers (1992) and Somers and Gibson (1994). Baker's model, although it can be modified to any genre of writing, focused basically on conflict, how narratives can promote and naturalise the ideologies of the powerful, and how, nonetheless, they can provide opportunities for resistance. I will discuss in detail some of the narrative features elaborated by Somers (1992), Somers and Gibson (1994), and Baker (2005, 2006a), the most significant of which are *temporality*, *selective appropriation*, and *causal emplotment*, along with examples of their employment in translation. Moreover, in the next chapter, framing will be discussed as a tool that promotes certain narratives over others. Above all, the ethical role of the translator at times of conflict is of utmost importance and a central question in the debate. Thus, we will start by discussing the political role of the translator in the next section.

2.2 Translation studies and political discourse

Relying on sociological narrative theory in her *Translation and Conflict*, Baker focuses on conflict, which she describes as a situation where ‘two or more parties seek to undermine each other because they have incompatible goals, competing interests, or fundamentally different values’ (Baker, 2006a, p. 1). The conflict discussed by Baker is mostly political; indeed, narrative theory itself is believed to be essentially political because ‘our stories are likely to express ideological effects and hegemonic assumptions’ (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 212). Moreover, Baker’s study comes within the scope of the recent political turn within translation studies since the 1990s (Brownlie, 2007). Bánhegyi (2014) believes translation to be an inevitable ‘part of the international negotiations, struggles and political power games’ (p. 140).

Moreover, translation scholars applied different methodologies in their study of the political aspects of translated texts. For example, Gangon (2006) applied Fairclough’s (1998) critical discourse analysis, Schäffner (1998) explored hedges in European political discourse, and Tang (2007) applied LeBaron’s (2003) Theory of Cultural Conflicts. In 2004, Schäffner called for the integration of political discourse analysis into translation studies.

Integrating political discourse analysis into translation studies is very important as it recognises the role of translators who have always been on site at times of war. Take, for example, wars happening in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and, finally, Syria, where translators have been on site to ease communication between conflicting groups and to send messages to and from them. A prevailing question is whether this enabling of communication between people can be neutral, and whether the translator can take, or even should take, sides during the act of translation.

Indeed, the role of translators and interpreters ,at times and in places of conflict, is one that has attracted significant interest since the events of 11th September 2001 (Salama-Carr, 2007, Askew in an interview with Salama-Carr, 2011). Some scholars believe that the translator’s role is uncertain during conflict (Jones, 2004; Askew in an interview with Salama-Carr, 2011). In contrast, Tymockzo (2003) asserts that translators cannot assume an in-between status. One may look, for instance, at the significant contribution of translators during the second World War, who were basically involved in ‘cracking the codes of both enemies; and

second, the construction of cultural products that would mould public opinion in the many cultures of the world. In short, many people with interest in translation were involved in gathering intelligence, negotiating cultural differences, and producing propaganda' (Tymockzo, 2006, p. 444).

To gain a better understanding of the translator's role in conflict, we may benefit from a few recent examples here. During the war in Iraq in 2003, Fahmy (2004) was a translator with the US military among a group of journalists who reported for the Los Angeles Times. Fahmy's role as a translator was very important, not only to the crew he accompanied but also to the American soldiers because Fahmy and his crew followed the US military around for their own safety and many times he was asked to interpret to a soldier at a checkpoint what desperate Iraqis wanted to say and the soldier's response to them. His help during the coverage of war was also very significant. Not only did Fahmy interpret for his crew as they were interviewing people, but he also interviewed people himself, which shows the extent of his involvement (Fahmy, 2004).

Reaching out to the Iraqi people, messages were dropped by the coalition helicopters on land and US Humvees 'patrolled the secured neighbourhoods with large microphones and announced taped Arabic spoken messages that stated: We know that you are worried about the war...We will not stop until we rid you of Saddam Hussein's regime...And that will not take long' (Fahmy, 2004, p. 93). These leaflets are expected to have been written in English first, then translated into Arabic (Baker 2006a) and they reveal how important it was for the coalition to work side by side with translators. Simply, 'translators and interpreters are part of the *institution of war* and hence play a major role in the management of conflict – by all parties, from warmongers to peace activists' (Baker, 2006b, p. 1–2).

Fahmy, the interpreter, was not only a mediator; he also took sides. He supported the coalition and the war on Iraq full heartedly. When people complained to him about the destruction caused by the troops themselves, he tried to calm them down by reminding them that the troops were simply still busy fighting the Baa'thists and freeing their country, and that they would build everything back again. Was Fahmy then *bridging gaps* or giving desperate people false promises on behalf of the coalition? Fahmy himself, it seems, was taken by and promoting the US and UK narratives that their soldiers came to save Iraqis from

Saddam Hussein, that they were bringing hope, prosperity, and freedom to the people (Ismail & Mishra, 2009; Parry, 2011). Actually, ‘the weapons of mass destruction argument was coupled with the objective of freeing the Iraqi people from a brutal dictator in order to convince others, including many Iraqis, of the “justness” of the war’ (Inghelleri, 2010a, p. 177). In other words, ‘the overall thrust of coverage supported a pro-war perspective’ (Hayes & Guardino, 2010, p. 61). Commenting on the troops advancing into Basra, Fahmy noted that many reporters used the term ‘the fall of Basra’, but he preferred to call it the ‘opening of Basra’ (Fahmy, 2004, p. 93). Even more excited than the American reporters, Fahmy could not have chosen better words to describe the invasion of Iraq than this flowery term that summed up the whole of the war on Iraq propaganda. ‘Opening’ a country is an Islamic concept that, for Muslims, means liberating a country and ensuring justice and prosperity. It meant conquests, not in the sense of brutal invasion, ‘but as the overthrow of impious regimes and illegitimate hierarchies, and the “opening” of their people to the new revelation and dispensation’ (Lewis, 1991, p. 93). Thus, while the ‘fall of Basra’, which indicates that Muslims have lost their land is bad news, its ‘opening’ should be good news.

Since Basra is already a Muslim country in this context, ‘opening’ could mean getting it back and releasing it from the grips of a dictator. This also coincides with the ‘just war’ narrative, as will be seen in the next section, which was promoted during the build-up to the war in Iraq and during the war itself. In the just war Western narrative, fighting to ensure democracy and toppling a regime that may kill its own people is justified (Bellamy, 2006; Pezderc, 2010). Of course, a term such as ‘Just War’ can be moulded as it fits by the dominating powers or governments wishing to launch a war. At times of conflict, specifically, if translators might manage to silence their own voice as they translate works of literature, who can silence their conscience when they are with one side or the other? Baker (2005) wonders if translators really bridge gaps between people, promoting love and understanding, or widen the gaps, fuelling hatred and stereotypes, and helping to justify the killing, torturing, and bombing of innocent people:

No one questions whether bridges are always built for the (morally) ‘right’ reasons, nor the fact that just as they might allow us to cross over and make a positive contact with a different culture, they also allow invading troops to cross over and kill, maim, and destroy entire populations (Baker, 2005, p. 9).

Indeed, in a study conducted by Saleh (2017) where he interviewed interpreters of the pro-rebel side in Libya to study their role in creating conflict narratives which paved the way for international intervention. Based on the narrative (discussed in 2.3) and framing theories (discussed in Chapter Three, he created a model based on textual and non-textual framing to collect and analyse the data. Saleh has concluded that ‘ interpreters interviewed influenced the framing of narratives of the Libyan conflict on both of the nontextual and textual levels. The findings allow us to predict the influential roles that are played not only by Libyan interpreters who operated in the Libyan conflict, but also by all war-zone interpreters in general, in framing narratives of conflicts (Saleh, 2017: p.206).

Unfortunately, assuming that translators occupy a neutral position is actually part of the ideology of translation (Bassnett, 1998; Tymoczko, 2003). This ideology has taken the status of a master narrative in translation and forces translators to assume irresponsibility towards the texts they translate (Baker, 2010). Ironically, it has also lured the audience into blindly accepting translations as originals, while oblivious to the manipulation conducted by translators (Alvstad, 2014).

Only in the last ten years, according to Harding and Inghilleri (2010), or in the last two decades considering the time this paper was written, has this complex role of the translator and interpreter been examined by academics in the field, such as Apter (2001, 2006), Tymoczko (2003), Baker (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010), Inghilleri (2008), and Takeda (2008). Not only academics, but also quite a number of translators, have written autobiographies bringing to light first-hand accounts of the complex role of the translator. Fahmy (2004), whose role has just been discussed in this section, is one example among many other accounts that reveal significant divergences in the practices of translators and interpreters in globally significant political contexts and also ‘highlight[s] the ethical dilemmas they experience in responding simultaneously to the demands of employers, codes of ethics, and the real or perceived tensions between translators’ personal/ professional and local/global allegiances’ (Inghilleri & Harding, 2010, p. 166). Interpreters, if local, have always been loathed by the two sides of a conflict. They are often treated with mistrust by the dominant side hiring them and as traitors by their own people (Schäffner, 2012; Stahuljak, 1999).

While financial needs might propel interpreters to stand alongside what might be called *the enemy*, many interpreters do actually try to make *the enemy* hear the voice of their people. It could be their attempt to make amends with their own people themselves or even to redeem the sin of interpreting for the enemy. For example, interpreters who worked for ECMM, the European Commission Monitoring Mission, were trained to interpret neutrally; the mission to monitor the war in Croatia (1991–1992) itself was supposed to be neutral (Stahuljak, 1999). Serving the ECMM, one interpreter, according to Stahuljak, recalls her experience as she translated neutrally, thinking that the transgression of the Serbs should unfold clearly to the monitors even if the Serbs interviewed tried to depict a different story. Also, she tried to make use of conversations in between the assignments to promote her own view of the events to the monitors, her own narrative, but as the war dragged on, it became clear that the monitoring community was unwilling to take action. This was frustrating for the interpreters who could see the ‘absurdity of this situation, in which, in spite of the professed “political neutrality,” not to make a decision is in fact to favour the stronger, the aggressor’ (Stahuljak, 1999, p. 25).

Interestingly, some scholars still believe that ‘the professionalism of the translator requires detachment rather than commitment’ (Pym, 2012, p. 67). Pym uses the translator of ‘pharmaceutical’ information as an example of someone who ‘would certainly have to trust in the validity claims of the source text, but that trust would be essentially the same as any user of the actual pharmaceutical products’ (p. 67). According to Pym (2012), the translator is only responsible if he misrepresents the source text, and as Baker (2009) insists that she would not translate for the CIA or Israel, Pym thinks ‘her position is as confused as it is honourable’. Pym emphasises that the relationship between the translator and his/her *clients* should be of mutual trust regardless of the message being translated (p. 8).

In the opinion of Pym, if you want to understand your enemy, you need to have a dialogue with them, which can only be done through translators. Pym’s argument here is rather fallible. There cannot be a comparison between translating pharmaceutical material and translation during conflict. When translating pharmaceutical material, the translator does not have pharmaceutical knowledge to judge those texts, and he/she has no choice but to trust the companies producing these medicines, exactly as patients do when given prescriptions by their doctors, but translation at times of conflict is a very serious issue. In other words,

ideology is absent in the former situation but strikingly present in the latter. One can see that the Iraq war propaganda was made more successful through translation (Fahmy, 2004; Inghilleri, 2010). Translators who translated for the ECMM in Croatia hoped that by translating what the Serbs said, their fallacy will be exposed to the monitors, but whether the monitors could really see through that or not, no action was to be taken. That is because the instruction for that mission was to pose as neutral, and hiring Croatian translators was just part of the show (Stahuljak, 1999). Why should translators be put in a sinkhole? Why should they be deprived of their feelings and humanity?

Now, many translation scholars, including Baker (2005, 2006, 2009, 2013), Tymoczko (2003, 2006), Schäffner (1997, 2004, 2014), and Inghilleri (2009, 2010, 2012) believe that translators are responsible for the narratives they promote. Baker (2005, 2006) further believes that translators should reject jobs that promote narratives that go against their moral and political stance. Othman, like Fahmy (2004), was an interpreter in Iraq much respected by the US military for his reliability and alleged neutrality (Inghilleri 2010), but the fact remains that many of those interpreters and translators were responsible for promoting the war on Iraq; ‘claims about their neutrality do not relieve him [them] of the moral obligation to consider the consequences of his [their] role’ (Inghilleri, 2010, p. 191). On the other hand, and positively, as translators may promote dominant ideologies and narratives, they can also resist them (Narinjan, 1992; Tymockzo, 2003, 2006; Baker, 2005, 2006, 2009). Since we have mentioned narratives here, it is now timely to discuss what is meant by narratives from a social perspective in the next section.

2.3 Social narrative theory and translation

Narrative is a term that has been recently considered in translation studies. Many scholars have discussed and applied the linguistic narrative theory in translation, such as Bosseaux (2004a, 2004b) and Leone (2011) who focused on linguistic aspects of narrative such as focalisation. While narration is the telling of a story to a certain audience, focalisation, a term first coined by Bal (1985), is the limited submission of information through a ‘perspective filter’ (Jahn, 2007, p. 94), or a point of view (Chatman, 1978). Furthermore, focalisation studies assume that no speaker or writer can ever tell the whole truth. Speakers and writers choose carefully what to say and what not to say in relation to a specific perspective (Bal, 1985, 2009; Fludernik, 2009; Jahn, 2007).

However, there was a further development in the study of translation when Mona Baker (2005, 2006) differentiated between narrative as a term used by the linguistic and literary approaches and narrative in the context of sociological approaches. Discussing the definition of narrative in linguistic and literary approaches, which see narrative as one genre or mode of communication, Baker points out three major differences between these linguistic approaches and the sociological approach. In the sociological approach, narrative is not an optional mode of communication but it cuts across all genres of communication. It does not limit its scope to the oral mode of communication, and, totally unlike linguistic and literary approaches, does not focus on the structural make-up of discourse (Baker, 2005, 2006).

Interest was generally growing in identity politics and narrative theory fields; Margaret Somers (1994) states that these are important developments but have limitations as ‘they stand’ (p. 605). One shortcoming of identity studies, identified by Somers, was their tendency to put people into categories such as race, gender, or ethnicity, and then assign specific attributes to each of these categories. A black law professor, for instance, criticising this rigid categorisation, noted that her being black was not the only thing that identified who she was, but also her gender and her ‘ecology, pacifism, [and] my peculiar brand of colloquial English’ (cited in Somers, 1994, pp. 605–606). In order to soften these rigid categories, Somers proposed destabilising them by relating them to aspects of relationality, time, and space, i.e. by integrating the narrative theory into the politics of identity, creating what Somers calls *the narrative identity*.

This kind of integration was not an easy task as humanists held the belief that narrative was no more than a storytelling representational mode while, in the meantime, researchers of other disciplines such as psychologists, anthropologists, and social workers were already modifying the theory and reconceptualising it to fit wider purposes (Somers, 1994). Somers believes that by focusing on the ontological aspect of narrative, rather than on its representational mode, we will be able to integrate historical and relational elements into the theory and thus avoid categorising people, because what makes a person is a network of interconnected factors that may change through time and space.

Thus, narrativity is defined as ‘concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. These concepts posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make

sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities' (Somers, 1994, p. 606).

One of the aspects of many new works of narrative studies is, however, especially relevant to the increasing sociological attention to identity formation. This is a shift from focus on representational to ontological narrativity. Before this shift, philosophers of history had argued that narrative modes of representing knowledge (telling historical stories) were representational forms imposed by historians on the chaos of lived experience...Social life is stories...[and] narratives is an ontological condition of social life (Somers, 1994, pp. 613–614).

This means that people do not construct their identities solely in relation to how they can be categorised, but it is stories in which events are emplotted that guide people's actions. Also, people understand the world and their place in it only through the narratives available to them. People keep constructing and reconstructing their identities in relation to their memories of previous happenings, their expectations, and projections, all brought in through 'available social, public, and cultural narratives' (Somers, 1994, p. 614).

2.3.1 Four dimensions of narrativity

Somers also proposes four dimensions of narrativity, the first of which is ontological narratives, which are the personal stories guiding how we place ourselves in the world, how we act, and, as a result, how we produce new narratives. Baker defines narratives as 'public and personal stories that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are the stories that we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world in which we live' (Baker, 2006a, p. 19). It goes without saying that ontological narratives (personal narratives) are not constructed in isolation but in relation to the available *public narratives*, which are larger than the individual. Examples of public narratives are family narratives, institutional narratives, such as the church or the mosque, and governmental narratives. Thus, a theological explanation of the roots and effects of poverty can be given by religious institutions, but economic or political justifications are provided by the government. Because ontological narratives are not independent of the public narratives circulated in a society, asylum seekers, for instance, might fail in presenting their personal narratives in a way fathomable to the receiving culture unless interpreters come to their rescue (Baker, 2006b).

Indeed, Inghilleri (2012) has observed that interpreters improve on asylum seekers' narratives to make them fit the assumptions of the receiving culture.

A third type of narrative, Somers (1994) indicates, is conceptual narratives, which are the concepts that social scientists construct. Social scientists need to formulate concepts that grasp the narrativity along with its agency, the identities it creates, and the social action that would take place. Personal and public together may lead to the creation of *meta* or *master narratives*. These are the narratives:

in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and as social scientists. Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these master narratives – Progress, Decadence, Industrialisation, Enlightenment, etc. - even though they usually operate at a pre-suppositional level of social-science epistemology or beyond our awareness. These narratives can be the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society, Barbarism/ Nature vs. Civility (Somers, 1994, p. 619).

Paradoxically, meta-narratives, despite exhibiting basic features of narrativity that I will detail in section 2.3.2 such as temporality and causal emplotment, are made of abstracts and 'miss the crucial element of conceptual narrativity' (Somers, 1994, p. 620). As a result, they can be denarrativised. For example, at the time of the First World War, *patriotism* was a meta-narrative elaborated by priests who told the youth that it was sweet and heroic to die for one's country. 'Christian ministers preached patriotism to such an extent that a February 1918 editorial in the *Santa Cruz Evening News* praised clergy for their war work: the saving of individual souls seems to have lost its importance as a church function in view of the larger duty of helping to preserve the soul of the nation' (Brown, 2015, p. 12). Resisting the meta-narrative of patriotism promoted by the church and the media, Wilfred Owen wrote his marvellous poem *Dolce Decorum Est*. (1917) after joining the army; young Owen was dismayed by the grim reality of war and, in the poem, he described young soldiers with a vivid imagery, creating a picture of war opposite to that purported by the priests and even the newspapers at the time. The soldiers did not stand tall but were 'bent double', 'like beggars'; when one soldier, who could not put on his mask in time, died of poisonous gas that burned him from the inside, he was thrown carelessly into the wagon with no respect for his dignity, heroic deeds, or patriotism towards his country. Owen urged his readers to envision that horrible moment, which kept haunting him even in his sleep at night. He finished his poem by

asking the priests and elders not to tell the young that it was sweet and honourable to die for one's country because, in reality, it was neither sweet nor honourable.

By writing that poem, Owen contested the public narratives of his time. Translators can also, Baker (2006) asserts, either subscribe to public narratives or contest them. See, for example, narratives of the Russian-Chechen conflict. Russian public narratives proclaim that terrorism is the root of the conflict, whereas Chechen narratives that are translated into several languages try to show the world in a different picture – that it was Russian aggression that initiated the conflict with peaceful people (Harding, 2004, 2012). Moreover, as mentioned earlier in section 2.2, translators have the choice to accept translating a narrative or rejecting it altogether if it goes against their beliefs or ideologies. Actually, translators and interpreters have power beyond that. They can ‘in collaboration with publishers, editors, and other agents involved in the interaction – accentuate, undermine, or modify aspects of the narrative(s) encoded in the source text or utterance’ (Baker, 2006a, p. 135).

2.3.2 Features of narrativity

‘As studies of the politics of identity tend to rigidify aspects of identity formation, this can be avoided by incorporating dimensions of time, space, and relationality’ (Somers 1994, p. 606). The four features of narrativity identified by Somers (1994) are relationality of parts, causal emplotment, selective appropriation, and temporality, sequence, and place, which means that events are only considered in embeddedness in a certain time or space and through causal emplotment that ties these events together and gives them their meaning. In the following sub-sections, I will discuss temporality, causal emplotment, and selective appropriation, features I have found more suitable to the context of news translation.

2.3.2.1 Temporality

Temporality refers to the sequence of events presented via any medium regardless of their chronological order, but it is the way that events are ordered temporally or spatially that give them meaning. In memoirs, for instance, people do not usually follow a chronological order, but ‘a combination of both thematic and chronological order... Translators responsible for the 1969 version of Milan Kundera’s *The Joke* cut, paste, and reordered the chapters to make them fit into a strict chronological order’ (Kuhiwczak, 1990 cited in Baker, 2006a, pp. 51–52).

In 2004, members of the ‘Grassroot Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign’ posed as indigenous Americans. By placing their trauma temporally along with the history of indigenous Americans, they voiced the message that they would not accept having their culture dissolved as the indigenous had. Also, it was an indication that the United States was as responsible for the Palestinian conflict as it was for indigenous suffering (Baker, 2006a).

Shepard, in his translation of Sayyid Qutb’s *Social Justice of Islam*, also provides another example of temporality at work in translation. In the introduction to his translation, he discusses the resurgence of Islam in the 1970s and relates it to an earlier resurgence in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus, Shepard intertwines both unrelated events with Qutb’s ideology ‘guiding the readers’ understanding of the text and framing the character of Qutb within historical events’ (Elgindy, 2013).

2.3.2.2 Causal emplotment

‘Causal emplotment is what helps readers make sense of the selected events and voices. It is emplotment that translates events into episodes’ (Somers, 1994, p. 616). Indeed, Somers (1994) believes that causal emplotment is the most important feature of narrativity because it provides explanation, however implicit, of how events are related. It is through causal emplotment that events are given their significance, not how these events happen chronologically, nor how they can be categorised.

Fairclough (1995) also refers to emplotment as he discussed the sociological intertextual analysis of texts. Despite relying basically on the linguistic aspect of texts, he finds what is left implicit in the text, *the presupposed*, to be very important and critical to the reader’s understanding of the text. ‘The unsaid, the already said, the presupposed, is of particular importance in ideological analysis, in that ideologies are generally embedded within the implicit meaning of a text rather than being explicit’ (Fairclough, 1989, Chapter 4 cited in Fairclough, 1995, p.108). Hart (1992, p. 634) also expresses similar views: ‘Attempting to make sense of the message behind subjects’ words in the search for operative social patterns amounts to an exercise in interpretation.’

Moreover, causal emplotment ‘allows [us] to weight and explain events rather than simply list them’ (Baker, 2006a, p. 67). For example, people might relate the same set of events but

disagree on their interpretation. Boys throwing stones at Israeli soldiers might be presented as angry and violent youths by some news media or organisations supportive of Israel, but as legitimate acts of resistance by pro-Palestinian organisations. Thus, causal emplotment is the filter through which events are narrated, however foregrounded or backgrounded these events are in the text. Moreover, causal emplotment, as it seems to me, is very much related to temporality, the ordering of events. We might seek further guidance here from linguistic narrative theory, particularly Bal's principle of ordering (2009), which is 'the presentation of events in an order different from their chronological order' (p. 76). According to Bal, there are 'internal retroversions' in which the narrator goes back to earlier events of the same story and 'external retroversions' in which the current events are related to others that span from a few days earlier to years before.

This reordering of events has an effect on the story created and on the reader's understanding of the events. 'External retroversions generally provide indications about the antecedents, the past of the actors concerned, in so far as the past can be relevant to the interpretation of events. This, incidentally, demonstrates the potentially political importance of such narratological aspect' (Bal, 2009, p. 89). Sue Ann Harding (2012) examined websites covering the Beslan hostage-taking attack in Russia in 2004 when 'an armed group seized and held captive over a thousand people', including children, for three days, resulting in the death of more than three hundred people.

Harding has attempted to analyse the coverage of the Beslan events on three Russian websites: RIA-Novosti, Kavkazcenter, and Caucasian Knot. The websites examined contained examples of how external retroversions (going back to previous events to make them in one frame with the current) were used to create the story. Taking RIVA-Novosti as an example, the Russian texts included only five external retroversions spanning from twelve hours to ninety-nine years, bringing to mind previous hostage takings and a history of war in Chechnya, to frame 'the event as another terrorist attack' (Harding, 2012, p. 297). In the English texts, fifteen retroversions are included, bringing to mind terrorist attacks on Moscow and justifying, to the world, Russia's war on terror. These attacks, not mentioned in Russian texts, according to Harding (2012) could make the Russians feel that their government was weak rather than serving to justify its actions. Thus, details are usually added that may look

irrelevant functionally, but this ‘overcompleteness ...is relevant with a more general negative portrayal of a person or a group’ (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 185).

Causal emplotment has always been used by politicians to justify their actions. A democratic country like the USA created an interrogation camp at Guantanamo Bay where people were tortured, beaten, raped, and placed in inhumane conditions. This was allowed under the narrative that those people were terrorists and that it was all right to use every possible means to get information from them, to prevent catastrophic events from happening (Inghilleri, 2008).

2.3.2.3 Selective appropriation

Selective appropriation is another feature that Somers finds of utmost importance, for it is this ‘selective criteria’, in which a distinction is ‘qualitatively and lexically’ made among a set of events, characters, and social experiences, that thematically connect events and, thus, affects how a whole set of events are ordered and prioritised. As a result, each narrative has a general theme that affects its whole structure, like ‘husbands as breadwinners’ and ‘women must be independent above all’ (Somers, 1994, p. 617). Fairclough (1995) also sees selectivity to be very critical in the understanding of texts. ‘Before engaging in an analysis of what is in the text, however, one needs to attend to the question of what is excluded from it’ (p. 105).

The weighting of events via causal emplotment can be achieved through other narrative features such as relativity, temporality, and selective appropriation. Somers (1992) describes the importance of this evaluative criteria of narratives in which an array of overlapping events might be included or excluded. This selective criteria is basically thematic, but it also has to do with our embeddedness in time or place or in other meta-narratives (Baker, 2006a). A good use of selectivity, for instance, is what Calhoun (2007) refers as ‘selective memory, whereby all of the good accomplished by the US government is taken to constitute the essence of ‘Our Good Nation’, magically rendering its people good by extension, completely neglects the many horrendous consequences of US military intervention, both during and after World War II, and forms the nucleus of what is essentially a jingoistic worldview’ (p. 240).

The 1940s film series, *Why We Fight*, produced by the US War Department also serves as another example of selectivity to promote the desired narrative. It gave a historical portrayal of how Hitler rose to power. Hitler's rise to power was not portrayed as being due to personal characteristics but to the fact that he was the logical ruler of the aggressive barbaric Germans, as they were depicted in the film series. Thus, a whole group of people were demonised (Calhoun, 2007). The US learnt neither love nor compassion from the holocaust, according to Calhoun, but war propaganda from the Nazi Germans by demonising people and thus 'the slaughters at My Lai and Fallujah, or the torture at Abu Ghraib and Guanta'namo Bay' in this 'We Are Good; They Are Evil' assembled narrative became quite justifiable (p. 240). Selective appropriation has also to do with who is allowed to speak. Ironically, allowing more people to speak and be represented, while at the same time limiting or framing their contribution, would enhance 'the truthfulness of events' reported as long as 'those who are ideologically close will be given primary attention as possible sources of opinions'(Van Dijk, 1988, p. 85).

Selective appropriation is also central to the translational activity as 'translation, thus, is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection', (Wolf, 2012, p. 131). Whitaker (2002), in an article in the Guardian, describes receiving 'small gifts from a generous Institute in the United States providing "high quality" translations from Arabic newspaper articles'. That institute is the Middle East Media Research Institute, Memri, established by Yigal Cameron, a colonel who spent 22 years of his life in the Israel military. What makes Whitaker feel uneasy about this organisation is its selective criteria. The chosen articles either paint a dark picture of the Arabs or promote Israeli political agenda. Whitaker points out a significant example where a story, published in a Jordanian newspaper, of the 'dissenters' in Iraq having their ears cut by Saddam Hussein, was further translated and circulated by Memri. The Iraqi man who told this story, Adil Awadh, was a member of an Iraqi opposition group supported by the US. He was, along with six other Iraqis, arrested in the US on suspicion of being terrorists or belonging to the Iraqi intelligence. His story was accepted without any attempt to fact check or think of possible motives. As the story could be true, Whitaker wonders if Awadh could have fabricated it to appeal to the US government and be granted asylum? That was, however, a 'tale about Iraqi brutality that newspapers would happily reprint without checking' (Whitaker, 2002).

In my opinion, taking the allegations of individuals as absolute truth without fact checking is very common in Western media if these tales or allegations support the newspaper's ideology or agenda. Iraq could not have been invaded in 2003 without being demonised first, in order to justify the War on Iraq within a Just War narrative frame or a Liberation narrative frame. Thus, any tale from Iraqis about their miserable lives would be welcome. This is another example of how translation plays a very important role in war propaganda and how translators are responsible for the translated material they produce. Similarly, through translation, Memri sustains stereotypical images of Arabs as psychopaths, violent, and backward, and with whom there is little hope for peace, justifying in the end Israel's aggression against the Palestinians, or the war on Iraq in 2003, just to name a few (Baker, 2006a). That is, however, what is to be expected of an organisation established by an Israeli who would make translations that further support Israeli narratives.

Translators can also resist and promote alternative narratives. They have to collaborate and do the translations that depict a different narrative. Whitaker, in his article criticising Memri, indicated that language might stand between Arabs and Western people and as Memri exploited this by promoting negative narratives about the Arabs, they can do the same. 'Arab media companies could get together and publish translations of articles that more accurately reflect the content of their newspapers' (Whitaker, 2002). Responding to Whitaker's suggestion, a year later, Arabs Against Discrimination was established. 'This organisation relies too heavily on translation to promote counter- narratives of what they believe Arabs stand for' (Baker, 2006a, p. 76).

It is important to note here that selective appropriation is not only related to the selection of texts, but also to what to include or exclude from the text. In the RIVA-Novosti covering of the Beslan hostage taking, investigated by Harding (2012), as I have already mentioned in section 2.3.2.1, five other incidents in the past were juxtaposed with the main story of hostage-taking attacks, portraying the Beslan hostage takings as another terrorist attack on Russians by the Chechen extremists. Actually, all three newspapers utilised this internal selective appropriation, adding and omitting to promote their own narratives. What was also interesting, during this selective process, was that little attention was actually given to the core event, the Beslan hostage taking.

2.4 Resisting dominant narratives

As I mentioned in 2.3.1, dominating narratives can be resisted and challenged. In retaliation to the weapons of mass destruction narrative that prevailed at the time of the British/American invasion of Iraq, Sheldon (2003) created a parody title for his book *Weapons of Mass Deception: the Uses of Propaganda on Bush's War on Iraq*, in which he discussed how there was no evidence that Hussein's regime had any *weapons of mass destruction*, nor there was evidence to sustain the claim that Saddam Hussein imposed a threat to US security.

Also, Emmanuel Ortiz, a Chicano/Puerto Rican/Irish-American activist and poet, wrote a poem in response to a white boy who told him to go back to Baghdad, describing the boy's words as *misguided missiles* that burnt innocent *brown bodies*:

I swear I was gonna write a poem about that white boy
About how his words were acts of errorism
Misguided missiles
Missing their marks
Leaving brown bodies burning
Turning soccer fields into battlefields
Turning mosques and marketplaces into burial grounds
I wanted to write that poem (Ortiz, 2004)

You may notice even the significant coinage of the word *errorism*, indicating that the whole *War on Terrorism* narrative is itself a grave error that misses the mark and causes destruction in the world. He even asks the boy to go back inside the CNN studio where he was fed all of this *War on Terror* narrative.

I wanted to tell that white boy off

In a poem

That said
Go back to Nazi Germany
Go back to Imperialist Britain
Go back to Hollywood
Go back to the Oval Office
Go back across the Mason-Dixie line
Go back to Oklahoma City
Go back to Jasper, Texas
Go back to the suburbs
Go back into every red-white and blue-blooded American home
Crawl back inside the weapon of mass *distraction*
That is the centrepiece of your living room
Back into the studios of CNN (Ortiz, 2004, emphasis added)

That said that activists and translators can also resist by repeatedly elaborating their counter narratives through different media. Launching websites, organising speeches, and demonstrations, and making their own coverage of war and conflict, these are just examples of what translators and activists can do. The 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre are repetitively portrayed as a significant day in the history of the US, where its values were attacked, and its people traumatised. These attacks were used to justify invading other nations to protect these values, but many authors chose to focus, instead, on the trauma of the Iraqis after the US invasion. For example, Thomas Hirschhorn (2007) created an eighteen-metre-long art collage, named The Incommensurable Banner, of the ‘photographs of mutilated bodies of Iraqi civilians’. German Gerhard Richter (2004), in his *War Cut*, placed photos from two days of reportage on the war in Iraq ‘alongside slices of his resolutely antirepresentational abstract paintings’ (Luckhurst, 2012, pp. 714–715), and in *the Valley of Elah* (2007), a film produced by Paul Haggis, a father is enraged when he learns how his son, a soldier who spent a year in Iraq, abused and murdered Iraqi prisoners, and he turns the American flag upside down (Luckhurst, 2012, p. 718).

Since political ideologies are, of course, characterized by systems of frames, ideological language will activate that ideological system. Since the synapses in neural circuits are made stronger the more they are activated, the repetition of ideological language will strengthen the circuits for that ideology in a hearer’s brain. And since language that is repeated very often becomes ‘normally used’ language, ideological language repeated often enough can become ‘normal language’ but still activate that ideology unconsciously in the brains of citizens*and journalists (Lakoff, 2010, p. 72)

Translators have also been vital in the creating of resisting narratives. Mosireen, for instance, a revolutionary activist group in Egypt, collaborated with film makers to produce films

anonymously for the group. Eleven documentaries produced by Mortada (2016) and other volunteers specifically utilised the aspect of particularity by depicting the lives of eleven Egyptian women who had participated in the making of the Egyptian Revolution and who spoke and described their contribution to it. Edited versions of these documentaries were made available to the public through the Mosireen YouTube channel. Getting people to see those women at a closer, more personal level, may guarantee more support for the Revolution by everyday people, or in this case women, but there comes the need to share these documentaries with the world.

Mortada states that his purpose was to ensure that women's roles would not slip out of the history of the revolution and that they should be connected to other rebel women across the globe. Surely, this particularisation of women's stories could help the world to see more into the revolution and empathise with its everyday people, and here came the need for subtitlers who could help the world understand and identify with these women. However, subtitlers should not only translate spoken words as they are but also make use of narrative features, to help those viewers who may not be familiar with the Egyptian context to see similarities between the Egyptian Revolutionaries and other revolutionaries they may celebrate. Also, subtitlers might need to use selective appropriation in which they remove some aspects of the narrative beyond the comprehension of foreign viewers and fill in gaps of background knowledge that the speakers may suppose they share with their local audience.

Mortada's Herstory documentaries were first translated into English and then from English into other languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish. El-Tarz (2016) and Mortada (2016), however, lament the fact that subtitlers did not participate in the process of film production, which made the task of reframing more difficult. They both assume that if translators had participated early on in the process of editing the videos, they could have produced better versions in different languages that better reached the hearts and minds of the target audience. 'After all, for the majority of viewers, who do not speak the interviewee's language and are not familiar with cultural codes and references she deploys in telling her story, the subtitles are the only way into her world. They therefore cannot be divorced from the film making process nor, indeed, from the political project as such' (Mortada, 2016, p. 135).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the expansion of translation studies has been discussed as it has gone beyond studying translation as a linguistic transfer into investigating other aspects related to translation and the translator, including ideology (Bassnett, 1998; Lefevere, 1992; Van Dijk, 2011). Translation was also studied from a sociological point of view, applying Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field (Elgindy 2013; Hermans, 1996, 1999; Inghilleri, 2012; Simeoni, 1998; Somers, 1992; Somers & Gibson, 1994), first adopted in translation by Mona Baker (2005, 2006). Baker's approach, specifically to translation, has been political as she was concerned with translation at times and places of conflict. Many other scholars have also focused on political translation and highlighted the responsibility of the translator (Bánhegyi, 2014; Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Schäffner, 1998; Tang, 2007).

Specifically, this chapter focused on the social narrative theory and elaborated on the dimensions of narrativity, which were ontological, public, conceptual, and meta-narratives, and also on three features of narrativity deemed by the researcher to be more suitable to the news context. These features were temporality, causal emplotment, and selective appropriation.

Translators and activists do not have to surrender to public and meta-narratives created by the media. In the same way that media can exploit features of narrativity to create their public and meta-narratives, both activists and translators can also benefit from these features in creating resisting narratives.

Chapter 3: Framing of Media Narratives

3.1 Relationship between narrative theory and framing

Among the first to put forth the concept of framing was Erving Goffman (1974), who posited that people interpret what is going on in their world through their primary framework. According to Goffman, there are two primary frameworks: natural frameworks in which physical incidents are interpreted naturally without being affected by the social circumstances and social frameworks, which are the outcome of social interactions between people. Both frameworks help people interpret and communicate data. Goffman's work was heavily criticised; Craib (1978) described it as repetitive and difficult to understand. Scheff (2005) thought that Goffman's framing theory was casual and vague. Nonetheless, Goffman was often cited; he incited others to further investigate frames. For example, Tannen and Wallat (1993) emphasised the passive aspect of framing following Goffman's lead. Also, Lakoff (2010) pointed out that 'One of the major results of cognitive and brain sciences is that we think in terms of typically unconscious structures called "frames". Frames include semantic roles, relation between roles and relation to other frames' (p.71).

In contrast to the notion of framing as a passive attempt to make sense of one's surroundings, Entman (1993, 2004) defines framing as 'culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation' (cited in Entman, 2007, p. 173). This activity of collecting and bringing together different pieces of information, according to Entman, defines problems, identifies their causes, passes judgements, and offers solutions. Baker (2007) also defines framing as 'an active process of signification' (p. 156). According to her, framing is 'understandings' that emerge out of an interaction, or actively, as deliberate, discursive moves designed to anticipate and guide others' interpretation of attitudes towards a set of events' (p. 156).

One might wonder whether there is a relationship between narrative theory and framing or if they are two different titles for the same theory. Indeed, there is a strong relationship between the two and the functions highlighted by Entman (1993, 2004,) are also narrative functions. Look, also, at how Gamson and Modigliani (1989) defined a frame as 'the central organising idea' in a structural package 'for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue...In effect, they[packages] contain a story line' (pp. 3-4). In this sense, all of the

narrative features discussed in this chapter are actually framing features since they resonate within certain story lines, but framing in this chapter refers to elements that surround the text and guide our interpretation of it. These frames might highlight the same narrative of the text it surrounds or even serve to undermine it without the need to change any aspect of the narrative from within the text.

During an interview with Andrew Chesterman, a translation scholar at the University of Helsinki at the time of the interview, Baker (2008) points out that framing and narrative are two distinct theories but framing is a useful tool for demonstrating how ‘the same narrative might be framed differently by different narrators’ (p. 23). Also, Baker states that ‘frames can double up as narratives themselves’ (p. 23). For instance, cover pictures of books may frame a book as well as promote certain narratives.

In the cover of Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, for instance, Baker (2007) draws attention to the cover image where there is a grey cross at the top, a grey crescent at the bottom, and a red star in the middle. This red star also splits the title into two parts, *The Clash of Civilizations*, and *The Remaking of World Order* (1996). ‘The most obvious interpretation of the red star,’ Baker says, ‘is communism’ (p.23). The cover can work as a frame for it prepares the reader to understand that Islam is the new threat before even embarking on reading it, and it can also work as a narrative because it summarises the main narrative idea of the book in a picture, which depicts Islam as the new danger threatening Western democracies.

I may stress here again that all features of narrativity can be considered as a kind of framing as they do not only create different narratives but also shape our understanding of those same narratives they create. In actual fact, in order for the features of narrativity ‘to become operative, and for a set of events to be constituted as narrative with a specific pattern of causal employment,’ surrounding frames play a vital and active role in setting the directions within which narratives are to be interpreted (Baker, 2007, p. 155).

Furthermore, since narratives are ‘the stories that we subscribe to’ (Baker, 2007, p. 155) and those in which we strongly believe, they affect how we perceive people during events. Some narratives can be dominant or meta-narratives, such as ‘the War on Terror’ in which the

world is divided into two poles, the evil backward East and the kind modern West. Narratives are promoted or challenged through framing. Indeed, framing and reframing dominant narratives are ‘a part and parcel’ of activism as they involve ‘setting up structures of anticipation that guide others’ interpretation of events, usually as a direct challenge to dominant interpretations of the same events in a given society’ (Baker, 2007, p. 156).

3.2 Framing, translators and activism

Translators can also challenge or support dominant narratives by exploiting features of narrativity and through framing or *reframing* like activists, by using a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies that guide their readers’ interpretation of the texts they translate, in order to raise and retain a community of supporters, and to resist or accentuate a dominant narrative. These strategies include paratextual elements such as introductions, footnotes, cover pages, and blurbs in books (Baker, 2006a, 2007, 2010; Harvey, 2003;), headlines and visual imagery on websites and news coverage (Baker, 2007, 2010; Parry, 2011; Van Dijk, 1993) or deixis, tense shifts, and code switching (Baker, 2010; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Any choice that is made by translators as they manoeuvre their way through the translation has to affect the narrative produced and support one narrative over another. For example, in translating events that occurred in 1956 in the Middle East, Baker (2007) indicates that the translator is faced with two choices that have nothing to do with language. Those events might be translated as *The Suez Canal Crisis*, coinciding with the Western narrative of three powers: Britain, France, and Israel. Here it is viewed as a political crisis, not as an invasion. Alternatively, the translator might opt for the *Tripartite Aggression*, subscribing to the Middle Eastern narrative of an aggressive unjustified invasion by three Western powers. Whatever the choice, the translator would have already set the road for the reader. Even if the ‘The Suez Canal Crisis’ is translated as such into Arabic, for example, this narrative can still be challenged and reframed ‘at a variety of points or sites in or around the text’ (Baker, 2007, p. 157) through the framing strategies just mentioned in the previous paragraph.

3.3 Key framing strategies for translators

In order to frame narratives in translation, Baker (2006) focuses on four key strategies, two of which are narrative features and two of which are rather linguistic. These features are temporal and spatial framing, selective appropriation, labelling, and repositioning of participants. Indeed, many neoconservative organisations try to provide as many accurate translations as possible ‘since their credibility can easily be undermined if their opponents were to identify and publicize a list of errors in these translations’ (Baker, 2007, p. 159). However, through framing, they impose their own views and guide readers towards certain interpretations of these texts. Now, we will move on to discuss these four features of framing often used by translators. However, in order not to further blur the lines between the narrative theory and framing, I will stick to framing as the elements surrounding the texts, the *frame of the picture*.

3.3.1 Temporal and spatial framing

Temporal and spatial framing ‘involves selecting a particular text and embedding it in a temporal and spatial context that accentuates the narrative it depicts and encourages us to establish links between it and current narratives that touch our lives’ (Baker, 2006a, p. 112). For instance, in 2011, the time of the rise of the recent Egyptian Revolution, Sinan Antoon, an Iraqi poet and translator, translated a poem composed in 1971 by Nijm, a revolutionary Egyptian poet who always wrote in the Egyptian vernacular and died in 2013, in an act of ‘redeployment of the symbols of revolution from An Arab Archive’ (Abdel Nasser, 2016, p. 112).

‘The Script is my script’

This script is my script
These words are mine
O my eyes
Cover the pages with tears
The olive shore is mine
The land is Arab (Antoon, 2011)

To the side of the poem, you can see the picture of Fouad Nijm wearing a Palestinian Kufiyah, invoking in the mind of the readers the Palestinian resistance against Israel and

situating the Egyptian Revolution in the same light as a kind of people's resistance against corruption and dictatorship. Other instances of temporal and spatial framing on websites, are annotated links to videos or other related links that enhance or compliment the same narrative in the source text. Baker (2007, 2010) notes that, in Memri, each English translation of an Arabic newspaper article was combined with an annotated video clip that 'acts as a further framing device, encouraging the reader to interpret even the most reasonable of Arabic discourse as one that hides an extremist subtext' (Baker , 2007, p. 160).

3.3.2 Framing by selective appropriation

Here, Baker focuses on selective appropriation *within the text* when translators add to, omit, or self-censor parts of the source text that can accentuate a certain narrative. It could also mean retaining aspects of the narrative (that are censored in the source text) in the translation. Selection, as a primary framing technique, has been discussed by many scholars. Entman (1993), for example, defined framing as essentially involving '*selection and salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or recommended treatment*' (p. 52, emphasised original).

In translation, selectivity is initiated by which texts are chosen for translation and which are neglected. Memri and Watching America, for instance, frame the Muslim and Arab world as dangerous, aggressive, and anti-Semitic by choosing texts that could be interpreted this way.

I say *could be interpreted* because other framing elements will be used to ensure the reader interprets them as such. Also, in order to claim objectivity, Memri translates for 'reformist' authors calling for human and women's rights in the Arab world, and Iran further cultivates the narrative that those moderate people are rare in an extremist world (Baker, 2007, p. 158).

According to Baker (2006a), both Memri and Watching America produce translations that are as accurate as possible, to ensure they are not targeted because of translational errors, but many translators find ways to guide their readers from outside the text. Translators usually change titles and photos (which is specifically true for news translation), or add photos and captions to frame translated texts. Although Baker (2006) discusses selective appropriation more in the sense of Van Dijk and Fairclough as a framing technique, looking at the macro

level of selectivity to work hand-in-hand with its micro level, as I have explained earlier, is more practical.

Actually, all features of narrativity are framing as they shape our understanding of the text. Moreover, I do not find it practical to single out an aspect of the feature and discuss it somewhere else, so for my own purposes, as you will see in my narrative features diagram, *selective appropriation* is one thing.

3.3.3 Framing by labelling

Framing by labelling means ‘any discursive process that involves using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, group, even, or any key element in the narrative’ (Baker, 2006a, p. 155). These labels have an effect on the audience’s perception of certain narratives. This explains why euphemisms are often used in political discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993).

‘Neighbourhoods’ in occupied Palestine is a euphemism for ‘colonial settlements’. Thus, especially during conflicts, labelling is extremely important as there is always a need for both sides of the conflict to legitimise their actions. In the Western world, specifically, where values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights prevail in discourse, it is critical to shape any action of war that puts innocent people’s lives at risk within these apparently benevolent frames. *Humanitarian intervention* has never been used but at times of war. ‘Every use of military force is described as humanitarian intervention’ (Chomsky, 2001, p. 147). Also, agents of the FBI’s counterintelligence programmes (COINTELPROs) ‘avoided organisational sanctions by using personal characteristics of targets to justify counterintelligence actions, particularly in the absence of disruptive political activities by otherwise “worthy” targets’ (Cunningham & Browning, 2004, p. 347). These labels ensure the creation of deviant narratives, i.e. threats that need to be targeted. Thus, wars are often referred to as operations, such as ‘Operation Just Cause’, ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ and ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’. These code names refer to US wars in Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq, respectively (Rampton & Stauber, 2003). Snow et al. describe this same process as ‘frame transformation’ (Snow et al., 1986, p. 473), which, in effect, frames the much-despised war into a rather positive framing. Similar to codes, headlines in the news are very

effective (Van Dijk, 1993). 'Framing works to shape and alter audience members' interpretations and preferences through priming' (Entman, 2007, p. 173). Headlines affect priming by choosing to foreground certain aspects of the narrative. In the context of websites and news coverage, head titles, photos (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993) and their captions (Parry, 2011) are very effective labelling packages that summarise the narrative of whole texts, or shape people's understanding of them. It is also very important to note that many people suffice themselves with reading head titles and looking at photos, and do not read the main text (Van Dijk, 1993), which may depict a different narrative to the labelling package.

Photos are, indeed, very effective for framing. Abraham and Appaiah (2006) found that photos of black people or black and white people along with news of social problems encouraged people to relate these problems to black people, even if the source texts did not indicate people's colour, ethnic, or racial identities in their coverage. 'Implicit racial images of blacks helped prime racial stereotypes about blacks and led to stronger association of blacks with social problems addressed in the stories' (p. 183). This further proves how powerful photos are at framing news stories. They can even be superior to headlines because photos never appear to pass judgement. They rather appear to be snaps of reality, but they do suggest implicit meanings or, as in this case, racial or discriminatory attitudes, which journalists who know too well that because of the emphasis on political correctness in modern societies, they cannot express it explicitly (Van Dijk, 1993).

Interestingly, labelling was one of the strategies used to universalise the holocaust. In order to separate the holocaust drama as 'sacred evil', there came the need to rename it. Concepts like 'mass murder' and 'genocide', despite the atrocity they depict, still normalised the event as something specific that happened in history. 'Holocaust' was an English word that meant 'something wholly burnt up'. However, by the time it was used to refer to Nazi concentration camps in the 1960, it was no longer used in everyday speech and was used as a proper noun (Alexander, 2002, p. 28), which singles the word out as something specific to the Jews and no one else.

In short, labelling refers to naming, counter naming, titles and head titles, photos, and captions. In translation, titles can be changed altogether and photos may even be replaced by others, framing the original text within frames, depicting different narratives. When the Watching America website translated an article from the Jordanian newspaper Alhayat AlJadeeda titled originally ‘Signs on the Road: America and Democracy!!!’, the English title was ‘Oh, America . . . Oh, Empire of Contradictions’ (Baker, 2010, p. 361). The title, together with a summary describing Palestinian people *scratching their heads*, evoked causal emplotment in the sense that they suggested that America is hated not because of its policy but because people in the East cannot comprehend them and they only need to better communicate their policies to the world. Baker (2010) asserts that there was no confusion whatsoever in the original article, as is suggested by the framing. Valdeon (2014) also notes the significance of translation in reframing news not only by selecting and deselecting but also by adapting other key components in news texts such as ‘headlines and quotes’ (p. 58). The War on Terror propaganda (Rampton & Stauber, 2003) or narrative (Baker, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010) was further spread through translation. Memri, for instance:

Memri further strengthens this public narrative by grouping its translations under damning headings. The headings, which act as powerful frames that signal the culpability of the protagonists it depicts as sources of threat, include ‘Antisemitism Documentation Project’, ‘Jihad and Terrorism Studies Project’ and ‘Islamist Websites Monitor Project’. These and similar categories structure the massive archive of translations available on the site.¹³ Their choice and arrangement, like the choice of source and target languages, establish a pattern of relationality in which disparate elements such as Islam, terrorism and antisemitism (the latter a phenomenon traditionally associated with Europe rather than the Muslim World) come to be depicted as closely connected and best understood as aspects of the same phenomenon (Baker, 2010, p. 357).

3.4 Relationship between narrative theory and CDA

Fairclough, a pioneer in critical discourse analysis, has proposed ways to analyse language in the news. According to Fairclough, power in language may not be visible unless a text is closely examined (Fairclough, 1995). However, while discourse is defined as the ‘language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view’, Fairclough’s (p. 56), narrative theory looks at the stories created or recreated and then presented as a stand-alone or assembled along with others to create social meaning from a specific point of view. Narrative theory analyses texts in big blocks related to their meaning, i.e. big semantic units, whereas CDA studies texts more closely, looking at word choice, specific structures, the

‘intertextual connection between words’, and how they convey ideological meanings (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 145). Moreover, CDA looks at concepts similar to narrativity such as levels of abstraction in which the focus is on what information is presented, what is suppressed, what is added, or what is deleted (Fairclough, 2003). This may look similar to selective appropriation, but Fairclough, as other CDA pioneers, would still limit himself to language structure, i.e. for instance, nominalisation or passivity, which hides agency. Thus, the analysis is limited to the context of the situation at hand, i.e. while CDA does consider the broader context of the text, it does not consider the cumulative effects of different texts creating certain themes and narratives.

Moreover, Van Dijk’s description of the inverted pyramid structure of the news in which the most important elements are summarised in the first paragraph, can also be considered spatial placement. Furthermore, I cannot help but see relationality discussed by Baker (2006), who states that certain naming can evoke a lot of other connotations and create connections between unrelated events, as the same labelling feature discussed in CDA. This is because narrative theorists cannot ignore the effect of the linguistic elements, including labelling, scrutinised by CDA scholars, on the narratives of these texts. Furthermore, if CDA looks at how the microstructure affects language meaning, narrative theory looks more at the effect of macro structures of texts and within texts. Comparing the two, Baker (2010) describes CDA as local limited analysis of language, whereas narrative theory allows us to study stretches of texts as complete narrative units that cut across different texts and media and contribute to or elaborate on the creation of public or meta-narratives.

Rather than limiting itself to the local analysis of linguistic or visual material and linking these to the broad notion of ‘discourse’ as ‘social practice determined by social structures’ (Fairclough, 1989/2001, p. 14) or as ‘social construction of reality, a form of knowledge’ (Fairclough, 1995, p. 18), narrative theory assumes that the unit of analysis is ultimately an entire narrative, understood as a concrete story of some aspect of the world, complete with characters, settings, outcomes or projected outcomes and plot. A model of analysis based on this theoretical framework makes it possible to investigate the elaboration of a given narrative in an individual text or event as well as across several texts and events, and across different media (Baker, 2010, p. 249).

In other words, narrative theory looks at techniques beyond the selection of words such as selective appropriation and causal emplotment already discussed here. The implication here is that it is not only the linguistic choices that affect the social meaning of texts; neither does the narrative theory limit itself to studying what stories were chosen, which bits of a story were

made salient, and what was ignored, but it goes further (Van Dijk and Fairclough indeed paid attention to the selectivity within texts). It also studies how stories are put together to create certain narratives, whether across one text or a collection of texts. As Fina and Georgakopoulou, (2012) put it, narrative theory looks at ‘the way stories are put together to construct meanings’ (p. 145).

That said, both theories help analysts understand texts’ orientations and dig out pre-supposed meanings, some of which may not be appropriate or safe to be spoken explicitly. However, authors or journalists, nonetheless, try to reach across to their readers, relying on whatever they are supposed to have as shared background knowledge. No analysis can be comprehensive, and it may not be practical to use both CDA and narrative theory to analyse texts, and, specifically, texts of conflict. However, framing is rather linguistic and, although it contributes to the creation of narratives, is more CDA than it is narrative. Labelling, for instance, was very much discussed by Van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1995), and Machin and Mayr (2012). This includes, in the context of news, headlines that cannot be ignored when analysing social texts because they not only summarise what the text is about, but are the most remembered elements of a news story (Van Dijk, 1993).

All in all, there is no denying that there is some criss-crossing between the two and that the narrative theory can surely benefit from more focus on language, not in the manner of CDA, but by looking into the most significant linguistic elements that aid the interpretation of texts. In my opinion, this was already done when Baker (2006) created a model of framing alongside her narrative model. Baker’s model, however, is very general and is made in a one-size-fits-all manner. Not all of the narrative features discussed by Baker fit the news context. Moreover, Baker’s model could be more precise by combining overlapping narrative and framing features, which I will explain in detail as I discuss my methodology in Chapter 5.

Finally, in relation to the study of narrative theory and translated texts, the fact that narrative theory looks at complete narrative units in texts, and how they relate or contribute to public or meta-narratives, makes it unnecessary for translation scholars to compare source and target texts and ponder over how accurate or faithful those translations are. This is because even the most accurate translations can undermine the narratives of source texts through the narrative features discussed, such as selective appropriation, causal emplotment, and temporality. The

privilege of the narrative theory is that it looks at the big picture within which the translation was placed and how it is meant to function in its new environment. To sum it up, if CDA is concerned with how the use of certain vocabulary and certain structures such as passive and nominalisation affect meaning, narrative theory looks at the bigger picture, at how different semantic units situated in a text produce one, usually recurring, theme, one story line, or one narrative.

3.5 Conclusion

Framing is very much related to narrative theory; the narrative features discussed in Chapter Three such as causal emplotment and selective appropriations are framing themselves because they limit the interpretations of events to certain perspectives. I have discussed temporal framing, framing by selective appropriation, and framing by labelling. Framing is, indeed, indispensable to narratives, but for the purposes of this research and in order to blur the lines between narrative theory and framing, I see hardly any difference between framing by selective appropriation and selective appropriation as a narrative theory. Thus, I resort to looking at framing more from a CDA perspective regarding paratextual elements surrounding the texts, such as introductions, titles, headlines, photos, and annotated links. In the next chapter, I will introduce my new model for the narrative analysis of news and its translations that make use of both the narrative theory and framing analysis, combine overlapping features, and fit the news context.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Through the BBC and Al Jazeera English websites, I propose to investigate their developing coverage of the Syrian Revolution, setting the clock back to March 2011, when the first protests erupted, until June 2012, using both narrative and framing theories to pinpoint both the narratives advanced by these media and whether any translation was tailored to fit them. I will offer discussions here about the data I have chosen and the specific events that captured my attention, about the media I have chosen and why, the tools that I have used, and, finally, my methodology and model of analysis.

4.2 Data to be analysed

4.2.1 Media coverage of the Syrian uprising

On the 15th March 2011, school children in Deraa, inspired by the Arab Spring, Tunisian, Libyan, and Egyptian uprisings, wrote slogans on the walls calling for freedom, revolution, and the fall of the regime (Kahf, 2014). Soon after, fifteen children were arrested, sparking widespread protests in Deraa calling for, among other things, the release of the children and the lifting of the emergency ban (Ismail, 2018).

While the protesters were chanting ‘peaceful, peaceful’ (Diehl 2012), the government response was two-fold (Azmeah, 2016; Sharp & Blanchard, 2012). It cracked down on the demonstrators using tear gas and live ammunition, but, realising the international condemnation of its actions and attempting to appease the demonstrators, it also promised reform, helping the poor, increasing salaries, lifting the emergency ban, and releasing the political detainees (Al Jazeera, 19th March 2011; BBC, 20th March 2011). It turned out, however, that many of these promises were not realised. Families of the detained children, for instance, confirmed that their children were not released (BBC, 20th March 2011).

The fact that school children from rural Deraa wrote the wall slogans that first sparked protests is an indicator that the Syrian Revolution did not start by the means of any political or religious group. The youth from rural areas, who suffered the most, are those who started the protests (Kahf, 2014). It was not sectarian either, although the Sunni majority resented

that power was in the hands of the Alawite minority; protesters chanted, 'It is just Syrian, neither Sunniya nor Alawiyya' (Kahf & Bartkowski, 2013).

Aware of the danger of a sectarian divide, the protesters wanted to make clear, early on, that sectarianism had nothing to do with the uprising; rather it was caused by 'a generational experience of grievance and systematic disenfranchisement by a corrupt, repressive, and massively armed ruling elite' (Kahf, 2014, p. 556). The protesters did not call for the fall of al-Assad in the first weeks of protests, but did later following the violent crackdown on the protesters by the security forces (Kahf, 2014). al-Assad, who had claimed his country was immune to the effects of the Arab Spring because it united its people against Israel (Abboud, 2016), still spoke defiantly after the spark of the protests and referred to protesters as 'armed gangs' and 'infiltrators' (Al Jazeera, 23rd March 2011; BBC, 18th March 2011; Ismail, 2018). It became obvious he was not going to give up power, in contrast to how Mubarak and Ben Ali reacted to their people's anger. Both did, indeed, like al-Assad, point fingers at foreign agents and Islamists who manipulated the protesters in order to cause chaos in their countries. However, as protesters grew in number and confidence, they condescended and acknowledged the legitimate demands of protesters; no longer were they referred to as mobs manipulated by troublemakers, Islamists, or foreign agents (Lahlali, 2014).

Except for the few incidents that happened when protesters threw stones at the police and set government buildings on fire (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011; BBC, 21st March 2011), the uprising remained peaceful until the 29th July 2011 when the Free Syrian Army was formed (Kahf, 2014). Kahf (2014) also indicated that extremist-armed foreign fighters did intervene later in the uprising, but the portrayal in the news of these factions as basic players in the revolution was more of an alarmist attitude, which did, eventually, enhance their importance, whereas the core population of the revolution's teens did not embrace any sectarian or ideological agendas.

Some scholars point fingers at the FSA, which started the militarisation of the revolution, inspiring the creation of several other factions fighting together and ending up in the escalation of violence from both sides (Tokmajyan, 2015). Others seem to point fingers rather at Islamic extremism and foreign intervention. 'One of the catastrophic outcomes of the transformation from nonviolent to violent struggle was Islamic extremism and religiously-

driven foreign involvement' (Manna as cited in Zunes, 2013). 'Currently, most of the foreign combatants on both sides are religious fundamentalists with agendas that extend beyond the Syrian borders' (Tokmajyan, 2015, p. 170). According to Al-Tamimi (2013) and Zelin (2013), these foreign combatants were either extremist Sunnis who joined the rebels or extremist Shiite militias coming from Iraq or Hezbollah militants from Lebanon. I would like to examine, in this thesis, what was covered in the news of the events that took place from March 2011 to the end of June 2012, what really went on through this period, and how the Syrian uprising and its people, al-Assad and his opponents, i.e. the protesters, whether militarised or non-militarised, were treated by both Western and Arabic media, the BBC, and Al Jazeera, specifically. Sadly, at the time of writing this paper, the Syrian Revolution has been grinding on for more than eight years.

4.2.2 Media websites

For my data to be reliable, it was very important to choose news media that were significant, and influential. Media that claim to be, or look, objective may be more effective than overtly biased media because bias can be hidden in-between the lines and, thus, consumed in small dosages by trusting, unaware readers. This explains why I have chosen the BBC and Al-Jazeera, two influential news media that claim to be objective and watched by many in the world.

4.2.2.1 The BBC

Founded in 1922, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has expanded now to offer its services, both locally and internationally, through the TV, radio, and internet (Hypergene, 2005). Operating nine local TV channels and eleven international channels, including BBC America and BBC Arabic, its audience is estimated to be about 180 million a week (Hypergene, 2005).

In actual fact, the BBC was the only legitimate news broadcaster in the UK until the 1950s and still holds a significant place in the UK as it is funded by every household owning a TV licence, which requires payment that goes exclusively to the BBC. As a result, it is required to produce a variety of programmes that appeal to a widely diverse audience (Fox & Mitu, 2016).

The Corporation has always claimed that objectivity is very important. However, Sir John Reith, the BBC's first Director-General, openly stated that the Corporation must serve the Nation's interests and, thus, it historically maintained a close relationship with the government, which affected its coverage of significant events such as The General Strike in 1926 when the BBC spoke for the government instead of addressing the grievances of the people (Gagnon, 2013; Seul, 2015).

During the Second World War, following Chamberlain's demands, the BBC targeted the German public and encouraged them to revolt. Chamberlain had hoped the Germans would rebel and save him the trouble of war; however, war broke out in 1940 and, thus, the BBC propaganda intensified, emphasising the superiority of the British and French armies in order to cover up their losses (Seul, 2015). The BBC reflected the government's thinking at the time (Gagnon, 2013; Stone 2017). Later, in 1938, the BBC started to address foreign audiences in Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese for South America, German, French and Italian (Seul, 2015).

After its role in the Second World War, the BBC stressed impartiality as a major concept of the Corporation and regained the trust of its people. Impartiality as a concept was constantly revised and redefined by the BBC. However, in its 1996 Royal Charter, the BBC stressed *due impartiality*, which, according to Gagnon (2013), meant that impartiality could not be measured or tested. Again, the impartiality of the BBC was tested with its coverage of the weapons of mass destruction claimed to be in Iraq and, thus, leading to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Gagnon, 2013) when it completely supported the Tony Blair government and the USA.

Moreover, in a study about the BBC coverage of Somali piracy, conducted by Way (2014) the author concluded that the BBC was not objective, but rather took an orientalist approach to the issue. Orientalism is a concept that refers to the world in two distinct entities, the 'West and the Rest' where the West retains superiority over the 'backward rest of the world' (Hall, 1992 as cited in Way, 2014, p. 19). As a result, the causes of the conditions that paved the way for piracy, which involved Western intervention in the region, were totally ignored in the coverage, which only focused on Somali pirates as one evil entity. Not only that, but the coverage completely ignored Somalian voices and only used Western sources that were given

power and agency and, thus, represented as the solution to the problem. As Way puts it, Somali piracy was caused by illegal fishing and governmental inaction towards it. This absence of the government was ironically caused by the Western interventions in the region and, thus, Somalia needs no more Western intervention, just a functioning government.

However, despite these recent examples of bias in the BBC, it is known for setting tough standards to assure objectivity (Harrison 2010), and keeps on reviewing its content and policy in order to represent all diversities in the UK (BBC Report, 2012). In 2007, it released a new strategy for its news coverage. In *From the Seesaw to the Wagon Wheel*, it was stated that impartiality meant more than representing two sides of the conflict, but, in a multinational UK, more stances should be reflected. Thus, the BBC proposed to depart from its seesaw policy in which the concern was to keep the seesaw balanced so it did not tip in favour of one party over another, and adopt a wagon wheel policy ‘where the wheel is not circular and has a shifting centre with spokes that go in all directions’ (BBC Report, 2007, p. 5). In the report, impartiality is not imposed on the BBC by the audience, but is actually part of ‘the brand’, even though there will always be the need for the BBC to reassess its impartiality in a society that is growing more and more diverse (BBC Report, 2007, p. 12).

The BBC website is ‘the widest reaching news gathering network’ and is being watched by approximately 230 million people a week (Al Hegin, 2014; Way, 2014, p.20). I have chosen to investigate the website because the material I am investigating dates back as far as 2011, which makes it easier to retrieve than through TV. Also, in a study conducted by Fox and Mitu (2016), they compared BBC news on three platforms – the Web, television, and radio – and concluded that there was no significant difference in the news agenda across the platforms when delivering news content and, thus, the website coverage of Syria is also highly representative of the BBC television and radio coverage of the same conflict.

Finally, the BBC uses translation extensively in its news coverage, and its Monitoring Service translates news sources from over 140 countries in about 70 languages. The process starts from rough translations of the sources, and, then, material chosen by BBC General News Service is translated again according to the BBC editorial policy, which is edited before being sent to the newsroom (Podkalicka, 2011).

4.2.2.2 Al Jazeera

Shortly after the licence was withdrawn from the BBC Arabic service in 1996, its redundant staff were recruited to participate in the making of an Arabic News Media that soon ‘trail-blazed its way across the Middle East’ (Seddon, 2009, p. 29). From the start, it chose a different route to other Arabic news channels in the region, which were generally conservative and followed the directives of the sponsoring states to the letter. Al Jazeera soon tackled taboo topics such as politics, press freedom, and human rights issues in the Arab World (Miles, 2005). It also created a discourse of resistance that did not follow in the footsteps of the elites and the powerful, i.e. Western governments, as do many Western news media (Edwards and Cromwell, 2006), which incurred the wrath of both Arab governments as well as Western governments (Tawiq & Abdul Ghani, 2015). Having been boycotted by angry Arab governments, it could not support itself by airing advertisements (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007). This did not stop it from going ahead, and thus, in 2001, Al Jazeera’s Arabic website was launched, and immediately after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Al Jazeera’s English website was also launched, reaching out to audiences beyond the Middle East.

‘Thanks to the English-language Web site of Al Jazeera, U.S. readers are getting a take on world events they aren’t likely to find in their local newspaper’ (Sheila, 2003, p.2). Not only do Al Jazeera websites offer the same content as the TV coverage, they also have extensive material in addition to what is shown on television (Abdelrahim, 2007). During the war in Afghanistan, for instance, Al Jazeera website secured 70 million page-views per month, and the number of visitors jumped from 9 million in 2001 to 161 million visitors by the end of 2002, while, during its coverage of the occupation of Iraq in 2003, it secured one billion visitors (Abdelrahim, 2007). Furthermore, because of its excellent coverage of the invasion of Iraq, Al Jazeera.net became the 45th most visited site in the entire World Wide Web, according to Abd-Elatti (2003).

Al Jazeera became very popular, especially after the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers when the USA started its propaganda war on terror that later justified attacking the Taliban in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. During the US attack on Afghanistan, Al Jazeera was the only channel able to report from Afghanistan (Martin, 2002). This prompted both CNN and ABC to sign contracts with Al Jazeera to import its exclusive news content (Azran, 2006).

Later, the USA bombed Al Jazeera's headquarters in Kabul in response to its reports on the US bombing and for the interviews it made with Osama bin Laden (James, 2001). Adding fuel to the fire in 2003, Al Jazeera further caused great outrage in the USA and the West when, instead of airing images of liberating American soldiers being received with flowers by excited Iraqi people, it aired images and videos of dead and captive American soldiers; Western governments and media found Al Jazeera footage humiliating, and, thus, accused it of breaching war coverage protocols in which images of dead or injured soldiers should not be aired. Ironically, these same news media aired images of injured and dead Iraqi soldiers, which shows double standards in dealing with the Middle East. Again, as in Kabul, Al Jazeera's headquarters in Iraq was bombed by the USA. Among the critics of Al Jazeera, according to Abdelrahim (2007), were US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and President Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, who criticised Al Jazeera for depicting the invasion of Iraq from a negative perspective. Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, also claimed that Al Jazeera 'has a pattern of playing propaganda over and over and over again' (Semitsu, 2004 as cited in Abdelrahim, 2007, p. 51).

Not only was Al Jazeera a source of nuisance to Western governments, it was also reproved by many Arab governments (Tawfiq & Ghani 2015). According to Daoudi and Murphy (2011), Al Jazeera 'has become the icon of this discourse, a pioneering satellite television channel that dared to speak out where state-owned or controlled terrestrial channels did not' (p. 11). One might shrug off Western criticism and Arab reprovals as governments being unhappy at their portrayal or the portrayal of their political actions and negative attitudes. However, some academics criticised Al Jazeera for its failure to criticise Qatar, its sponsoring state.

Tom McPhail, a Communications Professor at the University of Missouri St Louis, sounded very sceptical when he stated that Al Jazeera 'has royal money behind it, and, therefore, is not what I would call an objective mainstream media outlet' (McPhail as cited in Sheila 2003, p. 1).

Indeed, Al Jazeera took its hands off Qatari affairs and only tentatively approached issues related to the neighbouring Gulf countries so it did not inflame the relationships between

Qatar and its neighbours (Azran, 2013; De Lage, 2005; El-Nawway, 2003; Zayani, 2005; Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007).

Moreover, many scholars believe that Qatar launched Al Jazeera to mount pressure on rival Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, on a number of issues, and, as a ‘double speak’ to cover up for its cosy relations with the USA and Israel, while Al Jazeera attacked them (Tawfiq & Abdul-Ghani, 2016, pp. 2288–2289). Undoubtedly, Qatar is keen to be effective in the Gulf region, a desire reflected in its Foreign Policy, as Qatar utilises ‘vibrant public diplomacy in order to preserve its place as a key player in regional conflict resolutions...[and it uses] this diplomacy to engage with the Arab public sphere and shape its dialogue in a manner that best suits [it]’ (Barakati, 2011, p. 3).

Also, Barakati implies that, by ‘extending its influence of public discourse’, and by participating, after the spread of Arab uprisings, in ‘trajectories of political change throughout the Arab World’ (Barakati, 2011, p. 6), Al Jazeera is believed to be Qatar’s main tool to achieve its ambitious objectives.

Despite all the criticism, when Johnson and Fahmy (2008) conducted a survey of Al Jazeera viewers asking them to rank how credible they thought Al Jazeera was, it was ranked the highest in all aspects of credibility, and, while the viewers ranked the BBC and CNN high on expertise, they ranked them low on trustworthiness. Other Arab media, not surprisingly, were given the lowest ranking on all credibility measures. Al Jazeera is not only credible, but, for millions of Arabs, according to Tawfiq and Abdul Ghani (2013), is the only *credible* source for its coverage of the Arab Spring. It has become so influential that Hillary Clinton, President Obama, and David Cameron were among its viewers. Indeed, the editorial standards of Al Jazeera are very high (Seddon, 2009). Its reporting is ‘often raw more to the point, not skewed to present an Anglo-American view of the world’ (Seddon, 2009, p. 30). The value of Al Jazeera lies in its ‘Arab perspective on Middle Eastern events’, says McPhail, the communications professor, quoted earlier and critical of Al Jazeera being related to Qatar. Despite his scepticism, he acknowledges the network’s importance and affirms that ‘it is not going to go away’ (McPhail, as cited in Sheila, 2006, p. 1). By its departure from Western war narratives, Al Jazeera has ‘given voice to the voiceless’ (Bello,

2015, p. 85) and, therefore, Al Jazeera has managed to be the fifth top news brand in the world, ahead of the BBC (Al-Majdhoub, 2015; Tawfiq & Ghani, 2015)

As with the BBC, I have chosen Al Jazeera English website as I am investigating events that take us back to 2011 and because Al Jazeera website is reflective of Al Jazeera TV and more (Abdelrahim, 2007) and, thus, provides sufficient material for the analysis.

The Al Jazeera website is also a suitable platform for the analysis of translation, as the network has subscribed to both Arab and Western agencies, such as the Associated Press and Reuters (Khasib & Esroy, 2016) and, thus, translation is necessary for both the Arabic and English websites. Moreover, the network utilises various modes of translation, such as dubbing, narration, voiceover, and live translation (Darwish, 2009). In the Syrian context, as well as all conflicts in the Arab world, reaching out to people participating in the conflict or residing in areas of conflict would mostly require translation from Arabic to English. Thus, as both media are influential and have a large audience, it is going to be enlightening to investigate how they covered the Syrian uprising.

4.3 Periods covered and why

The researcher will investigate how the Syrian uprising and its people were covered by both the BBC and Al Jazeera on their English websites during the period from the eruption of the first protests in March 2011 up until June 2012, a period spanning 15 months. This will be divided into two periods: the initial period of the uprising from March to September 2011 and the militarisation of the uprising from November 2011 to June 2012.

These two initial periods have covered some of the most debated issues regarding the Syrian Uprising from its start as a peaceful revolution to its militarisation and the Al Houla massacre that was committed against innocent civilians and the intervention of third parties; it is important to observe how the coverage of the Syrian conflict evolved, how it was covered at the beginning, and, if news media took sides at the time, whether they continued taking the same side or whether they switched positions later.

Also, I want to see how Al Jazeera and the BBC represented Al Assad and the rebels, what narratives they advocated, and whether they gave fair attention to all the factions and actors involved.

It was important to investigate not only on who the blame was pinned, or who was more demonised and whose actions were justified, but the focus of this thesis is also on how that was achieved through aspects of narrative, CDA, and translation together.

4.4 Method of analysis

In this research, I propose applying the narrative theory to the analysis of the BBC and Al Jazeera websites' coverage of the Syrian uprising. I want to investigate what kind of narratives (or versions of the story) these websites were advocating by using features of narrativity as well as framing, which will be explained in this section.

I am also going to compare the narratives of the two websites, the BBC and Al Jazeera English, to see how similar or different they are and whether they coincide at times and differ at others, and, most importantly, how translation is used in support of the intended narratives of these news websites. Covering the events in Syria, both websites have had to use translation intensively. For both of the English websites, the speeches of Syrians, including the Syrian witnesses, residents, protesters, rebels, doctors, journalists, activists, human rights organisations, Syrian authorities, Syrian news agencies, Syrian officials, and Bashar al-Assad, are mostly translated from Arabic into English unless speakers know, and are willing to speak, English. Also, references to Facebook groups and organisations, videos of people chanting slogans or speaking Arabic, and people carrying banners had, some way or another, to be translated. These translations are not always direct or literal, but can be paraphrases of what people are talking about and some short quotes deemed highly significant by the news media. As for audio visuals, you rarely see subtitles, but, often, the commentator might paraphrase what people are chanting or talking about, explain the context, and, sometimes, one slogan or one word is translated. The same goes for photos of people carrying Arabic slogans.

Narrative theory, as explained in 2.1, is not really concerned with theories such as the equivalence of the translation (Catford, 1965; House, 1997), which is related to how accurate

a translation is, nor with the foreignisation or localisation theories advocated by Venuti (1995), who more encouraged the foreignisation of text to retain aspects of the source culture rather than erasing the traces of a different culture and westernising the texts so that the reader would read them like a text written by a Western reader. It is rather more concerned with how translated texts are used to fit the unfolding narrative of certain people or organisations, i.e. as a narrative tool itself. A focus on narrative also allows us to move beyond the long-standing preoccupation in translation studies with examining regular patterns of abstract choices, in the tradition of norm theory (Toury, 1995). Scholars of translation typically examine norms of translational behaviour by studying a collection of authentic translations (say, Arabic translations of English detective fiction during the 1990s) and identifying repeated choices, including types of strategies that are typically opted for by the translators represented in that collection, such as how they might deal with culture-specific references and whether or not they break down long sentences into shorter ones (Baker, 2010, p. 349).

Moreover, in the context of news, even if attempted, a comparison between the target and the source text is neither possible nor productive, because news media do not usually acknowledge translation, which means that chasing who translated what, or chasing what text is source and what text is the target is not an achievable task. Indeed, translation in the news is ‘largely invisible’ (Bielsa, 2016, p. 197). Therefore, translated texts appear in many ways more like new texts, specifically designed for the new readers to whom they are targeted. Although in the last ten years, interest in the translation of the news has been growing in significance (Bielsa, 2016; Darwish, 2014), the textual practice of news translation, thus, challenges some extended principles in translation studies, such as that of equivalence or of the central importance of authorship (Bielsa, 2016, p. 200). Indeed, according to Caimotto and Gaspari (2018), identifying source texts is very challenging in the news because of ‘the huge amount of editing that typically characterizes the production and circulation of multilingual news; the notions of fidelity or loyalty are called into question; and the neutrality of the investigator is put to the test due to issues of bias and ideology in (translated) news’ (p. 206). Moreover, constructing a target and source text path proves to be ‘very time-consuming and probably unfeasible in most cases’ (p. 216).

Thus, many news translation studies based their studies on some form of comparative data other than source and target text. For instance, Davier (2015) studied news dispatch by Agence France-Presse (AFP) to see how Switzerland is portrayed by the AFP in its English and French versions. His main question was ‘How do different professional and cultural communities make sense of the cultural Other in transnational news reporting?’ (p. 536). He has found that the French version of AFP more stresses fake cultural similarity while the English AFP was more cautious and preserved the cultural differences. See also Conway (2011, 2012), Davier (2017), and Davier and Doorslaer (2018) for other examples of translation studies without referring to source texts.

When Harding (2011), as discussed in 2.3.2.2, attempted to analyse the coverage of the Beslan events on three Russian websites: RIA-Novosti, Kavkazcenter, and Caucasian Knot, she did not attempt a comparison between source and target texts but rather studied the coverage of the story in Russian and Chechen through the narrative theory. This study also aims to study translations in the news through the narrative theory without attempting to trace source texts. However, I have traced translations inside the news stories. As Davies and Doorslaer (2018) put it, ‘traces of translation can be found with time-consuming detective-like archival work’ (p. 247). While translation is not usually acknowledged in the news, I have traced translation by resorting to other means. First, observing the speakers and their preferred language. For example, President Bashar al-Assad or his government mostly spoke Arabic; their speeches appeared in Arabic on most channels. Also, observing any indication on English websites that some quote or story taken from their Arabic websites, when articles stated that someone spoke to BBC Arabic or Al Jazeera Arabic, usually meant that the speeches were in Arabic; finally, opening the links annotated on the website page; if there was a link to the story linked to something in Arabic, usually a YouTube video or a Facebook page, it is a proof of the translation. For example, if a witness speaking in Arabic in the videos posted in BBC and Al Jazeera English, one can be confident, then, that the speeches quoted in the written article were translated from Arabic. This way I could ensure that I correctly tracked translations in the texts and proceeded to investigate their role in those texts.

Thus, as we are studying translation as a narrative tool, we are not looking for the strategies used during the translation process, or comparing texts in a bid to identify which is closer or further from the original text; our main concern is with what is translated, what is not, and

how translation is situated within the text suggesting certain narratives of the events being reported.

4.4.1 My narrative model

After studying a sample of Al Jazeera and BBC News, I have found that the most recurrent feature of narrativity is *selective appropriation* and *causal emplotment*. However, whatever narrative is proposed in a news story can be predicted by the framing, and, so, framing is very important in the analysis of narratives. Thus, I have created a narrative model based on these two features of narrativity in addition to framing. I will look at framing from two different perspectives. The paratextual elements will be investigated in terms of the narratives they create as they click into each other, both across the one article and across the whole selection of articles. Also, very important for the framing of news is labelling, already discussed in 3.4.3.

Framing by labelling can be observed both in the text and paratextual elements. Mostly, narratives hardly do without labelling, which indicates attitude and, thus, supports or undermines some narratives.

While Baker (2006) has applied eight features of narrative theory to translation, Sommers (1994) and Bruner (1991, 2004) have each applied four, not all of these features are critical to the news context. However, some of these features may not do without the other; therefore, I have created a model in which one feature may branch out of another. Branches usually inform the head feature or overlap with it, but they can also overlap with other head features. The features in my model will be as follows.

First, selective appropriation, discussed in 2.3.2.3 and 3.4.2, from which the selection of certain events, voices, and actors branch out. It goes without saying that the voices allowed to speak and translated, the actors portrayed, and the events highlighted, are the backbones of selective appropriation in the news context. In order for selective appropriation to achieve its goal narrative, it has to be repeated over a period of time and across several stories and articles.

Secondly, causal emplotment, discussed earlier in 2.3.2.2, is a feature specifically important in the reportage of conflict. This is because, in every conflict, reasons have to be identified, some actors have to be blamed, and some actions may need to be justified. Causal emplotment can be as long as one sentence, it can stretch over a few paragraphs, or it can provide the substance of a whole article. It can be made clear by using the dependent phrase starting with *because*, but most of the time it is not easily traced by the unsuspecting reader unless by means of presupposition.

Presupposition is a term used by Fairclough (1995) for the interpretations that people take from a text in which they are implied rather than stated. This is what causal emplotment is all about. It does not usually make explicit connection between events and neither does it interpret them directly, but leaves certain suggestions in the air for readers to grasp. In other words, presupposition can be defined as the missing piece of information that the reader usually understands from the context of the essay; but how can this be achieved? How can the reader understand the unsaid in a piece of text, or across texts, photos, and videos? I assume that temporality has the answer. Temporality not only refers to the timing regarding the disclosure of a piece of information, but it also refers to extra information sandwiched into the text. It is the reference to other events that look like innocent extra information, but actually provide the context through which the reader makes sense of the events reported. It makes or fakes connections and discreetly whispers the intended narrative into the ear of the reader. This extra information can be internal retroversion or external retroversion.

Internal introversion refers to the placement of an event in the text that happened at the same time of the main event, while external retroversion is the placement of an event that happened prior to the main event, which can go back from one day to years before (Bal, 2006; Harding, 2014). Bal (2006) proposed internal and external retroversions in his narrative theory, which Harding (2014) then applied in her analysis of the coverage of three news media of a terrorist attack in Beslan. Both Bal and Harding's contributions are detailed in 2.3.2.2.

In conclusion, *causal emplotment* and *selective appropriation* are the two most important features in narrativity as they go hand-in-hand in defining the ideological assumptions of texts.

‘Actually, it makes sense to differentiate degrees of presence, as it were, rather than just contrasting what is present and what is absent. We might think in terms of a scale of presence, running from “absent” to “foregrounded”’: absent – presupposed- backgrounded- foregrounded’ (Fairclough, 1995, p.106).

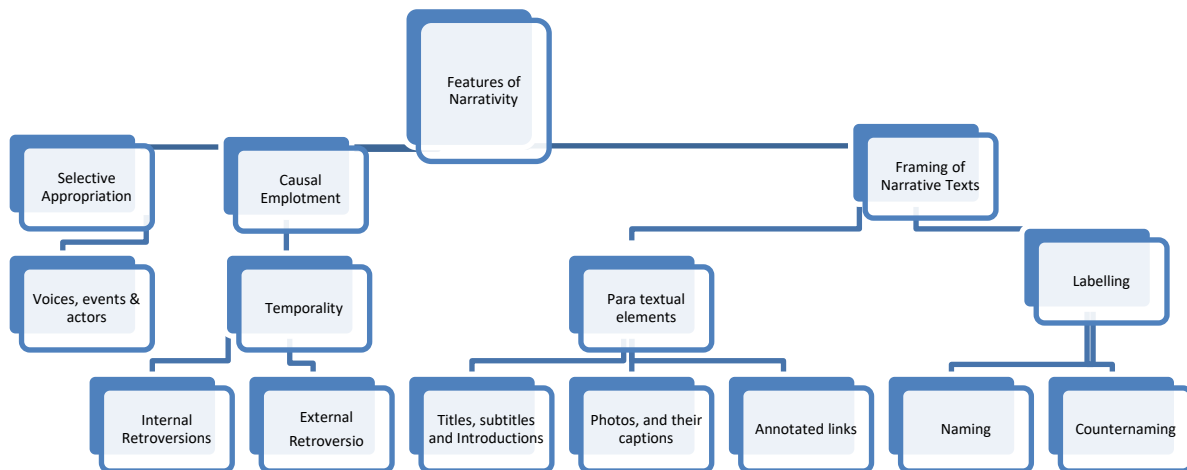


Chart 4-1 My narrative and framing model for the analysis of news coverage of conflict

As for framing, I will focus basically on paratextual elements and labelling. Paratextual elements are as discussed in 4.3 and include the introductions, photos, and their captions, and, finally, annotated links (Baker, 2010). Labelling includes naming and counter naming (Baker, 2006a). Below is my narrative model in which I have combined features of narrativity and framing.

As you can see in chart 4-1, my narrative model is based on three basic elements, the first being selective appropriation branching into the choice of events, actors and voices.

Secondly, causal emplotment, which provides the context through which the text can be interpreted and branches into temporality, internal retroversion, and external retroversion.

Finally, framing of the narrative texts through labelling and paratextual elements including photos and their captions, titles, subtitles and introductions.

4.5 Tools for the analysis

4.5.1 Google

After trying the archives of both websites, I found that it was difficult to obtain much of what was featured on these websites in 2011. I only found a few articles on the BBC website, while the Al Jazeera website had no archive. Thus, in order to collect as many articles as possible from the specified period, I used Google's advanced search by writing in BBC News Syria, or Al Jazeera English Syria, and, through the tools, I specified the time period I wanted. I did that for each month and collected 164 articles from the BBC website and 166 articles from Al Jazeera English website from March 2011 to June 2012. This included many important events in the revolution, the spark of the uprising in March 2011, the formation of the armed rebellion in June 2011, but which only started to receive media attention in November 2011, at least specifically on the BBC and Al Jazeera websites. I thoroughly applied my model on the months of March 2011 and November 2011 in order to assess these news media's initial reaction to the new events, which were the spark of the uprising and the formation of the armed rebellion. As such, using my narrative model, I have analysed all of the articles in these two months in two different sections in Chapter 5.

My detailed analysis of the March and November 2011 coverage of the BBC and Al Jazeera websites is my lead-off core that facilitates the analysis of role of translation in sustaining or departing from the initial narratives of the BBC and Al Jazeera, all from March 2011 to June 2012, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.5.2 NVivo

Although electronic data analysis is usually thought to be basically related to quantitative data analysis, Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has been around for decades (Zamawe, 2015). One of the most popular pieces of qualitative data analysis software is NVivo, which, unlike statistical software, does not analyse the data for you, but is 'basically data management packages, which support the researcher during analysis' (Zamawe, 2015, p. 13).

Tom Richards, the co-developer of the software, indicates that:

NVivo has features such as character-based coding, rich text capabilities and multimedia functions that are crucial for qualitative data management.... Moreover, the strength of NVivo lies in its high compatibility to research designs. The software is not methodological-specific, it works well with wide range of qualitative research designs and data analysis methods such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, conversation analysis, ethnography, literature reviews, phenomenology, and mixed methods (Zamawe, 2015, p. 13).

Specifically for big data, manual analysis is not practical (Leech, 2011). Also, Zamawe (2015) finds the ability to add nodes to data very helpful for tracking thematic topics in the data. Bazeley (2006) notes that CAQDAS helps researchers compare categories and codes within a short period of time.

Since my data are rather rich and extend over a long period of time, I have decided to use NVivo to help me manage the material I collect. For website material, NVivo enables the capturing of websites in PDF form by using Internet Explorer on the Chrome NCapture app. After that, the material captured could be imported into my NVivo project. Moreover, nodding can be done at any time during the process. I have used one of eight nodes for every website I captured. These nodes are indicate the BBC or Al Jazeera media, plus the year and month; therefore, I have BBC, March 2011, BBC, November 2011, Al Jazeera, March 2011, Al Jazeera, November 2011, and have files for the duration of months, namely, BBC from April to October 2011, BBC from December 2011 to June 2012, Al Jazeera from April to October 2011, and Al Jazeera from December 2011 to June 2012.

I mostly conducted manual qualitative analysis of these, benefiting from the useful feature of memos, writing my thoughts as I read the articles and attaching them to the texts. In the memos, I also included the website links to the articles I was analysing. That was so I could access the website page anytime and watch the videos. The videos could be saved and converted into mp3s to be imported into NVivo. Since I do not need to transcribe the videos for my research, I found it more practical to access the video immediately through the website and then writing my observations in the memo linked to the NVivo PDF page.

Moreover, NVivo was very useful for concordance analysis. Concordance is basically a corpus linguistic analysis. Baker P.et al. (2008) suggests that concordance is very useful for the analysis of discourse and may prove beneficial for this research, which blends aspects of narrative theory and discourse analysis. Concordance analysis increases the objectivity of the

research and enables the researcher to study ‘word or cluster in its immediate co-texts’ (Baker P. et al., 2008, p. 279).

As Orpin (2005) indicates, the researcher first has to decide which language aspects to investigate and what point of entry through qualitative analysis, and thus, as Baker et al. (2008) point out, corpus analysis confirms the researcher’s initial observations and adds quantitative value to it. The fact that the researcher selects the texts to be analysed in CDA to uncover ‘ideologies in political texts...can cast doubts on their representativeness’ (Gabrielatos & Baker P., 2008, p. 6).

A concordance identifies every example in the data, and helps to ensure that analysts do not merely pick evidence to fit their preconceptions. This also helps to present quantitative evidence in ways which can be checked by readers (Stubbs, 1994, p. 218).

Thus, after having made my initial assumptions about the texts I have read, I used the *Explore* feature of NVivo. This enabled me to search for the most frequent words in the texts I studied to see the most prominent actors in the news coverage of the Syrian conflict on the Al Jazeera and BBC websites. Furthermore, for the purposes of my research, I found that the most frequent 30 words were sufficient, as this provided enough information related to events and blame narratives in the news media. Also, under *Explore*, I used *Text Search* to show the concordance of certain words to check my previous assumptions about blame in stories through the context in which these words were used, i.e. the collocation of these words, which is ‘the words that occur in the neighbourhood’ of my search word. Among the words I searched are al-Assad, the FSA, Sunni, and Alawites (Scott, 2015, p.179). Justification for my word selection is related to who I have found was blamed for the violence, who was portrayed as a victim, and who was demonised on the BBC and Al Jazeera news websites.

Regarding the actors, al-Assad and the protesters were the most prominent. Entering these words in the text search returned words highlighted in yellow and, thus, I was able to go through all of the occurrences of these words in their contexts and revise my earlier assumptions. I also made use of the word search in NVivo for every issue that arose during my analysis, such as the world reaction to the violence in Syria and its possible influence on the media coverage by inserting words such as USA, UK, and Qatar.

4.6 Conclusion

This research has invested in the narrative theory as suggested by Baker et al. (2008) regarding conflict situations and translation. It has also invested in Critical Discourse Analysis and specifically its focus on framing as is described by Fairclough (), Baker et al. (2008), Entman and others. To this end, I have created a model that fits the news context while integrating both aspects of the narrative theory and CDA. After studying a sample of the Al Jazeera and BBC news websites, I have found that the most salient narrative features in the news are selective appropriation and causal employment, and the most important aspect of CDA for the news context is framing.

Temporality is a very important narrative feature for the news, but I have found that it fits well branching out of causal employment. Thus, the basic elements of my model are selective appropriation, causal employment, and framing. While the choice of events, actors and voices branch out of the selective appropriation, nothing can be made of these selections without causal employment, which provides the context through which to interpret that selection by comments or through temporality in which other events and voices are selected that help the reader make a connection. Framing is also very important in that it helps in the interpretation of the events and voices detailed inside the text; framing actually summarises for the reader the main ideas they should absorb after reading the text to the degree that, even if the text expresses something differently, the reader clings to the suggested meaning of the framing elements.

Framing in the news is well-studied and documented in CDA analyses, but what makes this research unique is its application of the narrative theory on the news context through methods of studying complete texts over a long period of time, extending for over a year from March 2011 to June 2012, the fact that it integrated both elements from the narrative theory and the CDA, and the variety of topics it investigated. Moreover, this research invests in corpus linguistic methods of analysis to verify the results obtained by the qualitative analysis and to increase its objectivity. Based on the initial findings of this research, concordance analysis was performed through the *Explore* feature of NVivo to discover the most frequent words and make a text search to study the context in which some of the actors in the conflict were

positioned and whether it coincided with my initial qualitative analysis findings or provided different information. This study also investigated the role of translation in the creating of the narratives of both websites, applying the same model.

While translation is already gaining significance in the news, this study is the first to follow translations across certain topics for the duration of more than a year.

Chapter 5: The Syrian Uprising Through the Coverage and Translations of BBC News and Al Jazeera

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse the coverage of the Syrian uprising, which started in 2011 and continues to this day, on the BBC News and Al Jazeera English websites. I will compare the stories advanced by these two news media using narrative theory. Did they produce the same narrative for the same events? If not, I want to trace what bias or ideology delivered different narratives of the same reality, and how that was achieved.

As I have spelled out in my methodology chapter, this will be done by looking through two basic features of narratives, selective appropriation (involving, basically, the selection of events, and voices), causal emplotment (imposing certain interpretations on the events by extra comments or extra information), and framing, more from a CDA point of view, including labelling, head titles, lead sentences, photos and annotated links. Of course, how translation has affected the narratives of these news media is indispensable for this research, but will be discussed in a separate chapter.

Single events do not happen in isolation, but each event or a set of events is related to other events that may have caused them or were prompted by them. As a result, our interpretation of these events relies on the narratives we construct that help us make sense of single events in relation to others. The same goes for the media; Fairclough (1989) observes that:

The hidden power of media discourse ... depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. A single text is, on its own, quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader and so forth (Fairclough, 1989, p.54).

Since the impact of the media is 'cumulative', we take it that narratives of the media are not spelled out in one single article, and, even if so, there are always references to other reports or stories. Also, media would not spell out attitudes and the narratives they want you to believe in explicitly, but rather tacitly, from which the reader is expected to understand what is left implicit by using the information s/he had learned from other articles. This is why I believe that no one article can stand on its own, but must be in collaboration with others. The more the same narrative is repeated, the more likely that readers will interpret events in relation to

it while narratives that are less often proposed can easily fade away. News media might offer different narratives to show impartiality, while foregrounding other narratives, which may more suit their ideology, making the remaining narratives fade into oblivion.

This chapter will be more concerned with assessing the initial reactions of the BBC and Al Jazeera towards two basic issues, the spark of the, somehow, unexpected uprising, and armed rebellion. Following the lead from this initial assessment, this research will go forward to investigate whether translation has sustained the narratives of these media and, if so, how. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.2 My analysis

This research will analyse reportage of two significant events that happened in Syria; the first is the spark of the uprising that was covered in March 2011, and the second is the emergence of armed rebellion that was first reported in November 2011.

I will begin by spelling out the common narratives of the events and seeing which ones were advocated by Al Jazeera and the BBC, or whether there was a different narrative suggested by either of these websites.

First of all, I will look at the paratextual elements, titles, subtitles, and introductions, and see how they function together to create a certain narrative. This step is important because many people do not get to finish the articles they read and rely on the headlines (Battoclette, 2017). People are actually so affected by headlines that misleading headlines leave a lasting impression on their understanding of an article, even if they read and try to comprehend it (Ecker et al., 2014).

After that, I will look at the basic narrative elements, selective appropriation, and causal emplotment. The latter specifically will be aided by other paratextual framing elements, including labelling, photos, and annotated links. A quantitative analysis of the labelling used throughout the period will be performed, which will include words such as al-Assad, people, Sunni, and Alawites, through the *Explore* feature in NVivo in which I can make a text search

of specific words; the results will show not only how many times a word was used, but will also enable me to study these words in their contexts and study their correlations.

The motive behind my selection of words is in identifying the actors in this conflict, who are basically al-Assad and the protesters, usually referred to as ‘the people’.

5.3 Syria narratives of March 2011

This was the month when the first protests sparked and, even though they were low scale, they surprised many, including the Syrian government, who said, earlier, that Syria was not subject to the effects of the Arab uprising and USA officials who had said, up to then, that Bashar al-Assad was a reformist who improved the economy and was loved by his people (Philips, 2016; Sanders, 2014). At the time, two narratives took centre place in most media. The first is that al-Assad was a dictator who stifled political freedom and left the country reeking with corruption resulting in more unemployment and poverty for the Syrians, especially in rural areas. Those Syrians who took to the streets wanted nothing but reform; they were peaceful, and had no sectarian agenda. It was a revolution of the youth who wanted to live and prosper and had nothing to do with any organisation, be it political or religious. In response, the regime had no tolerance for any kind of public criticism and lashed out on the protesters’ tear gassing and shooting them with live ammunition, causing the death and injury of hundreds (Kassab & al Sami, 2016; Philips, 2016)

The second narrative, basically articulated by the regime, was that the protests were a foreign conspiracy; Syria was resented for being an enemy of Israel. Indeed, the Syrian government was actually close to its people, who had no serious reason for revolt. Also, the seemingly peaceful protesters were infiltrated by Islamic extremists who had weapons and clashed violently with the security forces, causing the death of some civilians (Bartolomei, 2018; Smyth, 2015; Leenders, 2015).

Of course, there is no black and white regarding narratives; there are all shades of grey and different variations of these narratives. If a news channel submits to a certain narrative, it would be to a degree on the continuum from fully supporting it to somewhat doubting some

of its aspects. We are going to see now how Al Jazeera and the BBC websites dealt with these narratives.

5.4 Narratives of the BBC from March 2011

In order to study the reaction of the BBC to the uprising in Syria that was sparked in March 2011, a detailed analysis of eleven articles, published in March 2011, and portraying a variety of topics regarding the Syrian uprising, will be analysed through the use of the narrative and framing model suggested by the researcher. The analysis will begin by looking at the paratextual elements as they guide readers and direct their interpretation of the actors and events reported in the news. White (1997) points out that a headline along with the lead are ‘the text nucleus’ and goes on to say that a ‘hard news report is most typically constituted by the combination of its headline and opening sentences (known to journalists as the lead or intro)’ (White, 1997 p. 111). Moreover, ‘individually and together, these features represent the incident or statement selected for the reader’s attention as inherently newsworthy, as having compelled itself upon the reporter as obvious subject matter for a report and an unavoidably appropriate starting point’ (White, 1997, p. 128). Finally, as I have mentioned in 5.2, the impression of the headlines, along with the lead and subtitles, not only affect a reader’s interpretation of the covered events, but their impression is so strong that even if the content of the report lead to a different conclusion, the reader would cling to his/her initial understanding of being among the people who continue reading and not those who satisfy themselves with only reading the headlines and their subtitles.

This section will then move from studying the meanings suggested by the headlines, the lead, and subtitles, to a detailed analysis of the narrative features, selective appropriation, and causal employment, used in the reports of the month of March 2011, and as a result, the narratives suggested. Internal framing, including photos, labels, and annotated links will be studied along with causal employment.

5.4.1 Paratextual elements: Titles, introductions and subtitles

Headline	Lead	Subtitles
1. Syria: Why is there no Egypt Style Revolution? (4 th March 2011)	As Syrians eagerly follow developments in the Middle East, they are - for the first time in almost four decades - also loudly discussing the politics at home.	Emboldened Cosmetic changes?
2. Middle East Unrest: Syria arrests Damascus protesters (16 th March 2011)	At least 35 people have been arrested after they defied a ban on demonstrations and protested in the Syrian capital, reports say.	No dissent
3. Middle East Unrest: Three killed at protests in Syria (18 th March 2011)	At least three protesters have been shot dead in the south Syrian city of Deraa as security forces clamped down on a protest rally.	'Hundreds injured'
4. Middle East Unrest: Silence broken in Syria (19 th March 2011)	The silence has been broken in Syria.	'Rise up' Arrests
5. Syria unrest: Tear gas fired at Deraa funeral (19 th March 2011)	Syrian security forces have fired tear gas to disperse crowds at the funeral of two people killed in anti-government protests on Friday, witnesses say	None
6- Syria unrest: US condemns 'disproportionate force' (21 st March 2011)	The US has condemned Syria's use of 'disproportionate force' to suppress demonstrations calling for greater freedom and an end to corruption.	None

Table 5-1 Headlines, leads and subtitles in the BBC reportage of the Syrian conflict in March 2011

Headline	Lead	Subtitles
7- Syria crisis: Can reforms appease protesters? (24 th March 2011)	Under pressure from events in the southern city of Deraa that are threatening to spiral out of control, President Bashar al-Assad and his Baathist government have come up with a wide range of conciliatory decisions and promises that look good on paper.	Behind-the-scenes talks 'Damascus Spring' Vested interests
8- Syria: Setting the country alight? (24 th March 2011)	Six days after trouble first started in the southern Syrian town of Deraa, it seems to be proving hard for the authorities to contain it.	'Gravest internal challenge' No illusions Tribal towns Sectarian risk Corruption clampdown
9- Syria unrest: Profile of	The southern Syrian city of Deraa	

Deraa and Hawran region (24 th March 2011)	has been hit by daily protests for the past week against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, posing the greatest challenge to his rule since he took office in 2000 on the death of his father, Hafez.	None
10- -Syria unrest: Government pledges political reforms (25 th March 2011)	Syrian leaders have pledged to introduce reforms to meet the demands of protesters, after days of violence in the southern city of Deraa.	Relaxing restrictions?
11- Syria protests: The forgotten decades of dissent (29 th March 2011)	It has been decades since mass demonstrations have been seen in Syria, but the country has a rich history of revolt - and of repression.	Regime toppled Hama massacre 'Damascus Spring'

Table 5-2 Headlines, leads, and subtitles in the BBC reportage of the Syrian conflict in March 2011.

Just 11 days before the spark of protests, the BBC in *Why is there no Egypt style revolution?* (BBC, 4th March 2011), compares between the resentment of the Egyptians that brought about a revolution toppling president, Hosni Mubarak, to that of the Syrians; the BBC, at this stage, did not seem to think a revolution was going to happen in Syria. The title is rather definitive; it does not question whether there is going to be an Egypt style revolution or not; it assumes there is not going to be one and questions why. However, if the reader resorts to subtitles to find an answer to the why, he/she will be lost. Reading the first subtitle, *emboldened*, the reader might wonder about the word emboldened: why not revolt? The second subtitle, *Cosmetic changes?* does not provide answers either. It implies that whatever changes there are, they may not be serious enough to make a difference. Both the question mark and the word *cosmetic* cast doubts. The article does not seem to be really decisive.

Afterwards, the mood seemed to change quickly and there were four articles – *Syria arrests Damascus protesters* (BBC, 16th March 2011), *Three killed at protests in Syria* (BBC, 18th March 2011), *Silence broken in Syria* (BBC, 19th March 2011), and *Syria unrest: US condemns 'disproportionate force'* (BBC, 21st March 2011) – which throw the blame for violence on the regime. Subtitles, such as *No dissent*, *Hundreds injured* and *Arrests*, also indicate the same narrative: the regime does not tolerate dissent. As a result, it clamped down on protesters who were arrested, injured, or killed. One more article to the same end is an opinion article, *Syria protests: The forgotten decades of dissent* (BBC, 29th March 2011), which places the current wave of protests in the context of other protests in the past, which were crushed violently in Syria.

Three titles, *Syria unrest: Tear gas fired at Deraa funeral* (BBC, 19th March 2011), *Syria crisis: Can reforms appease protesters?* (BBC, 24th March 2011), and *Syria unrest: The government pledges political reforms* (BBC, 25th March 2011) are negotiating narratives with their introductions and subtitles.

The first is a description of regime violence against the protesters followed by an introduction, which indicates that the regime has promised reforms in response. The second, which questions the futility of reforms, is answered by stating that the regime did ‘come up with conciliatory decisions’, and the third headline also discusses the regime’s promises of reform. However, through labelling, doubt is cast over the regime’s credibility. The lead for *Syria crisis: Can reforms appease protesters?* describes the reforms as ‘look[ing] good on paper’, and the word *pledge* in *The government pledges political reforms* instead of promise, which, although more serious, could be satirical in light of the reader’s understanding of the promises that only look good on paper; also, a phrase is added to the second, the regime’s reform decisions. For the subtitles of the second article, it is not exactly clear what they mean until one reads what is inside. One may wonder who is *talking behind the scenes*, what the *Damascus spring* is, and whose *vested interests* are being discussed. For the last subtitle, specifically, one may tend to relate it to the regime, as *vested interests* are not expected from protests conducted by the youths, but rather certain opposition groups. As for the final article that describes the regime’s promised reforms, the word *pledge* is used twice in the title and its introduction, which are also followed by a subtitle, *Relaxing restrictions?* which seems to question the seriousness of these reforms.

Moreover, two articles, *Setting the county alight*, and *Syria unrest: Profile of Deraa and Hawran region*, talk about the spark of the revolution, but seem to be somewhat apologetic on behalf of the regime. There is a hint in the subtitles of the first, ‘Gravest internal challenge’ and, in the introduction of the second, that the protests are a great challenge to the regime that is trying to contain it. Also, there is the subtitle *sectarian risk*, which is somewhat interesting; the BBC is now worrying about the sectarian risk when the country is already sectarian, favouring the minority Alawites over the Sunni majority, a fact that was mentioned in the same article. The response of the regime, however, was to clamp down on the

protesters. The titles suggest that the articles would discuss both the regime's violence and also some justification for its attitude towards the protesters.

All in all, there are five articles (2, 3, 4, 6, 11) that focus on the regime's violence against protesters and emphasise the regime's history of crushing dissent. One article (1) is more in favour of internal reform and two (8 and 9) consider the regime's point of view and, even though they mention its clampdown on protesters, sound rather apologetic. I consider these articles to be in favour of the regime. Moreover, the three articles negotiating between the narratives, violence made against protesters, and the regime making reforms, are also supportive of the regime because, despite the fact that they mention the regime's violence towards peaceful protesters, it still places hope in its reforms. This makes it five articles in support of the protesters by exposing the violence of the regime and six apologetic articles by emphasising the regime's attempts at reform, despite informing on its violence, and justifying its hysteric reaction by showing understanding to the regime claims of threat and pending extremism from the revolutionaries. Up until now, it seems that the basic topics in the month of March 2011 are Bashar al-Assad as a reformer, the looming danger of Islamists, his fake reforms, and his crackdown on the protesters. In the following section, I am going to determine whether elements of selective appropriation and causal emplotment confirm a reader's first assumptions, and will then go into greater detail, discussing examples from within the texts along with supportive photos and annotated links.

5.4.2 Selective appropriation

I propose four groups of voices: the elites who are Western and Arab government spokesmen; the Syrian regime and its supporters, including al-Assad; people on the ground, who might be referred to as witnesses, residents, protesters, and activists; and human rights groups. A look at a word frequency cloud produced by NVivo for the month of March indicates that the basic actors here are the Syrian government or any of its representatives, and the Syrian protesters, who are mostly people from rural areas and are suffering the most.



Figure 5-1 The 30 most frequent words in BBC coverage of Syria in March 2011.

After having to stop *middle, east, and world*, words that appeared as the most frequent only because every article comes under *Middle East World* page in the website, one can see that the most common words are those related to the people, the protesters, their government, and al-Assad. *People* and *government* take third and fourth positions. *al-Assad* and *protesters* score positions six and nine.

Voices allowed to speak	No. of references
The elites	4
The regime	4
Human rights groups	3
People on the ground	12

Table 5-3 voices selected in the BBC coverage of Syria in March 2011.

The fact that *government* and *al-Assad* are among the most frequently used words in the BBC coverage of March 2011, does not mean that will be as frequently reported. In actual fact, the most referenced voices here are the people on the ground who can be anything from witnesses, residents, and protesters to activists. The regime and the elites both come second, people on the ground voices are almost three times more quoted than the regime. However, given that the speeches of the protesters are reported more often also does not necessarily mean support for their case, but it does show that the regime and its spokesmen do not hold much credibility for the BBC. Interestingly, human rights groups are the least quoted group; they have been quoted only three times. Both the elites and human rights group are condemning the violence of the regime, which, if we also add them to the voices of *people on the ground*, makes it 19 voices critical of the regime against four voices more on the side of the regime. Counting the voices makes it sound like the BBC is fully supporting the

protesters, but that could only be an indicator and cannot be enough to gauge the attitude of any news media. Voices usually shed light on certain events and perspectives rather than others, and so foregrounding certain voices over others can bring different events to the foreground. The temporal placement of voices might also add credibility or cast doubts over what is being said, but that will only be examined in specific examples. Now, I would like to have a look at the selection of events and examine the emerging picture of the conflict.

The events described	No. of times
1- Syrians are protesting, asking for reform or revolution	6
2- Facebook pages encouraging people to protest and organising the protests around Fridays	0
3- al-Assad giving interviews and making speeches basically to say that his country is unlikely to go through a revolution and that reform will take time	0
4- The government introducing or promising some reforms like freeing prisoners, and helping the poor	4
5- The government cracking down on the peaceful protesters by arresting people, firing live ammunition or tear gas	8
6- The current situation where the Syrian government is stifling political freedom and crushing opposition groups and the effects of the emergency law	0
7- Corruption	0
8- Assad supporters demonstrating for him	2
9- al-Assad blames foreign conspiracy and armed groups	2
From the above events selected, I have found that:	
Events demonising al-Assad and his regime	14
Events painting a neutral or positive picture of al-Assad and his regime	6

Table 5-4 Events selected for the BBC coverage of Syria

The shaded events in the table represent al-Assad's violent or negative actions towards his people while the non-shaded present a positive or neutral picture of al-Assad. The table shows that 14 events are mentioned that demonise the regime and six that are rather in his favour. This shows that the BBC is still clinging, at the time, to some hope that the regime is going to make a compromise with its people by effecting some reforms, although it did acknowledge the suffering it brought upon its people for merely protesting.

5.4.3 Causal emplotment of the BBC in March 2011

Generally speaking, the BBC narratives of this period seem to have developed from the hope that the regime will be able to implement reforms enough to satisfy the people to the loss of hope and mocking its reforms. Nonetheless, it did sound apologetic at times as it justified the regime's heavy crackdown. In the next section, I have gone further than the selection of voices and events to investigate causal emplotment and how these events and voices were contextualised in terms of cause and effect, which was done via various means, including situating them among other voices and events, making direct comments, and temporality, where other current or previous events are mentioned serving to add certain interpretations to the events being discussed or voices reported. I will also discuss photos, highlights, and annotated links in this section and see how all of these elements may work in harmony towards the suggested interpretation. Three main ideas were suggested by causal emplotment and the framing elements just mentioned in the BBC coverage of the Syrian events in March; these are hope for reconciliation, the crackdown on protesters, and some implicit justification for the crackdown.

5.4.3.1 Hope for reconciliation

In *why is there no Egypt Style Revolution* (BBC, 4th March 2011), Lina Sinjab discusses how other revolutions in the Middle East affected the atmosphere in Syria and emboldened the people to speak up. During a scuffle between a traditional market tradesman and a policeman, hundreds of people gathered around in defence of the tradesman and chanted, 'The Syrian people should not be humiliated'. The article goes on describing the economic difficulties people are facing; one person tells her, for instance, that he cannot find bread.

The article also acknowledges another source for people's grievances, which is corruption:

But Syria suffers from corruption that goes all the way up the system.
The government is stepping up campaigns to fight it, but some figures close to the regime remain untouched
(BBC, 4th March 2011).

This is, nonetheless, kind of assuming that al-Assad is trying hard to reform against an old corrupt regime. Mentioning the involvement accusation of the US Treasurer Rami Makhoul in the corruption makes al-Assad appear innocent. The article, then, concludes that no

demonstrations were expected to happen in Syria soon for two reasons, the first is because of the lack of any real opposition inside the country because the regime would not allow it, and, the second because of the popularity of al-Assad who, despite the people's grievances and poverty with which the article started, is described as someone who improved the stagnant economy.

Since inheriting power from his father in 2000, he has introduced gradual reforms that have helped to revive the once stagnant economy and open up the media.

That has been enough to satisfy many (BBC, 4th March 2011).

It also finishes with a very hopeful note that 'many people now believe there is a golden opportunity for change and for a peaceful transition to a democratic system'. The photos in the article also express the same idea that, while there is heavy security presence in Syria and the people's poverty, al-Assad is trying to reform and is loved by his people:



Figure 5-2 Syrians have been hit by rising prices (BBC, 4th March 2011).

In Figure 5-2, people are shopping in a Syrian market where al-Assad's photo is hung in the middle. The photo's caption indicates the rising prices in Syria. Photos of al-Assad inside the market is an indication of the regime's total authority and its security clampdown on the people. In the next picture, al-Assad is surrounded by a crowd of people reaching out to him.



Figure 5-3 Caption: Assad's supporters out in force during religious celebration (BBC, 4th March 2011).

These two pictures enforce Sinjab's answer to *Why is there no Egypt style Revolution in Syria?* and fits in with the same narrative of a popular president gradually reforming although his country is hit by economic crises. Six links were annotated to this article. These are *Syria opens up to social networks* (BBC, 11th February 2011), *Syria attempts to develop infrastructure* (BBC, 31st October 2010), *Damascus sees new business horizons* (BBC, 7th August 2010), and *Are US sanctions against Syria working?* (BBC, 7th August 2010).

All of these links emphasise al-Assad's reforms which, in the end, make the idea of al-Assad the reformer even more present; even the article that discusses the US sanctions on Syria, talks rather favourably of al-Assad, who was described to be setting out to building bridges with the West 'unlike the Bush era' (BBC, 7th August 2010). I would also like to note here that I have not mentioned any annotated links that dated into the future and would not do it for any of the articles because my concern is with the narrative created at the time the article was written. Surely, links that lead to future articles were added for any duration of time after the original article was published.

In *Syria crisis: Can reforms appease protesters?* (BBC, 24th March 2011), the question casts doubts on the regime's ability to please the protesters. In addition, as I have mentioned in 5.4.1, the lead describes the plans for reforms as 'look[ing] good on paper'.

Nonetheless, these reforms are foregrounded in the article. Summarising and quoting Bouthaina Shaaban's speech of reforms extended to 16 paragraphs, almost half of the 40-paragraph article. We are told that Shaaban discussed three issues, which were satisfying the people of Deraa, addressing the grievances about the economic conditions, and paving the way for more political freedom. The scepticism with which the article started has now been

that of the opposition, not the BBC's Jim Muir, who now distances himself as he set out to give the detailed summary of the reforms:

Opposition circles were initially sceptical about the official decisions, announced by spokeswoman Bouthaina Shaaban after meetings of the ruling Baath Party's national command, headed by President Assad (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Reform discussions are accompanied by a photo of Bouthaina Shaaban, looking serious and sincere about whatever she is discussing:



Figure 5-4 Bouthaina Shaaban's statements surprised many opposition activists (BBC caption, 24th March 2011).

Furthermore, after discussing the proposed reforms, under the '*Damascus Spring*' subtitle, this article reminds people of the Damascus Spring, a brief period of freedom after al-Assad, the Western-educated ophthalmologist, inherited power from his father. This was soon repressed and people were not allowed to sound opposition again:

But Baath Party diehards reinforced the hard line and reform efforts died away, political dialogue collapsed and dissidents began to be arrested again (BBC, 24th March 2011).

This looks like a causal employment element by external retroversion, in which things in history are recalled to support a certain narrative, which is that al-Assad's reforms are fake, but is actually more to support the idea that he is trying to reform and is facing difficulties. First of all, there is the fact that it was the regime's *diehards* are who enforced the repression exempts Bashar al-Assad from responsibility. Also, it finishes with a long comment that stresses the fact that the Syrian regime is aware of what is happening in neighbouring countries and knows that reforms are a must. Moreover, in the comment, we are reminded of what happened in Egypt and Libya when Mubarak and Qadhafi started by challenging the

people and claiming it was a conspiracy, then trying to appease the people, and, eventually, losing control. These lessons are mentioned with the expectation that the Syrian regime was learning from them:

The Syrian leadership seems for the moment to have drawn back from the kind of draconian repression that it meted out to crush a revolt by the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in 1982.

It seems to be following the Egyptian and Tunisian examples rather than the Libyan model, though clearly with the hope that placatory measures may be in time to head off a national upheaval (BBC, 24th March 2011).

The comment written about the expectations that Syria will follow the path of Egypt and Tunisia is in an article that started by reporting on recent regime violence:

As the measures were being announced, government security forces were swamping the streets of Deraa, whereby most account that dozens of people have been shot dead in the past few days.

Scores of other political dissidents, including writers and democracy and internet activists, were also reported to have been arrested by the secret police in Damascus and other Syrian cities and towns (BBC, 24th March 2011).

To the side, there is a photo of al-Assad looking firm with his index finger pointing somewhere. Based on what has been reported in the BBC, one might envision him pointing fingers at some armed groups, but the caption says something different:



Figure 5-5 President Bashar al-Assad has awarded wage raises and other benefits (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Although this article started with a few paragraphs showing scepticism of al-Assad's proposed reforms and citing recent violence against protesters, which extended to no more

than five paragraphs, the article continued by placing a lot of hope of a government that seems to be ‘aware’ of the wave of change and ready to adjust, and, despite the fact that the article mentioned the Damascus spring in 2001 that was soon repressed, the blame was not thrown on the Western educated president, but on the old components of the regime that al-Assad inherited.



Figure 5-6 Clashes in Deraa reported to have left some protesters dead, though numbers are disputed (BBC, 24th March 2011)

A day after, in *Syria unrest: The government pledges political reforms* (BBC, 25th March 2011), which again discussed the same issue with not as much hope, although Shabaan’s talk was summarised respectfully. There are two videos, the first showed people protesting and chanting, ‘peaceful, peaceful’, and then, there was a meeting with a political activist in the UK who had relatives in Deraa and spoke of the dire situation there. The content of this video was not summarised in the text, which comprised mostly of promised reforms and of Shabaan defending the government. The article ends with two annotated links, one that leads back to the previous article, *Can reforms appease protesters?* another article that foregrounds al-Assad’s promised reforms.

5.4.3.2 The crackdown on civilians

In *Syria arrests Damascus protesters* (BBC, 16th March 2011), the article describes the anger of people who were demonstrating on a ‘day of rage’. People on the ground spoke of killing and arrests and even when the regime was reported to have said that it only arrested ‘infiltrators’, the BBC observed that a ten-year-old was also arrested, somehow refuting the claims of the regime that a little boy would not be an infiltrator.

Under the subtitle *No dissent*, readers will find the answer to why people were arrested. The regime was described as an authoritarian regime that tolerated no dissent. Al-Assad had

inherited the regime from his father, who ruled for thirty years; he did introduce some economic reforms, but, politically, the regime stifled freedoms as before. To the right side of the article, a picture of the interior ministry with two guards outside and, in the caption, the ministry is reported again to have said that troublemakers infiltrated the protests.



Figure 5-7 Interior Ministry officials say protests infiltrated by troublemakers (BBC, 16th March 2011).

Whatever meaning the picture might indicate, it was lost in a sea of causal emplotment in which where every time the regime blamed infiltrators, an incident was mentioned that proved that the government was the problem. When the Interior Minister was quoted blaming infiltrators again, towards the end of the article, his denial of the political nature of the protests was to be followed by a description of the political situation in which many political activists are in prison.

The interior ministry denied that the initial protest was political in nature.

‘There were some persons who took advantage of this call to slip among these people and tried to shout some slogans’, said Gen Mohamed Hassan al-Ali, of the interior ministry’s moral guidance department (BBC, 16th March 2011).

The response to this quote was not only about the political situation, but, extending to four paragraphs, with a comment also confirming that what is happening is political:

In January, President Assad told the Wall Street Journal that Syria was more stable than Tunisia and Egypt. He said that there was no chance of political upheaval, and pledged to press on with a package of reforms...but observers here believe events over the past couple of days have broken the silence that dominated the country (BBC, 16th March 2011).

In *Middle East unrest: Three killed at protest in Syria* (BBC, 18th March 2011), security forces are blamed directly for killing the protesters:

They were killed by security forces as protesters demanded political freedom and an end to corruption, eyewitnesses and activists told foreign media (BBC, 18th March 2011).

This was followed by mentioning that al-Assad had inherited power from his father in 2000 and that he ‘tolerates no dissent’. A picture of al-Assad to the side of the article, his forehead creased, and pointing fingers towards something, which could be the troublemakers he often claimed infiltrated the uprising. This is the same as 5.4 in *Hope for reconciliation*, in which the focus was on him making reforms. Here, however, the caption makes all difference.



Figure 5-8 President al-Assad inherited power from his father in 2000 (BBC, 18th March 2011).

Whereas the caption of Figure 5.4 describes reforms, Figure 5-8 mentions the fact that al-Assad inherited power from his father giving the impression that he would not give it up. Of course, the reader would assume that, in light of the previous comment, he ‘tolerates no dissent’.

This was followed by Western politicians condemning the regime crackdown, such as the White House National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vieto and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. In addition, *Silence broken in Syria* (BBC, 19th March 2011) links to a YouTube video in which protesters can be seen chanting, ‘no fear, no fear’. A screen cast of the video is posted as a picture to the side:



Figure 5-9 Four people were killed during Friday’s protest in Deraa (BBC, 19th March 2011).

People in Figure 5-9 were mourning the death of four people who were likely killed due to joining the protests. This picture summarises the whole text that describes how people were brutally attacked for merely breaking the silence. The Al Watan newspaper, which said that the government was going to investigate the killing as quoted by the BBC, was described as ‘close to the regime’.

On the same date, 19th March 2011, *Syria unrest: tear gas Fired at Deraa Funeral* recounted the same events and finished by directly blaming the regime, mentioning Al Watan reporting of the regime investigation of the killing, but not forgetting labelling it again for its closeness to the regime and finally finishing with the US condemnation of the regime:

They were killed by security forces as protesters demanded political freedom and an end to corruption, eyewitnesses and activists told foreign media.
Al-Watan newspaper, which is close to the government, says the authorities have pledged to investigate the deaths.

The US and UN both condemned the violence and urged the government not to use repression (BBC, 19th March 2011)

Finally, in *Syria unrest: US condemns ‘disproportionate force’* (BBC, 21st March 2011), the regime military reaction was described in which troops were deployed to Deraa and six people were killed, including an eleven-year-old child. The regime voice was completely absent in this article and the only speakers were people on the ground, activists describing what was happening, or spokesmen of the West condemning the regime’s use of force:

Later, Mr Vietor said reports indicated the Syrian authorities had in recent days ‘used disproportionate force against civilians, and in particular against demonstrators and mourners in Deraa’.
‘We call on the Syrian government to allow demonstrations to take place peacefully. Those responsible for the violence over the weekend must be held accountable’, he told reporters in Washington (BBC, 21st March 2011).

And:

‘The Syrian government has shown no qualms about shooting dead its own citizens for speaking out’, said Sarah Leah Whitson, HRW’s Middle East and North Africa director (BBC, 21st March 2011).

Sara Leah’s comments were highlighted to the side of the article. The condemned regime has

severely cracked down on peaceful civilians whose peaceful chants are reported in the text:

There were also demonstrations on Monday in the nearby agricultural town of Jassim, where people chanted 'This is peaceful' and 'God, Syria, freedom', and in the towns of Nawa and Inkil, during which marchers held placards saying 'freedom', according to the Reuters news agency (BBC, 21st March 2011).

The article finishes with the BBC stating that the Baath party had ruled Syria for over 50 years and that it was known for its brutal crackdown on dissent. Notably, all of these articles were linked to each other, which made their message that al-Assad and his regime took all of the blame for violence, even more powerful.

Finally, *Syria protests: The forgotten decades of dissent* (BBC, 29th March 2011) by Anne Alexander is an opinion article that described the regime history of brutally clamping over dissent. This whole article carried the element of causal employment as it reminded readers of other protest movements.

It also reminded people of how, specifically, the Hama Massacre was carried out by the regime more than thirty years ago to crush the Brotherhood rebellion, and thus, the regime bearing a history of massacring people to crush dissent was now completely blamed for the violence.

Regarding the regime's pledges of reform, the article quotes Mounir Attasi, who describes the regime promises as fake:

'What they hear in the media is completely different to what they see on the ground. That is why they don't believe the promises of the government that it will reform itself' (BBC, 29th March 2011).

Two photos were posted in this article, one of people in a demonstration, their hands up, fists closed as if chanting some revolutionary slogans:



Figure 5-10 Demonstrations held in Damascus and at least five other cities (BBC, 29th March 2011).

Towards the end of the article is another photo of the late Hafiz al-Assad painted over a wall beside which two soldiers are standing.



Figure 5-11 The late Syrian president Hafiz Al-Assad used brutal force to crush dissent (BBC, 29th March 2011).

These two photos parrot the exact opinion expressed in this article that people desperately wanted change, but the regime was expected to respond not with reforms, but with brutal force.

The article is also linked to another article that dated back to 2005, *Syria quashes last dialogue Forum* (BBC, 24th May 2005) discussing the regime's closing the last dialogue forum under allegations of extremism and links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, Anne Alexander's perception is more enforced of the regime that always had, and would, respond with force.

5.4.3.3 Some implicit justification for al-Assad violence

On 25th March, the headline was *Syria unrest: Government pledges political reforms*, where Bouthaina Shaaban was given a lot of space in which most of her speech about reforms was written in a detailed summary; a very important issue she addressed was not included in the

main text, but, interestingly, it was highlighted to the side where Shaaban blamed Islamists and terrorists who could reside in Deraa or come in from neighbouring countries.

DERAA

- Located 120km (75 miles) south of Damascus
- Mainly Sunni Muslim population
- Long known as gateway to the south
- Close to Jordanian border, and Islamist group bases in Jordan
- Thought Islamist groups could help exploit collapse of government control in Deraa

Figure 5-12 Highlighted information about Deraa (BBC, 25th March 2011)

The last two sentences in Figure 5-12 may be the most important points in the highlight. I wonder what the reader is expected to get from emphasising the fact that Islamist groups are based in Jordan at the borders of Deraa, or that Islamist groups might exploit the situation.

Immediately under the highlight, a link takes us to *Profile: Deraa and Hawran region* (BBC, 24th March 2011), which contained a detailed elaboration of the same main ideas highlighted in Figure 5-12, more emphasising the Islamic danger and the city's importance to al-Assad. The article commented that, 'Deraa is a city that the Syrian government simply cannot afford to lose', and stressed that the main challenge to al-Assad was losing control of the Jordanian border through which Islamists can get in:

Jordan's Islamic Action Front has a significant following in the nearby city of Irbid. This group has close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian branch of which operates in a semi-clandestine manner.

It has never forgiven the Syrian government for its massacre of thousands of Muslim Brothers and civilians in the northern city of Hama in 1982 (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Ironically, mentioning the Hama massacre here did not serve to throw blame on the regime for violence, nor was it to justify the current revolutions or the grievances that people might

be holding against the regime, but it seemed to make them sound dangerous, unforgiving, and bent on revenge. Also, they were, in the concluding paragraphs, depicted as going to *exploit*, rather than to benefit from the collapse, which usually indicates using something unfairly to your advantage. Thus, the peaceful revolution was expected to fall into the hands of Islamists who did not start it but will, nonetheless, use it to their own advantage. This served to justify al-Assad's crackdown on the protesters because he could not *afford to lose* the Jordanian border to Islamists, the statement that was in the second paragraph of the article. The article finished as it started, by emphasising the urgency with which al-Assad was expected to deal with the situation:

The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups might try to exploit a collapse of government control in Deraa by seeking support from across the Jordanian border. There is no doubt that the President Assad will do everything in his power to prevent this (BBC, 24th March 2011).

The photo, in this article, also emphasises the strategic importance of Deraa:



Figure 5-13 Deraa is strategically important in Syria's southern crossroads (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Finally, also on the 24th March, *Setting the Country Alight* was another article by Jim Muir that discretely warns of Islamic danger. Here, also, there is an attempt to report from both the activists and the regime without siding with any using words such as the *activists said*, and, *but officials said*, under the excuse that journalists were banned from the city and verifying information was rather difficult:

Both the official accounts and those of activists agreed that about half-a-dozen people were killed, making it the bloodiest single incident since Deraa was paralysed by protests and a security crackdown late last week (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Moreover, the government was described to be making a lot of effort to appease the people of Deraa, who were, nonetheless, continuing to protest:

‘Gravest internal challenge’

The continuing disturbances come despite official efforts to calm the situation by despatching high-ranking delegations to the area (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Muir, then, continued citing the conciliatory efforts of the regime, by sending delegates and dismissing the governor of Deraa, Faisal Khalthoum. These efforts, however, seemed futile as in the photo below of a man holding three of the flags that represented Syria before the Baath party took over and were usually waved by protesters who wanted the end of the regime; he stands over a windowsill and the glass of the window is shattered.



Figure 5-14 Six days after trouble started in Deraa, authorities struggle to contain it (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Referring to the protests as *trouble* that was *difficult to contain* tells of the BBC’s sympathy with al-Assad, rather than with the people being killed. Another photo was of a man inside a bombed outbuilding, eyeing the burned debris he is standing on; the comment relating to Figure 5-15 was rather chilling, as it suggested that it was the protesters behind the destruction:



Figure 5-15 Highly combustible? Syrian protesters hoping to set society alight.

This comment might be digestible if it had been for a photo of people demonstrating, but it is very strange that it is a photo of the destruction likely brought on by the regime. The protesters were not armed at all at this stage, so did this comment suggest that the people had brought it upon themselves?

When the article finally admits that al-Assad's overreaction caused the country to go aflame under the subtitle *No illusions*, it immediately mentioned the regime's awareness of the importance of change:

But thanks to heavy-handed official overreaction to minor local incidents, Deraa suddenly produced the kind of burning popular outrage that has spread like forest fires in other countries...*Syrian leaders have no illusions about immunity* (BBC, 24th March 2011).

In the Deraa context specifically, the regime seemed to be doing its best:

So the Syrian response at Deraa has been two-pronged: to try to contain the situation with a big security presence, while at the same time at least going through the motions of negotiating over local grievances and promising to investigate the killing of protesters last Friday and punish anyone found to be responsible (BBC, 24th March 2011).

Under the subtitle *Tribal Towns*, a photo of al-Assad is posted with the comment that he tolerates no dissent:



Figure 5-16 Bashar al-Assad, having ruled Syria since 2000, tolerates no dissent (BBC, 24th March 2011).

However, the meaning of this picture is completely lost as the article goes on to describe the possible sectarian dangers that could happen in case the regime falls; that was because of the fact that the majority of people in Deraa were Sunni, which, in the end, might create sectarian strife:

Corruption clampdown

Ironically, Israel itself as well as the US and western Europe, would also almost certainly be extremely reluctant to see a similar intervention against the Assad regime, given the huge uncertainty about what would follow in the Sunni-majority country.

Even at the height of tension between Washington and Damascus around 2004-5, the Americans made it clear, for that reason, that they wanted only to change Syria's behaviour, not its regime.

But if dissent should spread and control start to slip out of Mr Assad's grasp, the potential for sectarian civil strife in Syria would be considerable (BBC, 24th March 2011).

This is the third time the BBC emphasises the Sunni identity as cause of trouble in case the regime falls. In *Syria unrest: Government pledges political reforms* (BBC, 25th March 2011), the Sunnism of Deraa was highlighted in the highlight to the side of the article along with the threat of Islamic danger. See Figure 5-12.

In Syria unrest: Profile of Deraa and Hawran region:

The population here – like most of Syria – is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. This makes it potentially unfriendly territory for Alawites like the Assad family and their allies (BBC, 24th March 2011).

See how describing the city as 'overwhelmingly Sunni' seemed to demonise the citizens for simply who they were; majority Sunni citizens in a Syrian district could not be overwhelming in a country in which the majority of people were Sunni, and, hence, using *overwhelmingly* here connotes some prejudice against the majority people in Syria. The article goes on to state that the Sunni people being a majority in Deraa made it an *unfriendly territory* for the Alawites and al-Assad. These depictions were in an article that described the protests as *difficult to contain* and justified al-Assad's violence as he could not *afford to lose Deraa* to Sunni extremists who may come from Jordan and exploit the situation.

In these three articles, I see bias against the majority of the Syrians for being Sunni and for their connection to Islamists. For these reasons, the BBC had also justified the regime crackdown on the people, highlighted the regime's fake reform efforts, and also justified not intervening as the West would find al-Assad more acceptable than the Sunni Islamists.

According to the BBC, the West is reluctant to intervene 'given the huge uncertainty about what would follow in the Sunni-majority country' (BBC, 25th March 2011).

5.4.4 Discussion: A tentative narrative

At the start, it seemed that the BBC, in *Why is there no Egypt Style Revolution* (BBC, 4th March 2011), was not in support of protests, and while it acknowledged people's anger and frustration, it undermined them by stressing the fact that al-Assad was popular among his people and that he was introducing reforms satisfying enough to many. Moreover, even though the BBC mentioned the emergency law, which has been in effect since 1963, the impression was that it was not al-Assad's fault; he inherited the regime and its ills from his father and was now introducing reform. 'Since inheriting power from his father in 2000, he has introduced gradual reforms that have helped to revive the once stagnant economy and open up the media' (BBC, 4th March 2011).

Later, however, the BBC did criticise the regime in six out of the eleven articles in March 2011 by allowing activists and protesters to speak up, negatively labelling the regime and its media, and reporting the condemnation of the Arab League and Western elites. It also compared the current clampdown on the people to the Hama massacre in 1982, which flattened the city and killed up to 10,000 people. Thus, the BBC went from placing hopes in al-Assad and his reforms to criminalising him. This acknowledgement of the crimes of the regime was, unfortunately, reduced by giving weight to the regime allegations of Islamic threat and some bias against the Sunni identity of the revolution.

5.5 Syria narratives of Al Jazeera in March 2011

In a similar fashion to my investigation of the BBC, I study here the reaction of Al Jazeera to the uprising in Syria that was sparked in March 2011; I will make a detailed analysis of eleven articles that were published during this month and portray the variety of topics discussed regarding the Syrian uprising, starting with the paratextual elements as they guide the reader and direct their interpretation of the actors and events reported in the news as I have explained further in 5.3. I will note here that a Google Maps search did produce a bit more than eleven articles but I have, as I did with the BBC, deleted repetitive articles that carried exactly the same material but with different titles or dates. After studying the meanings suggested by the titles, the lead, and the subtitles, the route will lead us to make a detailed analysis of the narrative features used in the reports of March 2011, and, as a result,

the narratives suggested. The role of labelling, both inside the texts and in the titles themselves, will be discussed as a kind of both internal and paratextual framing.

5.5.1 Paratextual elements: Titles, introductions and subtitles

Headlines	The Lead	Subtitles
1- Protesters stage rare demo in Syria (Al Jazeera, 15 th March 2011)	Protesters in Damascus call for freedom in rare display of dissent against Bashar al-Assad's Baathist regime.	None
2- Violence erupts at protests in Syria (Al Jazeera, 18 th March 2011)	Reports of violence as residents of three towns fill the streets in demonstrations against the government.	'Acts of sabotage'
3- Syria protesters torch buildings (Al Jazeera, 20 th March 2011).	One person killed as demonstrations in the southern city of Daraa continue for a third straight day.	Children detained
4- Syria's coming revolution? (Al Jazeera, 22 nd March 2011)	By taking to the streets, even in fairly small numbers, Syrians have crossed a 'red line' with their regime.	Culture of dissent

Table 5-5 Titles, introductions, and subtitles in Al Jazeera

5- Deaths as Syrian forces 'storm mosque' (Al Jazeera 23 rd March 2011)	At least six reportedly killed, but authorities blame 'armed gang' for violence in southern city of Daraa.	Government version Emergency law
6- Anger in Syria over crackdown (Al Jazeera, 24 th March 2011)	About 20,000 people chanting freedom slogans march at funerals in Daraa for protesters killed by security forces.	Call for Friday protests 'Need for radical change' Violence condemned

7- Country Profile: Syria (Al Jazeera, 24th March 2011)	Background on the politics, economy and foreign relations of Syria.	Politics Economy Foreign relations Population
8- Deaths as Syrian forces fire on protesters (Al Jazeera, 26 th March 2011)	At least 20 killed near Daraa, a witness tells Al Jazeera, as anti-government protesters defy security crackdown.	Regime supporters take to streets 'Day of dignity'
9- Syrian cabinet resigns amid unrest (Al Jazeera, 29 th March 2011)	Government resigns as part of promised reforms after two weeks of protests, outgoing PM appointed caretaker premier.	'Chaos' Expected reforms Protest violence
10- A defiant Bashar al-Assad (Al Jazeera, 30 th March 2011)	Al Jazeera's senior analyst deciphers whether the Syrian president's speech was historical or merely political.	None
11- Assad orders review of Syrian laws (Al Jazeera, 31 st March 2011)	Syrian president has set up committees to look into deaths of protesters and replacing decades-old emergency laws.	'Martyrs Day' 'Protesters arrested' Sectarian tensions

Table 5-6 Titles, introductions, and subtitles in Al Jazeera

After reading the titles along with the introductions and subtitles, we can note that the majority of articles, six out of eleven, emphasise that violence was committed by the regime against peaceful protesters. Early on, Al Jazeera made it clear that it distanced itself from regime narratives through the use of quotation marks hinting at its lack of credibility. This is seen in *Violence erupts in Syria* (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011) which was paired with the subtitle, 'Acts of sabotage', in reference to the regime blaming the violence on some infiltrators. Also, after the title *Deaths as Syrian forces 'storm mosque'* (Al Jazeera, 23rd March 2011), came two subtitles; *Government version* in an indication that there was another

version of events which might be more or less credible, and *Emergency law*, which served as a causal emplotment providing the context that incited people to protest.

One article, *Syria: country profile* (Al Jazeera, 24th March 2011), seemed to be highlighting the political, economic, and foreign relations in Syria. The titles and subtitles did not suggest how these issues will be treated, but any historical account is causal emplotment because every piece of history is selectively presented to support a certain narrative, a specific look at events.

There are three titles that mentioned the reform by the regime, *Syrian cabinet resigns amid Unrest* (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011), an opinion article titled *Defiant Bashar al-Assad* (30th March 2011), and *Assad orders review of Syrian laws* (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011), but whatever hope one may get from both of these titles is undermined by the following subtitles and even the next title. For the first, it was followed by the subtitles *chaos, expected reform, and protest violence*. Except for the second subtitle, these subtitles suggest that things are out of control, while the second article indicates Bashar's inability to concede to the will of his people. Finally, the third article, where its introduction also promised reform, it was followed by '*Martyrs Day*', which even though it was between inverted commas, indicated that people were dying, '*protesters arrested*' ironically as al-Assad was promising reform, and, finally, *sectarian tensions*, a subtitle not clear at whom fingers were pointed.

This leaves us with another opinion article, *Syria's Coming Revolution?* (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011). In its introduction, it is indicated that even if protesters were few, they had crossed a 'red line', and were now *challenging the regime*. Under the second subtitle, *A culture of dissent*, the author seems to provide causal emplotment as the current protest is going to be linked to other protests, which happened earlier in Syria.

To summarise, Al Jazeera focused on the violence of the regime and even when it mentioned its reform promises, it undermined it in the narrative by, again, reminding readers of the chaos and violence committed by the regime. Al Jazeera seems to full heartedly support the Syrian revolt and as expressed in the opinion articles, al-Assad was a defiant leader who did not seem to be bringing about real reform and that a Syrian revolution was now in the making.

5.5.2 Selective appropriation: Events and voices

Through studying the paratextual elements of Al Jazeera, one can see that they weaved together a negative picture of the Syrian regime by focusing on its violence, and gave little hope of reform. Going deeper, we need to observe how the choice of events, voices, and actors can help support the advocated narrative. I have made a list of the events mentioned and the number of their occurrences.

The events described	No. of times
1- Syrians are protesting, asking for reform or revolution	8
2- Facebook pages encouraging people to protest and organising the protests around Fridays	1
3- Demonstrations in support of other demonstrations	0
4- al-Assad giving interviews and making speeches basically to say that his country is unlikely to go through a revolution and that reform will take time.	2
5- The government introducing or promising some reforms such as freeing prisoners and helping the poor	7
6- The government cracking down on the peaceful protesters by arresting people, firing live ammunition or tear gas	20
7- The current situation where the Syrian government is stifling political freedom and crushing opposition groups and the effects of the emergency law	4
8- Corruption	0
9- Violence committed by protesters	2
10- Assad supporters demonstrating for him	3
11- Assad blaming foreign conspiracy and armed groups	3
12- Minor reforms	3
13- Events demonising al-Assad and his regime	38
14- Events painting a neutral or positive picture of al-Assad and his regime	13

Table 5-7 Al Jazeera reported events of March 2011

The shaded events in the table represent al-Assad’s violent or negative actions towards his people, while the non-shaded events present a positive or neutral picture of al-Assad.

It is clear that only 13 of the mentioned events provide a somewhat acceptable picture of al-Assad, 38 events point fingers at the regime, and 20 of these directly mention the government crackdown on the protesters. Since events are mostly expressed through the voices employed, foregrounding certain voices over others can, therefore, also foreground the events by those speakers as well. Not only that, the temporal placement of voices might add credibility or cast doubts over what is being said. Examples will be seen as we discuss causal employment in the next section. I proposed four groups of voices when I first discussed voices at the BBC in 5.4.2: the elite (mostly Western and Arab politicians), the regime and its spokesmen, human rights organisations, and the people on the ground. These are the people whose poverty and ill-treatment may have driven them to revolt despite the dire consequences of their dissent and those who witnessed at first-hand the protests and the government’s reaction to them. Generally, Al Jazeera cited all of these voices.

At this stage, the elite list included spokesmen or high officials for the US, for European countries, the UN, and for the Arab League. The second group, the Syrian regime, includes al-Assad and any of his official spokesmen and supporters such as the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). The third is the human rights groups, Western and Syrian, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Finally, the last group are the people on the ground who might be referred to as witnesses, residents, protesters, and activists.

Below is a table of the voices that spoke to us in these articles and their number of occurrences.

Voices allowed to speak	No. of references
The elites	6
The regime	19
Human rights groups	8
People on the ground	36

Table 5-8 voices of Al Jazeera, March 2011 coverage

The most referenced voices here are the people on the ground, who can be anything from witnesses, residents, protesters, and activists to Al Jazeera correspondents, cited seven times and, usually, from inside Syria or Lebanon. The regime and its spokesmen come second. This is normal as these two were the basic actors in this conflict, but the number of voices of people on the ground is almost double that of the regime, which shows how much support Al Jazeera has given to the protesters and their narratives. Finally, both the elites and human rights groups were cited condemning the regime in all of the instances, which totals more than 14 voices condemning the regime. If we add that number to the 36 voices representing protesters mostly talking of regime's violence, that makes up fifty voices against the 19 voices defending the regime. Clearly, the regime was the loser here and whatever narratives it might have tried to advocate were completely overwhelmed by the 50 voices blaming the regime for the devastating reality.

5.5.3 Causal emplotment of Al Jazeera in March 2011

As I indicated when discussing the BBC narratives of March in 5.4, the selection of voices and events is never a sufficient indicator of the news media's stance towards the narrative that might be initially suggested. Focusing on the regime violence and crackdown on the protesters may show impartiality, but may not necessarily mean justifying the protests or the necessity to remove the criminal regime. It may be to point out that protesters are a challenge to the regime and that protesters killed in large numbers could have been a problem that needed containing.

Similarly, allowing the regime to speak of reform and blame armed gangs might undermine it and make it a target for mockery. This has to do with causal emplotment, with how these voices and events are situated among other voices and events, which may have taken place at the same time or earlier. Direct comments can also affect the narratives of the voices and events represented. I will also, in this section, discuss photos and annotated links because they do not only frame the text, but also serve to enforce the causal emplotment within it. The main issues that dominated Al Jazeera coverage were justification for the rebellion, high expectations for a sweeping revolution, fake promises of the regime, and the crack down on civilians.

5.5.3.1 Justification for the rebellion

In the first article published about the protests on the 15th March, *Protesters stage rare demo in Syria*, Al Jazeera, which was, like the BBC, banned from entering Syria, described in detail a YouTube video published by the protesters. The demonstrators were chanting, ‘peaceful, peaceful’ and ‘God, Syria, freedom’. In the lead, *protesters in Damascus call for freedom in rare display of dissent*, the protesters’ call for freedom was emphasised. One gets the impression that those people were finally breaking chains and gasping for breath. This was followed by a long commentary about the regime repression:

The regime is considered one of the most repressive in the Middle East with political opposition locked up and media tightly controlled (Al Jazeera, 15th March 2011).

Then the comments of two human rights organisations ensued, Human Rights Watch, based in New York and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in the UK, both listing human rights abuses by the regime such as ‘jailing lawyers and torturing opponents’. In *violence erupts at protests in Syria* (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011), protests were instantly justified in the first sentence after the lead:

Protests have erupted in at least three towns across Syria in the most serious case of unrest in decades for a country that has been ruled with strict emergency laws for almost half a century (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011).

People were finally protesting after silently bearing decades of emergency law, which allowed authorities to detain people for whatever security reasons.

In *Syria protesters torch buildings* (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011), a lot of justification was articulated for the burning of the buildings through commentary and voices; first of all, people were angry at the killing of protesters two days earlier, demanded the scrapping of the emergency law and calling for an end to corruption. The burned buildings were the headquarters of the Baath regime that the people wanted to overthrow and a branch Syriatel, a phone company that belonged to Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of al-Assad, and who was accused of corruption by the US. Regarding this, an activist commented:

‘They burned the symbols of oppression and corruption’, an activist said. ‘The banks nearby were not touched’ (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011).



Figure 5-17 Condolences session held in Daraa for those killed [AFP/SANA] (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011).

The photo of people attending a funeral proved that the regime had fuelled people's anger by killing innocent civilians, which could have pushed them to act violently.

Furthermore, in *Syria's cabinet resigns amid unrest* (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011) and *Assad orders review of Syrian law* (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011), people's grievances are cited again:

They also called for the release of thousands of political prisoners and for Assad to allow freedom of speech and assembly and curb the free reign the security apparatus enjoys in the country of 22 million (Al Jazeera, 29th March).

Also, commenting on the promised reforms, the emergency law was described as *despicable*: 'This would pave the way for lifting the state of emergency laws,' it said. The widely despised, decades-old emergency laws give the regime a free hand to arrest people without charge.

5.5.3.2 High expectations for a sweeping revolution

Akin to citing people's grievances against the regime is the assumption that protests would sweep the country. In *Deaths as Syrian forces 'storm mosque'* (Al Jazeera, 23rd March 2011), five links are annotated; two of them lead us to opinion articles written in March, 2011 as well, which were *Syria's coming Revolution* (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011) and *Is Syria the next domino* (Al Jazeera, 6th March 2011).

Both articles saw the situation in Syria as very similar to that of Egypt and Tunisia in terms of being under the control of an authoritarian regime, the lack of freedom, and poverty. In the first, *Syria's coming revolution*, written after the spark of the protests, Yasser Tabbara stated that, despite the small number of protesters, there was no coming back for the Syrians who had 'crossed a red line' and that the revolution was not only possible but 'inevitable'. He also said that the Syrians would be able to unite:

People are finally realising that they are entitled to what is fundamentally theirs, and like their Tunisian and Egyptian sisters and brothers, they will know what do with it. They will organise and come together and they will learn to build a revolution and a more prosperous Syria (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011).

In the latter, Ribal al-Assad, Director of the Organization for Democracy and Freedom in Syria, warned of imminent revolution if the regime, which was not as immune as it thought, did not make serious reforms. At the beginning of Ribal's article, there was a photo of a boy carrying the Syrian flag:



Figure 5-18 A Druze boy wears a Syrian army uniform to mark the anniversary of Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. [GALLO/GETTY] (Al Jazeera, 6th March 2011).

The caption of the photo said it all, that the regime could no longer rely on its resistant fake narrative. In actual fact, Ribal said, in the article, that the Syrian regime told Iran that they were too weak to assist in striking Israel if the latter chose to.

The three other linked articles were *Deaths as Syrian forces 'storm mosque'* (Al Jazeera, 23rd March 2011), *Syria: 'A kingdom of silence'* (Al Jazeera, 9th February 2011) and *Unblocking Syria's social media* (Al Jazeera, 12th February, 2011). The last two serve as examples of external retroversion in which the article referred to things that had happened earlier than the

current event in order to create a connection between these events. In *Syria: 'A kingdom of silence'*, Wikstrom argued that Syria shared authoritarian rule and poverty with Egypt and Tunisia, but the repressive security system was the one reason people could not revolt; Syrians were far more afraid of the Syrian security forces than the Egyptians and Tunisians were. A Human Watch researcher based in Lebanon reminded readers of the heavy price paid by Islamists who revolted in the early 1980s, which the regime found enough justification for the Hama massacre and of the brutal response to the Kurds who revolted in 2004 in Qamishli. Citing other factors that made revolting unlikely, which were al-Assad's relative popularity and religious diversity, Wikstrom distances himself by citing anonymous analysts:

However, analysts say that in addition to the repressive state apparatus, factors such as a relatively popular president and religious diversity make an uprising in the country unlikely (Al Jazeera, 9th February 2011).

Although the article did discuss al-Assad popularity, it emphasised the *repressive state apparatus* and poverty over anything else. When one student praised the economic reforms made by al-Assad, Wikstrom commented by elaborating on al-Assad's move to capitalism, which improved the lives of some, hit hard on many others. The article finished with the expectation of a looming revolution quoting Nadim Houry, a Human Watch researcher who says that:

Houry says the lesson from Tunisia, which has been hailed as an economic role model in North Africa, is that economic reform on its own does not work.

'It will be interesting to watch how things are going to unfold over the coming few months', he says. 'The Syrians, like any other Arab household today, have their TVs turned on to Al Jazeera. They're seeing what's happening in Tunisia and Egypt. Freedom is an infectious feeling and I think people will want more freedom' (Al Jazeera, 9th February 2011).

Finally, Unblocking Syria's social media (Al Jazeera, 12th February 2011) discussed the motives behind allowing freer access to the internet whether it was a kind of reform and moving on or a further way to curb the freedom of Syrians. The lead sentence, 'Some wonder if Syria's decision to allow access to Facebook and blog sites is just a new way to track activists', emphasised the latter which reflected on the whole article as well. Another article that emphasised the idea of the inevitable revolution was *A defiant Bashar al-Assad* (Al Jazeera, 30th March 2011), where Marwan Bishara stated that the empty slogans of Pan Arabism can no longer appease the Syrians:

In reality, Arabs can't live on or by national slogans. Pan Arabism is a mere mirage if not motivated by, and translated into, concrete political and economic freedoms and prosperity for each and every individual Arab nation. That's what the Arab revolution is all about and Syria, as Assad likes to claim, is part and parcel of the Arab world (Al Jazeera, 30th March 2011)

Also, the article started with a photo of a pair of hands raising fingers painted with the Syrian flag against a photo of al-Assad suggesting the Syrian people's defiance against al-Assad despite the brutal crackdown.



Figure 5-19 Fingers painted with Syrian flag raised against a photo of Bashar al-Assad, March 2011

Related to the idea that the revolution was imminent, was the idea that the regime was not as popular as claimed; when pro-regime demonstrations were reported, it was often claimed that they were staged. In *Syrian cabinet resigns amid unrest* (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011), a video was posted at the top of the article of pro-regime rallies with a subtitle written inside the video indicating a 'Pro-Assad rally staged in Damascus'. Also, a photo of pro-regime rallies came at the top of *Assad orders review of Syrian laws* (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011):



Figure 5-20 Supporters of Assad staged large counter-protests in Damascus [Reuters] (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011)

The word *staged* was used again in the caption of the photo, which was a labelling element implicating that these demonstrations were not real.

5.5.3.3 Fake promises of the regime

Three articles discussed the reforms made by the regime towards the end of the month as a response to the protests of the people. All of the articles undermined these reforms as fake and ineffective. In *Syrian cabinet resigns amid unrest* (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011), readers were immediately reminded that this was not significant as power was not in the hands of the cabinet, but was concentrated at the hands of al-Assad:

The government has little power in Syria, where power is concentrated in the hand of Assad, his family and the security apparatus (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011).

In *A defiant Bashar al-Assad* (Al Jazeera, 30th March 2011), Bishara describes al-Assad's speech as disappointing and as a sign that no reforms were in the way; there will be no lifting of the emergency law nor any other significant reforms; al-Assad also reiterates ideals of national unity and gradual reforms that never translate into reality:

But it seems there is never a good time for reform in Syria. Indeed, events from 9/11 to the 2008 Israeli invasion of Gaza, through the invasion of Iraq, and the 2005–2007 complications in Lebanon have been counted by the president as reasons for not instituting reforms (Al Jazeera, 30th March 2011).

Finally, in *Assad orders review of Syrian laws* (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011), scrapping the 32 cabinet members was described as merely symbolic:

Assad dismissed his 32-member cabinet on Tuesday in a move designed to mollify the anti-government protesters, but the overture was largely symbolic.

Assad holds the lion's share of power in the authoritarian regime, and there are no real opposition figures or alternatives to the current leadership (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011).

The article concluded by stating that the regime had no real will for reform, but was following a strategy of cracking on the demonstrators while, simultaneously, offering them very little:

Assad, who inherited power 11 years ago from his father, appears to be following the same strategy of other autocratic leaders who attempt to quell uprisings by offering minor concessions coupled with brutal crackdowns (Al Jazeera, 31st March 2011).

5.5.3.4 *The crackdown on civilians*

In *Violence erupts at protests in Syria* (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011), the regime was blamed for killing protesters by citing witnesses, activists, and Reuters:

Witnesses reported that at least three people had been killed by security forces in the southern city of Deraa on Friday, where anti-government demonstrators had gathered after midday prayers (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011).

The regime was cited as well as *blaming* infiltrators:

The state news agency SANA said ‘acts of sabotage’ had broken out at the protest, which prompted the security forces to intervene.

‘Infiltrators took advantage of a gathering of citizens near the Omari Mosque in the city of Deraa on Friday afternoon to provoke chaos through acts of violence which resulted in damage to private and public property’, the agency reported (Al Jazeera, 18th March 2011).

This was immediately followed by witnesses stating that violence started when the regime hit people with batons and with a description of a video from Facebook of a man being dragged out of the Omari mosque by the Syrian authorities.

Also, in *Deaths as Syrian forces ‘storm mosque’*, it appeared that Al Jazeera believed the regime to be lying from the start. The lead sentence of this article was ‘At least six reportedly killed, but authorities blamed ‘armed gangs’ for the violence in southern city of Daraa’. Using *but*, signified an unexpected event, *blame*, which required evidence, and placing armed gangs between inverted commas all suggested that the regime was denying the fact of who was really behind the killing of the protesters. Moreover, when the accusations of the regime were cited, again residents were cited telling a different story. The article cited the regime again under the subtitle *Government version*, purported by SANA and in an indication that this was not the reality. This section ended not with residents or activists, but with Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and his spokesman Rupert Colville, calling on the Syrian authorities to stop the violence.

Another article, *Syria’s coming revolution?* (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011), started with the following photo:



Figure 5-21 Funerals held for protesters killed in Dara'a [Reuters] (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011).

In the photo, protesters were marching at a funeral, while carrying the dead body of what may have been another protester. Yasser Tabbarah confirmed in the article that protesters were killed by the regime:

In Dara'a, a southwestern city on the Jordanian border, protests have turned deadly and the regime has sealed off the city in a hurried attempt to quell the spreading unrest. (Al Jazeera, 22nd March 2011).

Syria protesters torch buildings (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011) also described how the regime detained children and then arrested people who called for their release. Here was a comment on the arrest of a woman activist, Jawabra, and others:

Jawabra was campaigning for the release of the 15 schoolchildren from her home city. Another prominent woman from Daraa, physician Aisha Aba Zeid, was arrested three weeks ago for posting a political opinion on the internet.

Residents say the arrest of the two women deepened feelings of repression and helped fuel the protests in Daraa, close to the border with Jordan. (Al Jazeera, 20th March 2011)

In the same manner, blaming the regime was resonant in almost every article, including *Deaths as Syrian forces fire on protesters* (Al Jazeera, 26th March 2011) where the blame was outright in the title and *Syrian cabinet resigns amid unrest* (Al Jazeera, 29th March 2011).

In order to confirm that Al Jazeera had continued to speak negatively of al-Assad and blamed him for the violence, I have resorted to NVivo. I first looked at the most frequent 30 words in Al Jazeera in its coverage from March to October 2011:

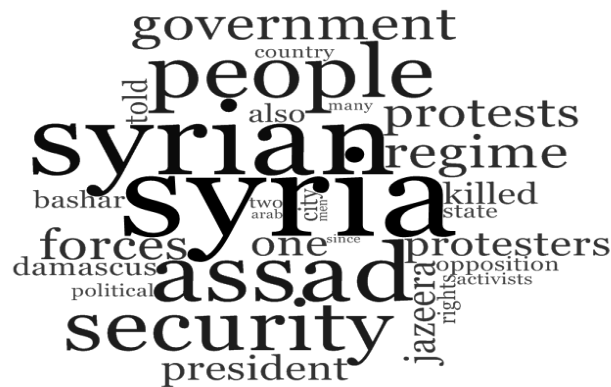


Figure 5-22 The 30 most frequent words in Al Jazeera from March to October, 2011.

As in the BBC, *Assad* comes about as the third frequent word after *Syria* and *Syrian*. *People* takes fourth place to be followed by four other words related to the regime, which are, in order, *security*, *government*, *regime*, and *forces*. *Protesters* take eleventh place and *activists* come much later.

5.5.4 Discussion: Unwavering blame of al-Assad

Al Jazeera, like the BBC, presented al-Assad as responsible for most of the violence on his people. However, unlike the BBC, Al Jazeera gave al-Assad no chance and there was no talk of al-Assad as a reformer and any mention of his popularity was undermined in the coverage such as emphasising the fact that pro-regime demonstrations were staged. During the month of March 2011, Al Jazeera's narrative of the Syrian conflict revolved around four main ideas. These were the justification for rebellion as well as high expectations for a sweeping revolt, labelling al-Assad reforms as fake, and emphasising al-Assad's crackdown on his people.

5.6 Armed rebellion

5.6.1 Introduction

In this section, I would like to focus on the armed rebellion that was formed in August 2011 by army deserters in Turkey (BBC, 13th December 2013), but actually started to be reported in both the BBC and Al Jazeera in November 2011. The formation of the Free Syrian Army was very significant in that it turned what were peaceful demonstrations into armed rebellion bringing about different reactions not only from the media, but also from the opposition itself. Some viewed this as an expected reaction to the violent crackdown by the regime on helpless people (Al Om, 2018), while others saw that this development was leading the country into

civil war and renewing sectarian divisions (Tokmajyan, 2015). News media are expected to be neutral, but in reality, this is hardly possible. They should always try to expose the truth, which might be in support of one side or another. However, whatever narrative any news media may support or provide should be based on evidence or, otherwise, the position taken would be biased.

Pointing out that impartiality was not the right way to judging bias in the news and that news media should take positions fairly as reality does not lie in between, Boudana (2015) proposed a model based on ‘consistency and justification of position taking’ (p. 600). While this research is based on the narrative theory, not on Boudana’s model, the same outlook persists in this research, which is that, if positions are taken, they should be justified, not built on false assumptions.

As I am looking here, basically, at the reaction of both the BBC and Al Jazeera at the formation of the Free Syrian, neither of the two news media were impartial and both took positions as will also be seen in the detailed analysis of November. This chapter will start by tracking down the articles published in both media about the Syrian revolution in November. The detailed analysis will start by looking at the framing elements of titles and subtitles first, then the narrative elements of selective appropriation and causal emplotment; causal emplotment will be discussed along other framing elements, which are videos, photos, annotated links, and labelling.

5.6.2 BBC coverage of the uprising in November 2011

I will start my analysis for the month of November by studying the initial reaction of the BBC towards the armed rebellion by looking first at the paratextual framing elements. I will then move to the narrative elements, selective appropriation and causal emplotment as well as other framing elements, including videos, photos, annotated links, and labelling in an attempt to tease out pieces of the story into one big picture.

5.6.2.1 Titles, lead, and subtitles for the month of November 2011

Headline	The Lead	Subtitles
1- Syria accepts Arab League peace plan after Cairo (BBC, 2 nd November 2011)	None	Freedom of movement
2- Arab League sanctions for Syria (BBC, 12 th November 2011)	The Arab League has voted to suspend Syria from its meetings and impose sanctions against Damascus over its failure to end a government crackdown on protesters.	'Concern for Syria' 'Not Libya'
3- Syria's Assad should step aside, says Jordan's Abdullah (BBC, 15 th November 2011)	Like most Arab leaders, Jordan's King Abdullah is still grappling with how best to respond to the growing crisis in Syria.	Surprising candour
4- Syria crisis: Erdogan steps up Turkey pressure on Assad (BBC, 15 th November 2011)	None	'Malicious' side-lining Tragedy foretold
5- Syria: New UN call over human rights abuses (BBC, 17 th November 2011).	Germany, France and the UK have tabled a UN resolution calling for an end to human rights violations in Syria.	Rebel attack
6-Syria 'to accept' Arab League monitoring mission (BBC, 18 th March 2011).	None	None
7-Syria unrest: Arab League sanctions' potential impact (BBC, 20 th November 2011)	None	None

Table 5-9 Titles and subtitles in the BBC for the month November 2011

Headline	The lead	Subtitles
8- Syrian rebel leader waiting in Turkey (BBC, 24 th November 2 2011)	Tracking down and interviewing Colonel Riyad al-Asad close to Turkey's border with Syria is not an easy business.	'Assad finished' Reluctance to join 'civil war'
9- Syria slowly inches towards civil war (BBC, 26 th November, 2011).	'They're asking for RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) in al Bayadah', said the young fighter, naming another district in Homs.	Avoiding patrols 'Constant fear' 'Heard screams' Army post attack
10- UN accuses Syria of gross systematic human rights violations (BBC, 28 th November 2011)	None	None
11- Syria: The view from next door (BBC, 29 th November 2011)	As Syria faces growing economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation and condemnation over what the United Nations calls 'gross human rights violations' for its crackdown on protesters, the BBC's Jim Muir considers how the country's immediate neighbours are reacting and how the outcome to the crisis may affect them.	Lebanon TURKEY IRAQ JORDAN ISRAEL
12- Turkey imposes economic sanctions on Syria (BBC, 30 th November 2011)	Turkey has announced a raft of economic sanctions on Syria over its crackdown on protesters.	Unprecedented sanctions Prisoners released

Table 5-10 Titles and subtitles in the BBC for the month of November 2011

Twelve articles were written about Syria in November 2011; ten of these articles discussed the Arab, Turkish, and international reaction towards the regime's crackdown on protesters. The reaction was basically economic sanctions on Syria, freezing assets and travel bans of some influential people in the Syrian regime, condemnation of the regime's actions, and calls for Assad to step down, such as the article about the Jordanian king saying that, if he were in Assad's place, he would step down.

When it comes to the requirements of the Arab League in Syria, not only did they ask the regime to stop its crackdown on civilians, but also to allow for the *freedom of movement* (BBC, 2nd November 2011) for journalists and human rights activists.

Al-Assad did not seem to be living up to his promises, which caused *concern for Syria* (BBC, 12th November 2011), but this was *not Libya* (BBC, 12th November 2011), so the Arab League was neither calling for international military intervention, nor for a no-fly zone as it did in Libya.

Uncharacteristically, the King of Jordan was the first Arab leader to call al-Assad to step down in a *surprising candor* (BBC, 15th November 2011); he also said that no Arab country was considering military intervention and that, if they interfered, each country would have a different agenda and it would be like opening '*Pandora's box*' (BBC, 15th November 2011). Erdogan said that, like any dictator, al-Assad would soon see his tragic end, a reaction that the Syrian government considered a conspiracy with the other Arab states and '*malicious side-lining*' (BBC, 15th November 2011).

Syria 'to accept' Arab League monitoring mission (BBC, 18th November 2011) suggests that Syria was going to accept the Arab monitoring mission; the effect of the sanctions on the Syrian economy, as Syria relies on its neighbours for trade, was discussed in *Syria unrest: Arab League sanctions' potential impact* (BBC, 20th November 2011). A third article towards the end of the month, *Turkey imposes economic sanctions on Syria* (BBC, 30th November 2011) also discussed the *unprecedented sanctions* on Syria by Turkey and the Arab League, which was followed by *prisoners released*, suggesting an attempt at reconciliation by the regime.

In two articles, one described the UN condemnation of the gross human rights abuse committed by the regime, *UN accuses Syria of gross systematic human rights violations* (BBC, 28th November 2011), and, in the other, *Syria: New UN call over human rights abuses* (BBC, 17th November 2011) three European countries Germany, France, and the UK tabled a UN resolution to condemn human rights abuse, but there was also a *rebel attack* on Syrian soldiers.

Here, the subtitle, *rebel attack*, did not seem to be only providing more details, but may be contrasting the main title *UN Call over Human Right Abuses* because it could suggest that both sides of the conflict, the Syrian regime, on the one hand, and the opposition, on the other, were committing human rights abuse. However, it could also be understood the other

way round, in that the rebel attack was the legitimate or, at least, the natural reaction to the human rights abuse committed by the Syrian regime. This can be confirmed by looking at the causal emplotment within the same article.

Towards the end of November the first two articles that discussed the emerging armed rebellion were published. The first, *Syrian rebel leader waiting in Turkey* (BBC, 24th November 2011) discussed an interview with the FSA rebel leader, Riyadh al-Asaad, who was waiting in Turkey and said that *Assad is finished*. This hopeful subtitle is followed by a bleak one, *Reluctance to join 'civil war'*, in suggestion that the armed rebellion had already driven the country towards the civil war. *Syria inches towards civil war* (BBC, 26th November 2011) also suggested that armed rebellion was further destroying the country. The subtitles that followed, *avoiding patrols, a sense of fear, 'heard screams, and 'post army attack'* suggested a state of war and a great sense of fear although it may not be clear who did what to whom. In light of the title about the civil war Syria was inching towards, one may understand that they pointed to exchanged violence between both sides.

All in all, it seemed from the basic framing elements, titles, and subtitles that nine articles focused on the Arab, Turkish, and international reaction to the violent crackdown on Syrians.

They might be considered to be pointing fingers at the regime or just neutrally telling what was going on, but the two remaining articles discussed armed rebellion almost as another culprit in causing and inflaming tensions in Syria. There, however, remains the need to look at the other elements within these articles, which are selective appropriation and causal emplotment, along with labelling, videos, photos, and annotated l

5.6.2.2 Selective appropriation

5.6.2.2.1 Events

In this section, I read through all of the articles that were written in November, named the events, and counted the number of times they were told. The choice of events is very important in the creation of narratives, although it remains for causal emplotment to create the final decision in the shaping narrative

The events described	No. of times
1- Syrians are protesting asking for reform or the fall of the regime	2
2- al-Assad giving interviews and making speeches basically to say that his country is unlikely to go through a revolution and that reform will take time./ defiance by the regime by saying it will continue the crackdown and	1
3- The government cracking down on the peaceful protesters by arresting people, firing live ammunition or tear gas.	16
4- The current situation where the Syrian government is stifling political freedom and restricting the access of journalists.	1
5- Corruption.	0
6- International condemnation of al-Assad regime	4
7- Arab condemnation of the regime	4
8- Action taken against the regime	21
9- Regimes reaction to action taken	5
10- Actions done by armed rebellion	1
11- Violence committed by Assad' s supporters	2
12- Violence committed by protesters	0
13- Reconciliation by the regime like freeing prisoners and accepting the Arab League plan	2
14- Requests and actions by the opposition for a no-fly zone or international intervention	2
15- Action by Russia and China, mainly vetoing UN decisions against Syria and defending the regime	1
16- Turkish support of the protesters by opening its borders to refugees and dissenters	2
17- Events demonising al-Assad and his regime	64
18- Events painting a neutral or positive picture of al-Assad and his regime	7

Table 5-11 Events described in the BBC in November 2011

Events that are shaded in dark grey are those that depicted the regime negatively; the events shaded in light grey depict the regime either neutrally or positively, or pointed fingers at other factors of violence, such as the armed rebellion. It appears by looking at the above table that, among the most prominent events described in these articles, was the violence committed by the regime against the protesters, which included shooting, arresting, torturing, and even using tank fire. These incidents were mentioned 16 times. Also, more prominent was news about action taken against the regime, which included sanctions, condemnation, and requests that al-Assad submitted to the Arab League plan. These events were mentioned 29 times and were the most dominant news in correlation with the titles discussed. Indeed, the violence committed by the regime and the reaction to it were the most important news items during the period. Of all the events, 64 painted al-Assad in dark tones and rather criminalised him. Only one event showed violence committed by the rebels and two events expressed a positive action by al-Assad by freeing prisoners and accepting the Arab League plan.

5.6.2.2.2 Voices

Voices are also important, as it is through the eyes of the speakers that we see the events and interpret them. However, voices, as well as events, could be easily manipulated. Not only that, only parts of the speech is selected and highlighted but also the position of the events and voices might be to undermine them, rather than emphasising them.

Voices allowed to speak	No. of references
Western elites	8
Arab league spokesmen	10
The regime	8
Human rights groups	1
People on the ground	8
Russia and China	1
Opposition groups SNC	1
FSA	3
Turkish spokesmen	9

Table 5-12 Voices in the BBC, November 2011

The majority of voices, in the form of 27 speeches, came from the Arab League members, European countries, or Turkey, which all condemned the regime. This also coincides with the world reaction to the human rights abuse during that period. Then, comes the regime, which is allowed to speak eight times, during which it usually defended its position and blamed the violence on protesters. Equally, people on the ground spoke eight times, usually counting the dead or describing the regime's violent actions. This, of course, did not give them equal status as the regime's narratives faded into the international voices condemning it along with the protesters, which made it 40 voices against the regime. As mentioned earlier, even though the events and voices seemed to be pointing fingers at the regime, their effect is not decisive as they cannot do without causal employment that can either enhance or undermine their meaning.

5.6.2.3 Causal employment

Causal employment adds depth and meaning to the events and the voices recounting them in the news coverage. This can be done by comments or simply by juxtaposing other events through either internal retroversion (when a connection is suggested between the event discussed and another current event) or through external retroversion (when a connection is suggested between the event discussed and another event that took place earlier). Moreover, causal employment is very intertwined with other framing elements as they further emphasise interpretations suggested through it: labelling, photos, videos, and links. The basic topics are the regime invoking the world's reaction against it and that armed rebellion also had problems.

5.6.2.3.1 The Syrian regime's violence invoked a global reaction against it

In an attempt to explain why the world would react against Syria, impose sanctions, and condemn its actions, the BBC, through causal employment, related that to the violence committed by the regime against its own people six times. For example, in *Arab League Sanctions for Syria* (12th November 2011), right after the title, it was directly stated that 'the Arab League voted to suspend Syria from its meetings and imposed sanctions against Damascus over its failure to end a government crackdown on protesters'.

Moreover, the 'US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report in the same week documenting allegations of torture and unlawful killings in the city, and called on the Arab League to 'step up pressure on Damascus'. Also, in a statement that clearly related the number of dead people reported by the UN to the regime, 'President Assad has sought to put down the protests since March. The UN says more than 3,500 people have died in the protests so far'. The article finished with a collection of eight pictures that summarises the conflict so far:



Figure 5-23 Guide to the uprising (BBC, 12th November 2011)

The first photo, the one above, is of a child raising two fingers on which the Syrian flag is painted. The other pictures repeat the same story of the article of people protesting against the regime, which responded using violence, and was condemned, internationally. Only one of the pictures, Figure 5-24, below, described support for the regime.



Figure 5-24 A rally in the capital in support of President Assad (BBC, 12th November 2011).

In *Syria's Assad should step aside, says Jordan's Abdullah* (BBC, 15th November 2011), the Jordanian king in an interview in the BBC said that al-Assad should step down as he failed to commit to the reforms he was promising and failed to protect his people. To the right side of the article, there is a photo of a protesting child with the word *Irhal* (leave) painted on his forehead. The caption of the photo described al-Assad's violent crackdown on his people:



Figure 5-25 Thousands of Syrians have fled into northern Lebanon to escape the crackdown (BBC, 15th November 2011).

In *Syria crisis: Erdogan steps up Turkey pressure on Assad* (BBC, 15th November 2011), Erdogan says that ‘the future could not be built on ‘the blood of the oppressed’’, and a photo of a red-faced, angry Erdogan was placed at the top right of the article:



Figure 5-26 Erdogan has become increasingly critical of Syria (BBC, 15th November 2011)

In another article, *UN accuses Syria of gross systematic human rights violations* (BBC, 28th November 2011), the BBC related the UN condemnation of the Syrian regime to ‘the way they have been dealing with recent anti-government demonstrations’. The report alleges that ‘torture, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances, were used by the government and security forces against protesters’.

Also, discussing the angry world reaction towards human rights abuse, there is the suggestion that al-Assad was being defiant in *Syria accepts Arab League peace plan after Cairo talks* (BBC, 2nd November 2011); the article doubted that the regime agreement to the plan was going to make any ‘difference on the ground’. Indeed, a photo of him was at the top of the right corner of the article suggesting he was defiant for refusing to step down, despite the protests of his people:

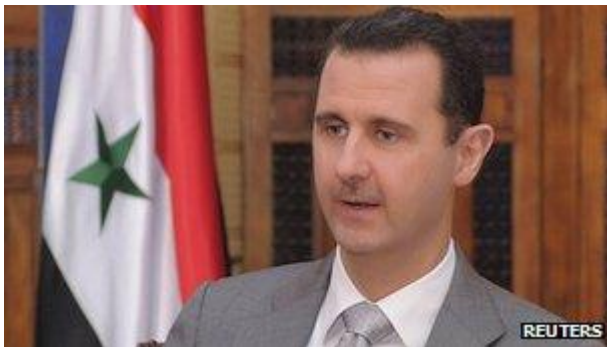


Figure 5-27 President Assad has refused to step down despite widespread protests against his rule. (BBC, 2nd November 2011).

Up until now, it seems that the BBC criminalised the regime and looked forward to the world reaction against it.

5.6.2.3.2 Armed rebellion had its problems as well

Since there is a specific focus on armed rebellion in this chapter, I would like to look at how the Free Syrian Army was regarded in the BBC and how it was compared to the regime. Looking at the titles discussed before in 5.6.2.1, it was suggested that armed rebellion was leading the country towards civil war. This could be a legitimate view, but it is very important to understand how this judgement was reached and whether it was justified.

If we look at the events recounted in 5.6.2.2.1, there is one violent action that was committed by the armed rebellion as it attacked a military checkpoint. To illustrate further, we need to look more closely at the two articles written about the armed rebellion. The first article, *Syrian rebel leader waiting in Turkey* (BBC, 24th November 2011), reported an interview between the rebel leader and the BBC correspondent, John Simpson, in Turkey.

This is the only article in which the FSA leader was speaking. He said that al-Assad was finished and that the regime was crumbling. To this, John Simpson commented that this is what rebels usually say, which does not always translate into reality. The comment did give an indication the BBC reporter was eyeing the FSA suspiciously, but that could be how any newly formed group might be initially viewed until it proved its worth to the world. However, the following comment might be disturbing:

Nevertheless people who know and have met President Assad often remark on his gentleness of character; he was, of course a practising ophthalmologist, and doctors rarely seem to make good dictators.

There has been a good deal of speculation in the West, as well as the Middle East, that President Assad is not happy with the butcher's work he has felt obliged to do, and that at some stage he will look for a way out (BBC, 24th November 2011).

Knowing what al-Assad has committed so far, which has culminated, to date, in the death of 3,500 people, as estimated by the UN and reported by the BBC in almost every article discussed here (see, for example, BBC 12th November, 15th November, and 17th November 2011), this vivid description of al-Assad as a lone wolf who was driven to crime, not by his evil nature, but by the current circumstances, sends shivers through an aware and critical reader. It mirrors the earlier depiction of al-Assad in the BBC coverage in March as a reformer who was not given a chance, and who was fighting against a very corrupt system that was beyond repair.

A few months later, with no sign of al-Assad regretting any of his actions, scaling down the violence, or seriously attempting to make amends with the opposition, al-Assad is described as *obliged* to do this dirty job. Why would a decent man kill all of those innocent civilians? Was it so he could stay president? He should have relented, and spared his own people. Was it to save his life? His life could not have been worth more than the 3,500 people he butchered. There cannot be a justification for the actions committed by the regime but, here, John Simpson, the BBC correspondent, was doing a sympathetic, justifying job.

Did Simpson, in the same manner, justify the actions of defected soldiers? Yes, he did, but he blamed them as well. According to Simpson, many had defected because they could not shoot their fellow citizens. However, those defected soldiers were portrayed as part of the violence. They were in no way viewed through the same sympathetic language lavished on al-Assad:

Still, there is continuing violence inside Syria between the army and those soldiers who cannot stomach the orders to shoot down their fellow-citizens (BBC, 24th November 2011).

Moreover, the FSA was depicted as weak with no more than a few hundred army defectors. That seemed to be a very realistic and accurate description (see also Foreign Policy, 9th December and White, 2011), but the question that could be derived from this commentary was who should be blamed for civil war if it ever happened in Syria; was it the strong army who started it, or the small group of defectors reacting to the violence brought upon them?

Another important question was whether the BBC saw any difference in targeting the army and civilians; readers also needed to know whether the FSA was only targeting the army or both the army and civilians. We might find some answers in the second article to be discussed, but more needs to be seen in the ensuing months as the FSA had just been formed and whatever judgement should be postponed for later.

In the second article, *Syria slowly inches towards civil war* (BBC, 26th November 2011), Paul Wood, the BBC journalist and his cameramen, accompanied the Free Syrian Army as it was smuggling weapons from Lebanon into Syria into a road that was full of mines and army patrols. Wounded men were also smuggled into Lebanon in the same manner.

One injured semi-conscious man was brought in. He had lost much blood through the journey and the doctor said that his chances could be less 50%. This was better than risking going to any of the government hospitals at which the injured could be tortured. There was also a vivid description of the stressful situation in Bab Amr and the incident of a little boy being shot at by an army sniper as he was playing outside, according to the residents.

Furthermore, Wood spoke to soldiers who explained that they had to defect because ‘They gave us the order to shoot on the demonstrators’, said Ahmed Daleti, ‘so we said ‘No’, these people are peaceful. They just want freedom. We are all one people, one blood – we couldn’t just shoot them’.

However, describing an attack by the rebels on the army, the article finished by commenting that ‘slowly, the struggle for democracy in Syria is being transformed, the country inching towards civil war’. It seems that, despite the vivid depiction of the regime’s brutality towards its people, and the fact that there were no reports of any attack on civilians by the FSA, the BBC was starting early on to pin equal blame on both the regime and the rebels for driving the country into civil war. Moreover, the photos in the article are rather vague; they did not seem to pin the blame on anybody except for once.



Figure 5-28 At least 3,500 people killed since protests broke out (BBC, 26th November 2011).



Figure 5-29 Unrest in Syria has sent demand for weapons soaring (BBC, 26th November 2011).



Figure 5-30 The restive province of Homs is heavily patrolled by the Syrian Army (BBC, 26th November 2011).

The first two photos describe the conflict that resulted in the death of 3,500 people, and the soaring need for weapons without naming who was to blame or the people who demanded weapons. The last photo describes the heavy patrols of the regime. Describing Homs as a ‘restive province’ sounds, somehow, apologetic to the drastic measures by the regime.

5.6.3 Discussion: Balancing the blame between the regime and the rebels

In November, the BBC placed a lot of the blame for the violence on the regime in nine out of the eleven articles discussed during that period. However, when discussing armed rebellion, it sounded not only suspicious of the FSA’s promises, a suspicion that might be well-placed if comparing the power of the regime to that of the seemingly scattered army defectors, but, interestingly, it sounded overly sympathetic to al-Assad who was portrayed as a decent man not happy about doing a ‘butcher’s job’ (BBC, 24th November 2011); it also sounded alarms that the formation of the Syrian army was drawing the country into civil war, ignoring the circumstances that led people to carry arms and pinned the blame equally on both sides.

5.7 Armed rebellion in Al Jazeera

5.7.1 Introduction

As I have stated in my introduction to this chapter in 5.1, armed rebellion was formed in August 2011 by army deserters in Turkey (BBC, 13th December 2013), but actually started being reported in both the BBC and Al Jazeera in November 2011. The formation of the Free Syrian Army was very significant in that it turned what were peaceful demonstrations into armed rebellion bringing about different reactions not only from the media, but from the opposition itself. Some viewed this as the expected reaction to the violent crackdown by the regime on helpless people (Al Om, 2018), while others saw that this move would lead the country into or create fresh sectarian divisions (Tokmajyan, 2015). Having already looked at the BBC coverage of the rebellion, here, I am turning my attention to Al Jazeera and how it reacted to the formation of the Free Syrian Army through a detailed analysis of the month of November.

5.7.2 Al Jazeera's coverage of the uprising in the month of November 2011

I will start my analysis of November by studying the initial reaction of Al Jazeera towards the armed rebellion by looking first at the paratextual framing elements of the articles written in the period, which I found through Google, specifying November 2011 for my search. I will then move to the narrative elements, selective appropriation, and causal employment as well as other framing elements, such as photos and annotated links, in an attempt to place pieces of the puzzle together and understand Al Jazeera's narrative regarding the uprising and, specifically, the armed rebellion.

This will be followed by chasing out all articles that covered the armed rebellion and other related issues in the ensuing months from December 2011 to June 2012, including the coverage of a massacre that happened in Houla towards the end of May.

5.7.2.1 Titles, leads and subtitles in Al Jazeera's coverage of Syria, November 2011

In this section, I will provide tables, including all of the titles, leads, and subtitles of the articles published in Al Jazeera in March 2011, and will then discuss the meaning readers may understand by simply reading them.

Titles	Leads	Subtitles
1- Syria agrees to Arab League plan (Al Jazeera, 3 rd November 2011).	Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo announce Damascus's acceptance of proposals aimed at easing protest crackdown.	Remarkable commitment Roadblock killings
2- Arab League warns of Syria peace deal failure (Al Jazeera, 5 th November 2011)	Official says 'failure of the Arab solution would lead to catastrophic results' amid fresh reports of violence.	US advice condemned 'Serious worry'
3- Syria's fragmented opposition (10 th November 2011).	As anti-government forces try to develop a united voice, Al Jazeera looks at the disparate groups within.	Syrian National Council (SNC) Free Syrian Army (FSA) National democratic committee for democratic change Youth groups
4- Arab League decides to suspend Syria (Al Jazeera, 13 th November 2011)	Syrian ambassador denounces move as illegal after regional bloc demands 'total implementation' of Arab plan.	'Historic day' 'Scandalous declaration' International support for decision
5- The Struggle for Syria (Al Jazeera, 15 th November 2011)	The Syrian people are being sacrificed at the altar of US imperialism, says author	This is Opinion article written by Joseph Massad, an associate professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University.
6- The Free Syrian Army grows in influence (Al Jazeera, 16 th November 2011)	Al Jazeera talks to FSA commander, rights activists and Syrian people about structure and role of anti-Assad army.	Military council 'False hope' 'Legitimate role'

Table 5-13 Titles, leads, and subtitles in Al Jazeera, November 2011.

7- Syria future worries Lebanon (Al Jazeera, 23 rd November 2011)	None	None
8- Q & A: Syria's daring actress (Al Jazeera, 23 rd November 2011)	Fadwa Soliman, an Alawite who became an icon in the uprising against Bashar al-Assad, speaks to Al Jazeera from hiding.	None
9- Syria and the unfolding hegemonic game (Al Jazeera, 25 th November 2011).	A new strategic alliance has formed, Ankara and Riyadh against Tehran, all trying to gain influence over Damascus.	An opinion article written by Nima Khorrami Assl, a security analyst at Transnational Crisis Project, London.
10- Arab League approves Syria sanctions (Al Jazeera, 28 th November 2011)	Curbs on dealings with central bank and funding for projects announced amid reports of deadly clashes inside country.	Arab bloc's conditions Concerns over sanctions Violent clashes
11- The impact of economic sanctions on Syria (Al Jazeera, 28 th November 2011)	As Arab states decide to cut commercial ties with the Syrian government; will it help end the violence in the country?	None

Table 5-14 Titles, leads, and subtitles in Al Jazeera, November 2011.

Looking at Tables 5-13 and 5-14, and through reading the titles, leads, and subtitles, one can get an initial understanding of the topics covered by the eleven articles written about the Syrian conflict during November. Four of these articles discussed the Arab League plan and their reaction towards the crackdown on protesters in Syria. Also, two articles discussed opposition groups in Syria, and a third discussed the Free Syrian Army. Moreover, two opinion articles indicated that the world's reaction to Syria was based upon political gains and manipulation.

Finally, in a further two articles, one discussed the impact of sanctions on Syria and the Syrian people, and the second, the possible impact of the unrest in Syria in neighbouring Lebanon. It first appeared that Syria agreed to the *Arab League plan* (Al Jazeera, 3rd

November 2011) with *remarkable commitment* according to the Arab League Secretary General, which, nevertheless, did not stop *roadblock killings*, resulting in the deaths of 21 people in the country.

Two days later, the Arab League *warns of Syria peace deal failure* (Al Jazeera, 5th November 2011) as the Syrian government *condemned US advice* to armed opposition to surrender their weapons. Meanwhile, the Arab League Secretary General had expressed ‘serious worry’ over the continuing violence in Syria. Finally, the *Arab League decides to suspend Syria* (Al Jazeera, 14th November 2011) in a ‘*historic day*’ which the Syrian government flagged as a ‘*scandalous declaration*’.

After condemnations failed to stop the regime’s crackdown on protesters, *the Arab League approves Syrian Sanctions* (Al Jazeera, 28th November 2011), which could be reconsidered if Syria meets *Arab bloc demands*, among which are to free political prisoners and stop the violent crackdown on protesters. However, despite *worries over sanctions* and their possible impact over neighbouring countries, there did not seem to be an imminent end to the *violent clashes* in Syria.

Looking at the framing elements dealing with the Arab League reaction to the Syrian government, fingers were mostly pointed at the Syrian government, which had done too little to implement the Arab peace plan, continued to kill protesters and defiantly condemned the Arab League and international criticism.

Discussing the opposition in Syria, it is described as *fragmented in Syria’s fragmented Opposition* (Al Jazeera, 10th November 2011). Al Jazeera then discussed the main opposition groups, which were the Syrian National Council (SNC), the *National Coordinating committee for Democratic change*, the *Free Syrian Army (FSA)*, and *youth groups*. At this point, the FSA was given an equal status to the SNC, but then came an article that discusses how *the Free Syrian Army grows in influence* (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011), which had formed a *military council*, and although some believe the Free Syrian Army was giving people *false hope*, it, nonetheless, had a *legitimate role* in the opposition. Finally, in *Q&A: Syria’s daring actress* (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011) Fadwa Soliman was interviewed; she was an Alawite actress, who stressed the fact that the revolution was not all Sunni. Also,

describing Soliman, specifically, as daring indicated the fact that dissenting Alawites might face even more brutal repression from the government.

In addition, there are two opinion articles, *The struggle for Syria* (Al Jazeera, 15th November), and *Syria and the unfolding hegemonic game* (Al Jazeera, 25th November 2011), which both indicated, along with the first line under each title, the leads in Table 5-13 and 5-14, providing a concise summary of what these articles were about, that Syria would be ignored unless there were some political gains for the countries that may be involved.

Finally, in a further two articles, *Syria's future worries Lebanon* (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011), and *The impact of economic sanctions over Syria* (Al Jazeera, 28th November 2011), the first looked at how the unrest in Syria could spill over to Lebanon, while the second questioned not only the impact of these sanctions on Syrian economy, but also whether these sanctions could cripple al-Assad and stop violence in the country.

What I found most important in the framing of Al Jazeera was the attention given to all opposition groups, highlighting the role of the FSA without attempting to criminalise it and drawing attention to the diversity of the opposition groups who come from different backgrounds, which dispelled fears of possible sectarianism. Also, Al Jazeera paid attention to the world's reaction in the way it extensively covered the Arab League efforts, basically through imposing sanctions, but, at the same time, questioned the effect of these sanctions, and whether they were serious enough to stop the regime crackdown on his people.

Thus, by questioning the efficacy of the proposed solution, it has opened doors to other solutions such as *no-fly zones* or military intervention rather than sticking to only one possible scenario. Finally, by predicting that the world would not help the Syrians unless there were tangible gains for the intervening countries, Al Jazeera was already blaming the world for its passivity towards the Syrians.

5.7.2.2 Selective appropriation

5.7.2.2.1 Events

In this section, I have read through all of the articles that were written in November and named the events recounted and the number of times they were told. The choice of events is

very important in the creation of narrative although how these events are interpreted decisively falls into the hands of causal emplotment. Voices are important as it is through the eyes of the reported speakers that we see the events and interpret them. However, voices, as well as events, could be easily manipulated, not only in that only parts of the speech are selected and highlighted, but also the position of the events and voices might be to undermine them, rather than emphasise them.

The events described	No. of times
1- The government cracking down on the peaceful protesters by arresting people, firing live ammunition or tear gas.	7
2- The current situation where the Syrian government is stifling political freedom and restricting the access of journalists.	1
3- International condemnation of al-Assad regime	2
4- Arab condemnation of the regime	1
5- Action taken against the regime	7
6- Regimes' reaction (defiance) to action taken	7
7- Actions done by armed rebellion	5
8- Violence committed by Assad' s supporters	2
9- Violence committed by protesters	1
10- Reconciliation by the regime like freeing prisoners and accepting the Arab League plan	2
11- Requests and actions by the opposition for a no-fly zone or international intervention	2
12- Action by Russia and China, mainly vetoing UN decisions against Syria and defending the regime	0
13- Turkish support of the protesters by opening its borders to refugees and dissenters	0
14- Violence in Syria	2
15- Events demonising al-Assad and his regime	29
16- Events painting a neutral or positive picture of al-Assad and his regime	2

Table 5-15 Events in Al Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising, 2011

Rows that are shaded in dark grey point out the regime's violent actions, while unshaded rows point out neutral or positive events for the regime, such as attempting to reform or having demonstrated in its support, or violent actions carried out by the rebels. White rows recount events that have to do with rebels or to unspecified violence.

There are 29 events demonising the regime in Al Jazeera, while only two spoke of tentative attempts at reconciliation, and a third described a violent action by the protesters. Interestingly, there were hardly any reports on people protesting in the streets; rather, the focus was on the Arab world and the international reaction to the violence committed against the protesters. Also, the reaction of protest groups or organisations was reported, including a specific focus on armed rebellion.

The most reported event during this period was the action taken against the regime by the Arab League, which started by giving warnings to the Syrian government of suspension from the League and imposing economic sanctions unless the League's plan, which included stopping the crackdown on demonstrators, freeing prisoners, and political reform. This event was reported seven times and, adding to it reports of condemnations, both internationally and from the Arab League, this makes it nine times.

Second is the Syrian government defiance, which was reported seven times; the Syrian regime considered actions against it as a conspiracy with the West simply because it was an enemy of Israel, or in case that it was said that it had to fight terrorists until they stopped committing terror acts in the country. Action taken by armed rebellion was reported five times; it was tabled as neutral because no blame was assigned to them in the context, which will be discussed later. Only once were unknown protesters blamed for violence against innocent Alawites and this was put in a context in which it was made clear that the circumstances were not clear and the event itself not verified.

5.7.2.2.2 Voices

Voices are also important, as it is through their eyes we see the events and interpret them. However, voices, as well as events, could be easily manipulated, not only in that only parts of the speech are selected and highlighted, but also the position of the events and voices might be to undermine them, rather than emphasise them.

Voices allowed to speak	No. of references
Western elites	16
Arab league spokesmen	20
The regime	11
Human rights groups	6
People on the ground	6
Russia and China	2
Opposition groups including SNC	14
FSA	10
Turkish spokesmen	0

Table 5-16 Voices in Al Jazeera coverage of the Syrian uprising in the month of November 2011

As for the speakers, the regime spoke much less than the opposition groups, people on the ground, and the FSA. The regime and its spokesmen were quoted only 11 times, while the rest were quoted 24 times, which could mean, depending on the context, that they might have been supported by Al Jazeera. If we add to that the voices of the Arab League members, the Western elites, and human rights groups, which all condemn the regime (41 voices), the regime’s argument is doomed with 65 voices against it. However, the picture gets clearer when we look at the events and voices in their context on the Al Jazeera website during November 2011.

5.7.2.3 Causal emplotment

Causal emplotment adds depth and value to the events and voices recounting in the news coverage. This can be done through comments or simply by juxtaposing other events through either internal retroversion (when a connection is suggested between the event discussed and another current event) or through external retroversion (when a connection is suggested between the event discussed and another event that took place earlier). Here are the most important causal emplotment narratives in relation to events covered in Syria in Al Jazeera.

5.7.2.3.1 No help for Syrians

Looking further into causal emplotment, which is the cues that give interpretation to events, it is interesting that the most prevalent issue is the prediction that the Syrian rebels were not

actually going to be given sufficient help as the US was not interested in removing an obedient dictator and, if they ever got help from other countries, it would only be to serve the interests of these countries.

This, according to Al Jazeera, freed al-Assad's hands to kill his people indiscriminately, inevitably leading to armed rebellion and, thus, a civil war, as was suggested by the two opinion articles published in November 2011, *The Struggle for Syria* (Al Jazeera, 15th November 2011) by Joseph Massad, an Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics at Columbia University, and *Syria and the unfolding hegemonic game* (Al Jazeera, 25th November 2011) by Nima Khorrami Assl, a security analyst at Transnational Crisis Project, London. For example, Massad states that:

It was the United States that destroyed Syrian democracy in 1949 when the CIA sponsored the first coup d'état in the country ending democratic rule. It is again the United States that has destroyed the possibility of a democratic outcome of the current popular uprising. My deep condolences to the Syrian people (Al Jazeera, 15th November 2011).

As Massad puts it, the US was never really interested in democracy in the Middle East; it ended democratic rule before and, it will make sure now that the Syrian Revolution does not reach its goal, democracy. Emphasising his perspective, Massad also said that:

The US will never help rebels against a dictator obedient to them, but if they win the US will make sure that it supports a counter revolution that would bring another loyal dictator. If they are unhappy about the leader, they would help the revolution only to bring in a more loyal dictator, not democracy. In Libya, for example, the NATO-led coalition supported a government that oppressed people as well in the name of NATO democracy (Al Jazeera, 15th November 2011).

Also, according to Massad, the Arab League would only act under the US instructions. It was told not to interfere in Iraq, Tunisia, or Egypt, but now it has been instructed to interfere in Syria.

This indicated, along with what he had said earlier, that whatever action the Arab League might implement, the US would make sure it was not effective enough to withhold the regime and help the rebels. At the top of Massad's article lies a photo in which a protester was holding his shoe against a picture of al-Assad.



Figure 5-31 The US destroyed Syrian democracy in 1949 when the CIA sponsored the first coup in the country (Al Jazeera, 15th November 2011).

Supporting the topic of the essay, which stated that through history, the US was never interested in implementing democracy in Syria, the present and past were woven together through the photo caption. Thus, it was a message to protesters not to hope for much from the US, which destroyed Syrian democracy in 1949, six decades earlier.

Assl (Al Jazeera, 25th November 2011) emphasised the fact that neighbouring countries, specifically Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, have their own interests in Syria. For instance, Saudi Arabia would want the demise of al-Assad to stop the Shia expansion in the region, while Iran would support al-Assad to consolidate its power further in the region. He said that:

Syria is important to Iran for two broad reasons. Firstly, it is the link between Iran and Hizbullah. Assad's fall will therefore be a massive blow to Iran's foreign policy by greatly reducing Tehran geopolitical... Saudis, on the other hand, are eager to see an end to the Assad's rule not least because he is an Alawi. Moreover, Assad's demise will enable Saudi to challenge Tehran in Lebanon with greater ease. For its part, Turkey is mainly concerned with the Syrian situation because it shares a long border with Syria, and that on-going instability in Syria could have destabilising effects on Turkey's own Kurdish population.(Al Jazeera, 25th November 2011).

A photo of leaders of neighbouring countries surrounding al-Assad conspicuously spelled out the article's main narrative:



Figure 5-32 If Assad falls, Turkey will lose their investments in Syria and are worried about spillover effects over the border [EPA] (Al Jazeera, 25th November 2011)

In Figure 5-32, the Syrian president is standing between the Turkish prime minister and the Qatari prime minister in a signal of Syria's significance to neighbouring countries; this is emphasised by the caption that speaks of Turkey specifically, which will be affected, economically, and is also worried about the possible political effects over its border with Syria, where Kurds resided. The article mentioned the teaming up of Gulf countries with Turkey against Iran, but the emphasis on Turkey in the caption may indicate that Turkey had more to worry about regarding the Syrian conflict than the Gulf countries.

Annotated links in this article also emphasise what the stakes of the chaos in Syria could mean for its neighbours. The article links to *Syria future worries Lebanon*. The annotated article speaks of a Lebanon worried about the possible rift between the Sunni Lebanese who supported the fall of al-Assad and the Shia, and, specifically, Hezbollah, an ally of al-Assad and of Iran, who support the staying of the regime in power. The article also exposed another apprehensive neighbour and another reminder of the possible power play in Syria, which could involve both Hezbollah and Iran in support of al-Assad.

Fadwa Soliman (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011), in her interview with Al Jazeera, also pointed out that the international community's ineffective support to the revolution was what was ultimately leading the country to civil war.

To avoid a civil war in Syria, the international community should take serious steps against the regime. So far we haven't seen any of their statements translate on the ground. I just saw with my own eyes a 25-year-old man being shot dead in a protest. The regime continues to kill because it does not sense seriousness on the part of the international community (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011)

Soliman's statements also directed pointed fingers away from Islamists so, if a civil war broke out, it was not because of them or because of violent protesters, it was because of the regime crackdown on the people and the international community not doing anything about it.

5.7.2.3.2 The regime cannot be trusted

Another causal employment cue is the suggestion that whatever was being done at the moment in terms of sanctions and condemnations, it was not enough to take al-Assad's violent hands off his people. That was simply because the regime could not be trusted. This was very noticeable in *Syria agrees to Arab League plan* (Al Jazeera 3rd November 2011) in which the framing elements had already pointed to the contradiction between the regime's promises, which conveyed *remarkable commitment*, whereas its actions resulted in *roadblock killings*.

Within the article itself, many people were quoted to express the fact that the regime's promises could not be relied on. For example, Victoria Nuland, the US State Department spokeswoman, expressed scepticism over the regime's seriousness towards implementing the Arab League plan and 'warned that the Assad's regime has a long track of broken promises'. She also said that 'We're not going to judge them by their words. We're going to judge them by their actions.'

Moreover, two members of the SNC, the Syrian National Council, expressed scepticism; one commented that the regime was just buying more time and another told Al Jazeera that:

To accept the peace agreement, the Syrian government must acknowledge that there is a problem, that there is a popular revolt and there is a demand to take note of the demands of the people. But it hasn't done so (Al Jazeera, 3rd November 2011).

In the previous article, three supportive links were annotated, the first was a video that announced Syria's agreement to the Arab plan only to end with a scene of protesters shouting their disapproval of the plan and saying that al-Assad was only buying time and that they were not going to be satisfied by anything other than his downfall.

In the second, *Will Syria become another Afghanistan? An inside story*, which was aired on the 31st October, just as in the previous month, during which an Al Jazeera presenter discussed al-Assad's claim that his downfall would lead to chaos in the region, there was the suggestion by one of the guests, Rim Turkmani, a public relations officer for a new Syrian party called 'the Current for Building up the Syrian State', that it was al-Assad's violence towards his people that was bringing chaos in Syria and in the region.

The final link is to *British reporter tells of time in Syrian jail* (Al Jazeera, 25th October 2011), in which the journalist recounted the brutality with which the regime treated peaceful protesters:

McAllister continued: 'I'd seen these things that they'd use, because the cable was next to my bed one night... It was so heavy, it was so awful, it must have broken bones. And the howling, the noise of a human being hit with that is something that just, you know, you shiver and shake'.

'You hear a sound that you've never heard before. I've never heard before. And I've seen people dead. And I've seen people dying. And I've seen people decapitated, but this sound hearing a man cry, is just like, awful, there's nothing to compare it with'. (Al Jazeera, 25th October,2011).

Reading this report, the idea that may hit the reader hard is that a regime that could sink this low in treating unarmed protesters could not encourage anyone's trust, and this explains why demonstrators in the video were unhappy about the Arab peace plan. They simply could not see it implemented in reality.

Another article that undermined the promises of the regime was *Arab League decides to suspend Syria* (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011) in which it was revealed that the regime had not kept the promises it made earlier to the Arab League. This was also through the quotes selected commenting on the Arab League decision. For example, Wael Merza, the SNC Secretary General, expressed his concern that the Arab League decision was not expected to

‘ease tensions on the ground’, and that, ‘Unfortunately, knowing the nature of the regime, we know the violence will be even more harsh in the coming few days’, he said. This also alluded to the fact that sanctions were not enough.

However, despite continuing to target civilians, Youssef Ahmad, Syria’s ambassador to the Arab League, still insisted that it had implemented the Arab League peace plan, which was to bring about ‘a complete halt to violence, the release of prisoners, removing the military presence from cities and residential areas, and allowing the Arab League and media access to report on the situation’ (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). According to Ahmad, as reported in Al Jazeera, the Arab League had threatened Syria with suspension despite their implementation of the peace plan (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011).

Shortly after reporting the Syrian Ambassador’s comments, Al Jazeera mentioned the UN estimation that more than 3,500 people had been killed since protests began because of the regime’s crackdown on protesters (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). More significant was the quote that came immediately after Ahmad’s claims in which Al Jazeera cited Human Rights Watch stating that, since the Syrian government had agreed to the plan, more than 100 people had been killed by security forces in Homs alone.

Finally, Hillary Clinton was quoted saying that ‘the failure of the Assad regime, once again, to heed the call of regional states and the international community underscores the fact that it has lost all credibility’ (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). Similar examples can be found in *Arab League warns of Syria Peace deal failure* (Al Jazeera, 5th November 2011); it also has causal employment elements in the photo used and the annotated links:

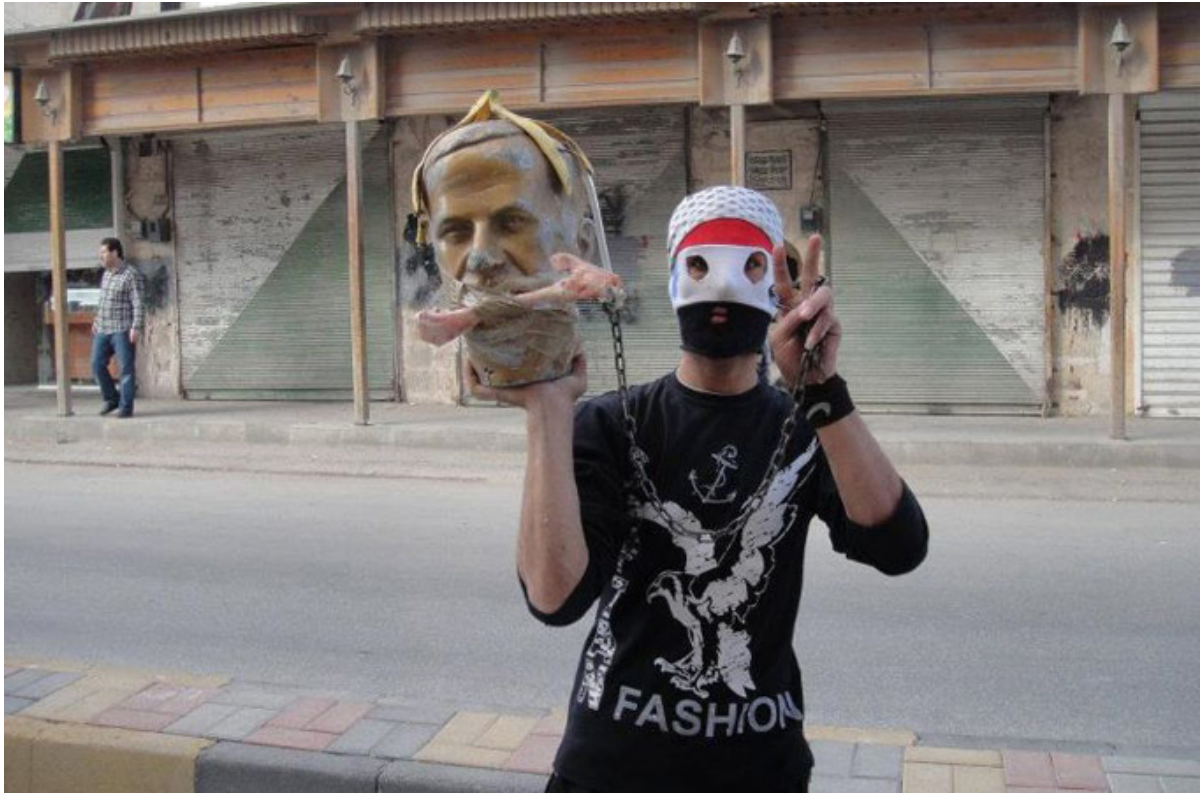


Figure 5-33 Syria has said it would honour an Arab plan to end violence, but reports indicate that not much has changed [Reuters] (Al Jazeera, 5th November 2011).

Here, the photo is of a protestor carrying the head of a statue of the late Hafiz al-Assad with a hammer or a piece of bone in his mouth. Understanding the picture along with the caption, it might mean that those protestors cannot trust the regime's promises and violence against them, which did not abate although the regime had claimed that it implemented the peace plan.

It might also indicate a wish by the protestors, by stuffing the mouth of the late president, to silence the regime that has always silenced them. Since the regime was not trustworthy, had the Arab League or the International Community done enough to support the revolution or, at least, protect the people?

Al Jazeera had alluded a couple of times that they were not doing enough, which I discussed in the previous section *No help for Syrians*. These were specifically in, *Arab League decides to suspend Syria* (13th November) and *Q&A: Syria's daring actress* (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

As for Al Jazeera's interview with Fadwa Soliman, she had stated that if the Syrian evolution deteriorated into civil war, that would be because the International Community had not done enough to stop al-Assad from killing his own people. In the other article about Syria's suspension, Al Jazeera stated that, 'the decision, which came after a meeting of Arab ministers, did not amount to a full suspension of membership from the regional body' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011).

Also, Jane Arraf, an Al Jazeera reporter from Cairo, expressed her disappointment that the League had not done any more: 'the Arab League could have imposed immediate sanctions or suspended Syria outright, but surprisingly did not do that but wanted to send a very strong message to Syria' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). Moreover, Merza (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011) had commented, as I mentioned on the previous page, that the regime's suspension would not ease tensions, but actually, it would make a brutal regime more brutal and violent in the coming days.

5.7.2.3.3 Blame on the regime

The regime often seems to be blamed in Aljazeera. For instance, in *Arab League decides to suspend Syria*, there was an indication that Syria did not implement the Arab League plan and continued cracking down on protesters with extreme violence:

Under an Arab League plan agreed on November 2, Syria pledged to pull the military out of flashpoint cities, free political prisoners and start talks with the opposition.

However, since then, security forces have killed more than 100 people in the central city of Homs, the New York-based [Human Rights Watch](#) said in a report issued on Friday (Al Jazeera 13th November 2011).

The news video posted in the article also pointed to the regime as the main culprit in provoking the sanctions on Syria. In the video, Arab League members were in a gathering and the commentator said that they are supporting measures to stop al-Assad from killing his people. Sheikh Hamad, the Qatari prime minister, appeared saying that they had been warning the regime for months.

Outside the league headquarters in Cairo, Egyptian and Syrian demonstrators were marching enraged and chanting 'Syria'. According to an Al Jazeera journalist who was seen walking among the chanting crowd, those demonstrators were unhappy about the Arab League

decisions because they believed those decisions only served to give al-Assad more time to continue violently cracking down on the people. Again, this is another instance of the blame falling completely on al-Assad for the increasing violence in the country.

In *Arab League approves Syria sanctions*, the government, also, was blamed for the violence and, thus, it deserved the sanctions.

The Arab League has approved sanctions against Syria to pressure the government to end its eight-month crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, effective immediately.

‘Today is a sad day for me, because we still hope our brothers in Syria will sign the document of the protocol and stop the killings, and to release the detainees and withdraw its military from Syrian districts’, Sheikh Hamad said.

Nabil Elaraby, the Arab League secretary-general, said the sanctions would be reconsidered if Syria met those demands (Al Jazeera, 28th November 2011).

In the previous quote, Al Jazeera made it clear that the Arab League had to resort to sanctions because the regime did not step down the violence, then it quoted Sheikh Hamad, the Qatari prime minister, expressing his disappointment and Nabil Al-Arabi still keeping the door open for al-Assad to get back on the right track for the sanctions to be removed.

Two articles are linked to the *Arab League approves Syria sanctions* just discussed. The annotated articles support the narrative that regime violence was not only pushing the country into civil war, but also expanding sectarian conflict into neighbouring countries, specifically Lebanon.

The first link was to *Syria’s Civil war?* a video that was aired on the 19th November in Inside Story, an Al Jazeera programme in which guests gather and discuss political issues. Speakers in this episode were Mustafa el-Labbad, director of the Al Sharq Centre for Regional and Strategic Studies; Dimitry Babich, political analyst, Russia Profile Magazine; and Abdulhamit Bilici, a columnist for Today’s Zaman and general manager for Cihan News Agency. They discussed an attack by The FSA on Syrian security forces, despite the regime having promised to implement the Arab League plan. The programme started with the news of Syria having agreed to have the peace plan monitored, of an *audacious* attack by the FSA on security forces, and of Russia *insisting* on equally blaming both sides for the violence.

Al Jazeera, in the programme, seemed to be understanding of the rebels' situation, and although the discussion was not basically about the FSA, but about what could be done regarding al-Assad's violence towards his people, the blame for possible civil war clearly was falling down on al-Assad, not on rebels fighting back.

The second annotated link was to *Syria's future worries Lebanon* (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011), which does not say much about who to blame.

In *Syria's daring actress*, Soliman also blamed both the regime and the international community's ineffective action towards it for the violence and for pulling the country down into a civil war:

To avoid a civil war in Syria, the international community should take serious steps against the regime. So far we haven't seen any of their statements translate on the ground. I just saw with my own eyes a 25-year-old man being shot dead in a protest. The regime continues to kill because it does not sense seriousness on the part of the international community.

If civil war breaks, it is not because of the protesters or Islamists; it is because of the regime's crackdown on the people and the international community not doing anything against it (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

It is clear that Al Jazeera sees that the regime has brought the sanctions upon itself.

5.7.2.3.4 Understanding the motives of the rebels

During the month November three articles discussed opposition specifically; these were *Syria's fragmented opposition*, *The free Syrian Army grows in influence*, and *Q&A: Syria's daring actress*. *Syria's fragmented opposition* basically discussed four groups, the Syrian National Council (SNC) under which other opposition groups unified, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change. Other groups discussed were the National Co-ordinating Committee for Democratic Change, the Free Syrian Army, and youth groups.

If we look at the space given to discussing these four categories, we can find that the SNC occupied the largest space in the article (40 lines). Second was the space invested for discussing the FSA (21 lines), while the other two groups took no more than eight lines each.

This was very significant because it placed both the SNC and FSA as the most important and legitimate opposition groups, and despite the fact that the SNC, in this article, occupied double the space, much of it was for discussing the five other groups that joined the SNC.

The SNC gained wide recognition at the time because it was attempting to bring in as many opposition groups as possible and unify them under one organisation, so the article also discussed five more groups under the same subtitle, while the FSA's twenty lines were completely devoted to the FSA. It was also notable that, among all of the groups discussed in the article, only the SNC and FSA were given a voice to speak out for themselves.

For instance, Ghalioun, the chairman of the opposition front, said that the SNC united 'the forces of the opposition and the peaceful revolution' (Al Jazeera, 10th November 2011). Also, in a meeting in Istanbul, Ghalioun said that, 'The Syrian Council is open to all Syrians. It is an independent group personifying the sovereignty of the Syrian people in their struggle for liberty' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). On the other hand, quoting the New York Times, the FSA's leader, Colonel Riad al-As'aad, said, 'We will fight the regime until it falls and build a new period of stability and safety in Syria' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011).

Again, the fact that only these two groups were given voices sets the stage from now on for them being the most important two, or the most representative of the revolution, despite the fact that, then, they followed different paths; the former was in support of peaceful protests despite the regime's violence, while the latter was in support of military action against the regime that had been targeting protesters for more than eight months. This article, *Syria's fragmented opposition*, was published on the 10th November and was the first that mentioned opposition groups.

Before moving to the next two articles, we need to have a look at the other elements in the text. The bigger space that is given to some speakers over others is partly causal employment, as it gives more importance to these voices and that can be confirmed if the rest of the text supports these voices by either other voices or comments. Noteworthy here is the indication that the regime could not be trusted that even the more peaceful opposition group (SNC) wanted no less than overthrowing it. For instance, describing the SNC organisation, Al Jazeera stated that:

The council's (SNC's) charter calls for overthrowing the government rather than engaging in dialogue with it, rejects foreign military intervention, and calls for non-violent protests (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011).

Also, as it described other groups that joined the SNC, Al Jazeera brought in history proving that, even as early as the year 2000, when al-Assad had just come to power and claimed reform, a secular group named *Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change*, described in the article as 'a pro-democracy movement that begun during the so called Damascus Spring in 2000–2001, which called for democratic change against Assad', was censored by the regime.

This was an indication that Bashar's oppression went further than the current events and back to 2000 when he had claimed reform. Al Jazeera repeated many times, after the protests erupted in March, that there was never any actual political reform, as detailed in 5.5.3.3. On the other hand, the BBC coverage in March still had, at times, a dreamy image of the reformer Bashar al-Assad, and it made it look like people were protesting against a person who had been trying to reform the country for years and that he still needed more time.

There is also the indication, in the same article, that in response to the regime's violence and false reform promises, there were only these two legitimate responses, peacefully protesting or fighting back:

Andrew Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told the New York Times that the formation of the army highlights the question of whether the opposition would continue to protest non-violently, as it has through much of the uprising or would it 'go down another path to fighting back' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011).

Riyadh al-Assad was also cited saying that they were fighting the 'regime until it falls and build a new period of stability and safety in Syria' (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). Ghalioun was also quoted saying that the FSA was a power not to be 'discounted'. However, it was not that Al Jazeera was unconditionally excited about the FSA; it expressed that those military defectors had just emerged and time was still needed for news media and observers of the unfolding Syrian conflict to fully understand the group; it was trying to fairly understand its position, while, at the same time, not ignoring the criticism the FSA received from other opposition groups.

Galioun, for instance, expressed his wish that the FSA limited their military operations to only defending civilians. Also, in the same article, Al Jazeera showed scepticism about the

number of defectors who joined the FSA and indicated that, while the FSA said that they had between 10,000 to 15,000 members, the SNC commented that those numbers were ‘exaggerated’. Two links were annotated in the article, one, *Syrian opposition forms united front* (Al Jazeera, 2nd October, 2011) taking us more than a month back; it described the formation of the SNC hoping it could represent most of the opposition groups, which Ghalioun described as ‘a united front in the face of the daily massacres committed by the regime against unarmed civilians, most recently in Rastan’ (Al Jazeera, 2nd October, 2011).

The second link was to an article published in *Foreign Affairs, Meet Syria’s Opposition* (Foreign Affairs, 2nd November 2011), just a few days earlier and to which the current Al Jazeera article had referred several times. In the *Foreign Affairs* article, Randa Slim, an adjunct research fellow at the National Security Studies Program at the New America Foundation and a scholar at the Middle East Institute, provided a very detailed description of opposition groups with more focus on the SNC, which received wider recognition than any other group and the NCC; both groups were against the militarisation of the revolution.

Regarding blame, the article reminded readers of the Hama massacre committed by Hafiz Al Assad more than three decades earlier when he killed, according to Slim, 20,000 Syrian civilians and forced the Muslim Brotherhood into exile. In addition to that, despite saying that the role of the FSA was not clear, Slim mentioned two noble things that the FSA did: ‘defending the neighbourhoods coming under attack from the Syrian military’, and ‘in other cities, establishing a ring around the protesters helping to defend them against soldiers and pro-regime militias’ (Foreign Affairs, 2nd November 2011).

The article also showed understanding of the inevitable need for civilians to defend themselves, leading the revolution to be militarised:

Despite the majority’s best efforts to maintain the peaceful character of the protest movement, developments on the ground might over time push toward the militarisation of the opposition... Activists inside Syria explain this development as citizens acquiring weapons for self-defence purposes. As one activist from Homs told me, ‘we will not allow another Hama (massacre) to take place... An FSA officer denied the report that Turkey has been arming them, but in his words are merely ‘helping with our protection and meeting our basic needs’ (Foreign Affairs, 2nd November 2011)

The second article focusing on opposition, *The Free Syrian Army grows in influence* (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011), was all about the FSA. The article mentioned an attack by the FSA on a Syrian Regime military basis.

What matters more than mentioning the event was how it was described through causal emplotment, and also through the voices selected to speak up. The attack was actually described as the event that gave significance to the FSA, ‘the attack by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on an air force intelligence base in the suburbs of the capital Damascus on November 16 has raised the profile of the band of army deserters, who are seeking to end President Bashar al-Assad’s long rule’ (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011). It was clear from Al Jazeera’s comment, as well that the defected soldiers were not portrayed as sectarian, wanting revenge, or having any bad intentions, but all they wanted was to topple the regime. This had been stated again in the article, ‘What is certain though, is that the deserters want to bring the Syrian government to its knees, by targeting its biggest strength, its 500,000-strong army’ (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011).

Moreover, FSA members were, again, allowed to speak for themselves. For instance, Colonel Ammar al-Wawi, the commander of the FSA’s Ababeel battalion, told Al Jazeera that ‘Our only goal is to liberate Syria from Bashar Assad’s regime’, and ‘To put it simply, we carry out military operations against anyone who targets the peaceful protesters’ (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011), and as the FSA had just created a military council led by Riayad al-Asaad, Al Jazeera quoted their announcement of their goals for choosing military action against the regime, which were to ‘bring down the current regime, protect Syrian civilians from its oppression, protect private and public property, and prevent chaos and acts of revenge when it falls’ (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011).

This announcement not only painted the FSA in a positive light as its aims were to topple the regime and protect civilians and property, but it also showed the FSA leaders’ awareness of possible accusations of sectarianism or acts of revenge against minorities, Alawites specifically, and chaos in the country. They did not want to bring chaos to their country and were going to do what they could to prevent it. In addition, Al Jazeera did not fail to mention a very humanitarian reason for defection, not revenge against the regime, but because of

soldiers finding themselves in a position in which they either fired on unarmed civilians or faced death themselves.

Here, also, Al Jazeera quoted al Wawi, ‘He said those who refuse to follow commands from the Syrian military to crack down on protests turn to one of the battalions located in their province’ (Al Jazeera, 13th November 2011). To the same end, photos in the article spoke out the same narrative:



Figure 5-34 Members of the FSA who once served for the national army say their conscience guided them to defect

It was a photo of defectors standing behind al-Wawi as he was giving a speech, probably to Al Jazeera. The photo could be interpreted in different ways and could make some analysts express their concerns that what started as peaceful demonstrations was turning into armed rebellion and, thus, chaos, civil war, and sectarianism, but here the caption by Al Jazeera stood out.

It told of the situation that made continuing peaceful demonstrations unrealistic and that those soldiers were forced into defection because they refused to target their own people. Those soldiers have chosen to target the regime itself that had no regard for the safety of protesters, instead of targeting their people. A highlight within the article also showed understanding of

the cause of armed rebellion; it was a quote by al-Wawi: ‘those who count on peaceful means, only to throw the regime, are delusional’ (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011).

Wawi also appeared in a second photo with a caption indicating the growing power of the FSA:



Figure 5-35 Wawi said the latest offensive on the air force base in Damascus follows a series of attacks

The photo caption was reporting al-Wawi telling Al Jazeera that the attack on the air base was not their first, but, according to him, it was the one that received media and activists’ attentions. The placement of the quote indicated that the FSA was powerful and had been carrying out operations against the regime for some time. It was also important to note that the article also finished with this quote.

In this article, the majority of voices, photos, and comments seemed to be rooting for the FSA despite the fact that Al Jazeera did tone its support down by allowing other voices critical of it to speak up. In actual fact, while the FSA members were allowed to speak up in their own defence nine times, critical voices of the FSA were cited five times. These voices came under the subtitles, *false hope and legitimate role*, in which Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, expressed his scepticism about the number of FSA members and its power.

Not only did he say that the defectors joining the FSA were less than one thousand, but also said that the FSA was giving people ‘false hope’; he also said that ‘one must keep in mind that the formal Syrian army is comprised of more than 500,000 soldiers, not to mention the

hundreds of pro-government Shabeeha [thugs]' and that 'betting on the ability of the Free Syrian Army to overthrow Assad is a losing bet' (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011).

Moreover, Randa Slim, an anti-government activist, the same activist who earlier said that the goal of the FSA was to protect civilians, accused the FSA of changing the peaceful nature of the uprising: 'the FSA has, unfortunately, only been effective in tarnishing the peaceful image our revolution had possessed' (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011). The SNC, however, tried to maintain a middle ground, according to Al Jazeera. They showed understanding of the FSA and praised its legitimate role in protecting unarmed civilians, but they criticised carrying any offensive operations against the regime. Thus, Bassma Kodmani, the spokeswoman of the SNC, told Al Jazeera that, 'We must maintain the peaceful nature of the Syrian revolution and we are in continuous dialogue with the FSA to co-ordinate our political stance' (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011).

However, no-one accused the FSA of committing violence equal to that of the regime or claimed that both sides of the conflict were to blame, but stated that they were expressing a different point of view or a different strategy to topple the regime. Moreover, while there was no answer back to the UK Observatory of Human Rights scepticism about the size and power of the FSA, Al Jazeera itself expressed its own scepticism about the provided numbers at the beginning of the article, 'depending on whom you believe, the group was believed to number between 1,000 and 25,000', but the comments of Randa Slim and the SNC spokeswoman were refuted immediately by other quotes.

In response to the Damascus-based activist, Randa Slim, a resident from Homs, said 'We cannot watch the government forces killing our friends and families and continue to say we want a peaceful revolution'. The fact that he was described as a 'resident of the central city of Homs' Baba Amr neighbourhood, which saw major clashes between the regular army and deserters', gave his point of view the upper hand as someone who saw with his own eyes the clashes that occurred between the two and emphasised his closeness to the reality of events that surpassed that of the Damascus-based activist who may not have seen as much (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011). Also, after Bassma Kodmani, the spokeswoman of the SNC's criticism of the FSA's offensive operations, the article finished with the quote from al-Wawi

saying that anyone thinking that the regime could be toppled peacefully was ‘delusional’, the same quote that was highlighted in the article.

Finally, on the 23rd November in *Q&A: Syria’s daring actress*, an article I have already cited several times in the previous two sections *No help for Syrians*, and *The regime cannot be trusted*, Soliman chose to announce her revolt to prove that not all Alawites supported the regime, that this revolution was not sectarian, and that it was not made up of Islamists who wanted to exclude anyone else, but was a revolution by the Syrian people for the Syrian people; ‘I just wanted to go just to say we Syrians are one people. I wanted to contradict the narrative of the regime and show people that there is no sectarianism in Syria. I wanted it to stop its lie that those who protest are armed groups, foreign agents or radical Islamists’ (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

Moreover, sectarian conflict was being, as Soliman asserted, manufactured by the regime itself, which killed Alawites and then blamed it on the rebels. She also pointed out that, in order to make the revolution sound more sectarian and exclusively Sunni, Soliman stated that the regime cracked down more brutally on Alawite dissidents to keep the uprising mainly Sunni:

In other cities, however, like Sweida [in the south of the country] or Tartous [in western Syria], where residents are predominantly from minority groups, the situation is very bad. People cannot voice their opposition because the government is even more brutal on dissidents belonging to minority groups than those from the majority Sunni Muslims. They threaten them and their families and children even before they decide to protest (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

Soliman went on to say that:

Look, this is a very important question. I want to answer it frankly because I do not care anymore. What happened in Homs is that the regime formed a 200-member group of security forces present in the districts where minorities live. They kill people and throw their bodies in other districts to create a sectarian turmoil. We have evidence of this and we released many statements warning people from those criminals living among them (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

Also, in response to the idea that arming rebels would swing the country into civil war, Soliman stated that it was inaction from the international community that was throwing Syria

into civil war; she believed that as long as the regime continued cracking down on peaceful people, civil war was going break out in Syria:

To avoid a civil war in Syria, the international community should take serious steps against the regime. So far we haven't seen any of their statements translate on the ground. I just saw with my own eyes a 25-year-old man being shot dead in a protest. The regime continues to kill because it does not sense seriousness on the part of the international community (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011).

Thus, this article also blames the regime about six times for both sectarianism and civil war, if it happened. There were no annotated links, but all of the three photos, which were taken of what seemed to be screen captures of her acting in films, showed her in extreme distress with the captions commenting on the more brutal crackdown on Alawites. For example:



Figure 5-36 Soliman believes the government's crackdown becomes more brutal when dissidents are from a minority group (Al Jazeera, 23rd November 2011)

Finally, while there is no mention of the FSA in the article, or any discussion about whether rebellion should be armed or not, this article throws two basic accusations, by the regime and some media outlets, that the rebellion was sectarian and that it was leading the country into civil war back to the regime. Since this article was an interview with one person who put forth her own interpretation of the events, I considered this whole article to be causal emplotment.

5.7.3 Discussion: A rather positive narrative of the opposition

In November 2011, Al Jazeera continued blaming the regime for the escalation of violence. Two issues dominated its coverage for this month; the first was the Arab League and the

international reaction to the regime violence, which went from condemnations to sanctions, and the emergence of the armed rebellion and other opposition groups. No blame, whatsoever, was placed on the rebels, armed or not, in the three articles that specifically discussed opposition or in anywhere in all of the articles discussed this month.

Moreover, the first of these three articles gave importance and legitimacy to the FSA among other opposition groups, almost equal to that of the SNC; the second article justified armed rebellion and defection of the army for it was done to topple the regime and to protect unarmed civilians brutally targeted by the regime. The third dispelled accusations of sectarianism, Islamism and the idea that armed rebellion was leading the country into civil war, and threw these accusations back at the regime. Despite the apparent support of Al Jazeera for the opposition groups, including the armed rebellion, it did acknowledge that the FSA exaggerated their numbers and allowed critics to blame it for turning the peaceful revolution into militarisation. The FSA voices and arguments spoke louder, but other points of view were not discredited and still had value in the articles. Also, the criticism did not go as far as to give the FSA and the regime equal blame for the violence, but as a difference of opinion on what was best to bring the regime down. Al Jazeera showed understanding, not only in that the rebels were pushed to carry arms by the unprecedented crack down of the regime, something the BBC also acknowledged, but that it only targeted the regime military, not civilians.

5.8 Conclusion

At the start, the BBC narratives of the uprising in March 2011 were faltering. Indeed, the first article written in March, just before uprising erupted, did not expect an uprising at all and, somehow, portrayed al-Assad as a reformist loved by his people, as discussed in 5.4.3.1; however, in the articles discussed in 5.4.3.2, the BBC discredited al-Assad's claims that armed gangs infiltrated the rebels by means of selective appropriation, causal emplotment, and labelling using words such as *blame* and *accuse*, which showed scepticism and required evidence.

Ironically, it also portrayed, in the articles discussed in 5.4.3.3, some implicit justification for the violence of al-Assad, reiterated al-Assad claims of the looming danger of Islamists in the

Sunni majority country, which justified both the crackdown on civilians and the passivity of the West towards the war crimes committed by al-Assad who ordered the firing at those that were unarmed.

Thus, the BBC stance had fluctuated back and forth between supporting the rebellion, blaming the regime, and doubting the rebellion of the Sunni majority, giving excuses for the regime and emphasising its promises and initial reform efforts.

Al Jazeera, on the other hand, stood fast by the rebels and fully justified rebellion as discussed in 5.5.3.1, and had high expectations for a sweeping revolution, as discussed in 5.5.3.2. It also condemned the regime brutality and gave no room for any praise of al-Assad, as was discussed in 5.5.3.3.

As both the BBC and Al Jazeera reported on the regime brutality, its aggression towards the protesters had been reported by activists so repeatedly that it was difficult to ignore (Kassab & al Shami, 2016). However, the approach of the two websites differed tremendously when it came to armed rebellion. To the BBC, armed rebellion meant extremism, civil war, and sectarianism. When it comes to extremism, the BBC related that to the rebels being Sunni.

It blamed the rebels when they attacked military targets and made them equal to the regime regarding that blame. Moreover, on more than one occasion, it represented al-Assad as a reformer who was trying to avoid the massacres, but was unable to stop the regime from doing so. It also worried about the fate of the Alawites in case the regime fell.

Unfortunately, the BBC fell into the regime's trap, which had been set since the uprising started: the rebels were al Qaeda extremists. It seems that any claims of extremism were based on presumptions, as there were no events reported by the BBC that supported the case for sectarianism or violence against civilian targets. Also, by pinning the blame for civil war on rebels, the BBC ignored the fact that the regime's brutality was the main factor that pushed civilians to carrying arms in order to defend themselves and the protesters. They targeted the Syrian army only when they realised that the regime was not going to fall peacefully. They had lost so many lives and there was no going back. Also, Philips (2016) indicated that the West encouraged protesters to carry weapons. Not only did Obama and US

spokesmen condemn al-Assad, but they kept repeating that ‘Assad must go’. Although the US had no plan for action, people in the Middle East still believed in the hegemony of the US and expected support. They, as well as Middle Eastern governments, took the US at its word. The rebels kept fighting with whatever small weaponry they obtained, thinking that, soon, a Western intervention was on its way. Later on, neighbouring countries started supporting the protesters thinking also that the US would soon interfere, but that did not happen. While Obama did not mean to give the impression that the US would interfere, he failed to make that clear, which was disastrous for the revolution (Philips, 2016). Moreover, the BBC did not speak to the Alawites as it did to the armed rebels. There were Alawites who participated in the rebellion and it was important that their voices were heard even if their numbers were small.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera reporters met with both the armed rebels and the Alawites. In this chapter, we have seen how Al Jazeera allowed the opposition groups to speak for themselves. It also reached out to a prominent Alawite, Fadwa Soliman, who participated in the revolution. She not only defended the rebels, but also spoke for the Alwite minority who were not allowed to rebel, shedding light on an important factor to the Sunnism of the revolution, which was that rebelling Alawites were prevented from having their voices heard, both by the government, who cracked down brutally on them, and their families, who disavowed them if they did.

Much more is to be said about the coverages of both websites when assessing the role of translation in the next chapter, which will span the whole period from March 2011 until June 2012. Studying this big scope of articles will not only enlighten our understanding of the role of translation in the narrative, but it will also enable us to confirm our initial perspective of the narratives of both channels. Moreover, the next chapter will also look into the factors that could have prompted both Al Jazeera and the BBC to create different narratives of the uprising.

Chapter 6: Translation as a Narrative Tool in the Coverage of the Armed Rebellion

6.1 Introduction

As concluded in the previous chapter, both the BBC and Al Jazeera criminalised al-Assad regime. They reported not only its war crimes but also the condemnation of the regime from human rights organisations, both in Syria and internationally. Indeed, the regime was quoted far less than the other speakers criminalising it, and whenever the regime or any of its spokesmen were given a space, their credibility was usually undermined by other voices or events that contradicted or labelled the claims of the regime. For example, al-Assad and his spokesmen were usually ‘blamed’ and ‘accused’, exposing them, in light of the context and causal employment, as liars detached from reality.

However, the BBC and Al Jazeera differed in their treatment of the armed rebellion: the BBC was more sceptical, sometimes accusing the rebels of being Islamic fanatics and worrying too much about sectarianism in case the revolution became militarised. Al Jazeera, on the other hand, stood more by the side of the protesters, including the armed rebels. Even though it acknowledged the Syrian voices that were unhappy about the militarisation, it was understanding of the causes that had led people to carry arms and the impossibility of carrying on peacefully unless the international community interfered.

Translation was utilised in both news media immensely because they were covering in English the conflict in Syria, an Arabic-speaking country. Translation helped to support the narratives of these news media by allowing both sides to speak through selective appropriation and then causal employment, usually in the shape of comments or references to other incidents or voices or through temporal placement by placing quotes between other quotes, either to support them or to reduce their credibility. The examples used here are not exhaustive because of the limited space of this paper and due to the difficulty in verifying that a text has been translated. Translation is not usually acknowledged in the news media, as discussed in section 4.3. I initially tried comparing the Arabic and English websites of Al Jazeera and the BBC but found the effort to be futile, as there was no indication of which elements had been translated. Even if Syrians are Arabs, one cannot be sure if a Syrian cited was speaking Arabic or English. Thus, I resorted to other means. For example, President Bashar al-Assad and his government mostly spoke Arabic; their speech appeared in most

channels in Arabic. In addition, an indication on the English websites that someone's quotation had been taken from the Arabic websites (as when the articles stated that someone spoke to BBC Arabic or Al Jazeera Arabic) usually meant that the speech was in Arabic. Moreover, if there was a link to a story mentioning something in Arabic, usually a YouTube video or a Facebook page, this was proof of translation. For example, if a witness spoke in Arabic in the videos posted on the English BBC and Al Jazeera websites, one could be confident that the speech quoted in the written article had been translated from Arabic. In this way, I ensured that I correctly tracked translations in the texts and proceeded to investigate their role in these texts.

6.2 Translations in the BBC's coverage of the Syrian uprising

As established in the analysis of the BBC's coverage of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 (section 5.4), the BBC did not expect a revolution at first, despite acknowledging the fact that the Syrians shared the same grievances as their Arab neighbours, but al-Assad was still popular among his people. He was also portrayed as a reformer held back by elements of the old regime. As the regime responded with utter force towards the peaceful first demonstrations, the BBC narrative shifted by the end of the month towards blaming the regime, including al-Assad, for the killing and targeting of peaceful civilians. It still hinted, though, at the threat of Islamists – the threat the regime had already been blaming for the violence, implicitly justifying, at times, its use of lethal force.

In the period from April 2011 to October 2011, the BBC's coverage shifted gears completely in support of the protesters. It had given up the narrative that al-Assad was a reformer held back by a deeply corrupt regime. It actually disregarded this narrative, where the West had placed too much hope on the Western-looking ophthalmologist trained in London, as in the article *Family dynamics drive Syrian President Assad*:

The US, France and the UK expected the Westernised-looking leader to open Syria up to the West. But 11 years after he came to power, change has been minimal and mostly cosmetic.

A common explanation had Mr Assad as a reformer who understood it was in Syria's interest to align itself with the West but was constrained by his father's conservative old guard. (BBC, 30th April 2011)

Moreover, Kim Ghattas, the author of the previous article, quoted sources stating that this image of al-Assad as a young reformer was a ‘well-studied tactic’ to do harm and then blame it on the regime so that people kept their hopes pinned on al-Assad.

But his image of a benevolent leader, frustrated by an old guard in his attempts to bring change to the country, was a well-studied tactic, according to US-based Syrian dissident Ammar Abdulhamid. ‘It was the same during Hafez al-Assad’s time.’ (BBC, 30th April 2011)

In the same article, Ghattas emphasised the fact that al-Assad and his family were in complete control of affairs in Syria and that the troops who had killed, tortured and massacred innocent civilians had taken direct orders from him and his brother, Maher al-Assad:

‘There is total solidarity between them and he is the president, like a board chairman, they discuss things and make a decision together.’

A source close to the Assad family, who spoke to the BBC on condition of anonymity for safety reasons, said there was ‘full co-ordination between Bashar and his brother Maher’ who heads the feared Republican Guard. (BBC, 30th April 2011)

Moreover, Ghattas emphasised many times that al-Assad was no different from his father: he was ‘just his father’s son’:

But over the last few years the reality that Mr Assad was just his father’s son, a tough leader putting up an act as reformer, became increasingly clear to more people in Syria who confided their bitter disappointment to visiting foreign reporters. (BBC, 30th April 2011)

There is no evidence of translation in the article, although Ghattas quoted Syrian activists and family members of al-Assad, but they might have been speaking in English. However, from here on, I will investigate if translation sustained the BBC narrative of al-Assad’s regime as a brutal regime lashing out at innocent civilians through the narrative investigation of all of the articles collected from the period.

As concluded in the previous chapter, the BBC very soon almost gave up hope on the regime making real reforms or concessions to the protesters. Thus, it continued reporting the crimes of the regime, assigning blame to the regime most of the time. At the same time, the BBC did not support the armed rebellion, which was seen by some as the only realistic solution in the face of a regime that bombarded and tortured peaceful protesters. The armed rebels were portrayed in the BBC as weak, incompetent, betrayers, extremists, al-Qaeda infiltrated and a

risk to the minorities, even before any reports emerged of Sunni extremists taking over the revolution. This is detailed in my analysis of the BBC translations from March 2011 to June 2012. The basic narratives of the BBC in the period used the Hama massacre as an example of al-Assad family's historic ruthlessness, belittled al-Assad's sayings and actions, argued that both sides should be blamed for the violence, argued that the armed rebels were not trustworthy and argued that the rebels were likely radicals.

6.2.1 The Hama massacre

In the article *Syria: Bashar al-Assad 'grants general amnesty'*, the BBC discussed the Hama massacre that happened in 1982 when Hafiz al-Assad crushed a Sunni revolution and killed over 10,000 people (BBC, 31st May 2011). This article and others (BBC, 8th July 2011, 31st July 2011, 1st August 2011, 18th August 2011) compared the earlier massacre to al-Assad's own crackdown on the protesters of Hama and other regions. For example, talking about the Muslim Brotherhood's support for the uprising, the BBC brought in some relative history on the prosecution of this group:

The banned political movement was behind a 1982 uprising in the city of Hama that was ruthlessly repressed, with at least 10,000 killed.

Membership of the group is punishable by death, though this has not been enforced (BBC, 31st May 2011).

Moreover, the Hama massacre was recalled nine times in July and August. The paragraphs below were repeated twice or more in several articles:

Hama was the scene of a Muslim Brotherhood uprising against Mr Assad's father, Hafez, in 1982, which the army crushed, killing at least 10,000 people. (BBC, 2nd July 2011 a, 2nd July 2011 b, 2nd July 2011 c, 3rd July 2011, 4th July 2011)

Hama – a bastion of dissidence – occupies a significant place in the history of modern Syria. In 1982, then-President Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar, sent in troops to quell an uprising by the Sunni opposition Muslim Brotherhood. Tens of thousands were killed and the town flattened. (BBC, 8th July 2011, 31st July 2011, 1st August 2011, 18th August 2011)

Hama was the scene of the suppression of an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's father in 1982. (BBC, 2nd July 2011, 5th July 2011)

In all of the above examples, a pattern was followed by either justifying the act of protesting or recalling the Hama massacre after reporting the current regime's recent massacres and crackdown on protesters, as in the article *Syrian tanks launch fresh attack on city of Hama*:

Syrian security forces have cracked down on anti-government protests across the country, killing 100 people in the city of Hama alone, activists say. (BBC, 1st August 2011)

In this article, which was written by Lina Sinjab, a BBC journalist based in Damascus, residents' testimonies were about the violence committed by the regime; the fact that she is Arabic and was quoting residents inside Syria makes it more likely that these testimonies had been translated.

According to the residents, the regime had been shelling them all through the night. The testimonies had been paraphrased by Sinjab, but one resident's speech was directly reported:

Resident Omar al-Habal told the BBC that people were building barricades and burning tyres to keep troops out.

He said there had been shooting in Hama 'from all sides by all types of weapons'.

'Bombs and heavy artillery, machine guns... and all around the city the people on the barricades light the tyres to protect the city,' he said. (BBC, 1st August 2011)

Omar al-Habal's speech was followed by Western condemnation of the violence:

Government attempts to crush continuing protests across Syria have brought strong international condemnation, with Germany and Italy calling for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council. Germany is currently a member of the council. (BBC, 1st August 2011)

To the side of the article lies the following highlight:

In an interview with the BBC on Monday, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague called for stronger international pressure on Syria.

"We do want to see additional sanctions. We want to see stronger international pressure all round. Of course, to be effective, that can't just be pressure from Western nations, that includes from Arab nations, it includes from Turkey," Mr Hague said.

Seeking military action against Syria, even with UN authority, was "not a remote possibility", he added.

On Monday, President Assad praised the military for "foiling the enemies" of the state, the official news agency reported.

The Syrian government has promised reforms but says its troops are being attacked by "armed gangs" who are backed by unspecified foreign powers.

Significance of Hama

Hama - a bastion of dissidence - occupies a significant place in the history of modern Syria. In 1982, then-President Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar, sent in troops to quell an uprising by the Sunni opposition Muslim Brotherhood. Tens of thousands were killed and the town flattened.

The city, with a population of 800,000, has seen some of the biggest protests and worst violence in Syria's 2011 protests. It was slow to join in, but has now become one of the main focuses of the revolt.

Figure 6-1 A screenshot from a 1st August BBC article

The highlight singles Hama out as having significance in history for being the site where the Muslim Brotherhood had been crushed 30 years earlier, with the killing of tens of thousands of people by Hafiz al-Assad to annihilate the Muslim Brotherhood. Providing the history of the 1982 Hama massacre (external retroversion) not only emphasised al-Assad as his father's son but also brought in the idea that the people had a good reason to protest. They were finally speaking out against the regime that had massacred their loved ones 30 years earlier.

This idea was suggested several times. For instance, in *Syria: President Bashar al-Assad sacks governor of Hama*, a witness described (translated, as he was speaking to BBC Arabic) how people were chanting for the fall of the regime. We are reminded again of the massacre that took place almost 30 years earlier:

One resident told BBC Arabic on Friday: 'Hundreds of thousands are chanting "Leave, leave, the people want the fall of the regime." All of Hama is celebrating. There are people chanting from their windows and from the fronts of their homes. All of Hama is on the streets.'

Hama was the scene of a Muslim Brotherhood uprising against Mr Assad's father, Hafez, in 1982, which the army crushed, killing at least 10,000 people. (BBC, 2nd July 2011 c)

In addition, the video posted in the article started with a reminder of the massacre. The reporter in the video commented on the hundreds of marching protesters, pointing out that they were in Hama, the 'city where tens of thousands were killed after the regime brutally suppressed an uprising in 1982'; this was followed by a description of the content of the banners the protesters were carrying. One of the banners said 'Juma'at Irhal', which can be translated as 'You should go, Friday'(my translation), addressing the regime. In the same video, the BBC commentator said that the people were asking the regime to leave. Thus, situating the people's request that the regime should leave after stating the regime's brutal history made the request seem more legitimate; the people were described in the video as 'unafraid' and 'defying their rulers'.

Moreover, the people of Hama were reported as chanting that they would not be killed again in reference to the same massacre in *Syrian unrest: Hama army raid kills dozens*:

But our correspondent says the people of Hama remain defiant, with some still out in streets shouting: 'We will not be killed again', a reference to a massacre in 1982 when tens of thousands were killed. (BBC, 31st July 2011)

The correspondent here was Lina Sinjab, based in Damascus, as referred to earlier in this section. It seems that she was the one translating the slogans of the protesters. The Syrians were never heard shouting slogans in Arabic, so this was surely a translation. There was also a video posted in the article where people can be heard in the background chanting slogans in Arabic. To the side of the article, the same highlight as in Figure 6-1, published on the 1st August BBC article discussed on the previous page, was posted. The highlight gave more details about the Hama massacre that had killed tens of thousands of people in reaction to a Muslim Brotherhood revolt. The translation of the shouted slogans was engulfed by reports of witnesses and residents describing the regime's attacks on the people. It is highly likely that these reports were translations as well. Relating the two events together, one that took place 30 years ago in an external retroversion and the recent events taking place in 2011, where people were defying the regime and declaring that they did not want to be killed again, hit two birds with one stone: firstly, it portrayed that brutality was natural to the regime, which had always clamped down on any kind of dissent, and thus the people's long silence was because of utter fear of another massacre; and, secondly, it portrayed that the Syrian people

had finally broken the barriers of fear and were standing up to the regime, despite its continuing violence.

6.2.2 al-Assad's sayings and actions belittled

Every time concessions of al-Assad were mentioned, someone would say something that belittled or cast doubts on these reforms, and whenever al-Assad said that there were armed terrorists among the protesters, labelling was used to cast doubts on his credibility, like using the words 'blame' and 'accuse' and placing al-Assad's statements between speech marks.

Of course, all of al-Assad's statements were translations, as he and his government only spoke Arabic. The following quote is an example of placing Assad's speeches between others that put his credibility into question:

The BBC's Lina Sinjab in Damascus says Syrians received the news that the parliament had lifted the state of emergency with a sense of caution, waiting to see if the changes are implemented on the ground.

There is still concern over the role of security apparatus in Syria, which is immune to any legal system, our correspondent says. (BBC, 20th April 2011)

Just before the previous quote, the speech of Interior Minister Ibrahim al-Shaar to SANA, the government's Syrian news agency, was translated, where he was saying that people should refrain from participating in rallies and that 'the laws in force in Syria will be applied in the interest of the safety of the people and the stability of the country.' Consequently, any credibility as to whether the government was really lifting the emergency law was stripped by the interior minister repeating the regime line that the people protesting were affecting the stability of the country and therefore deserved to be punished.

This was echoed towards the end of the article with another translation of the regime defending its aggression towards the protesters as an action that had to be taken to protect the country from armed insurrection:

But Syria's unprecedented wave of unrest shows no sign of abating. The government has said an 'armed insurrection' by Salafist groups is taking place in Homs and further north in Baniyas. (BBC, 20th April 2011)

Placing 'armed insurrection' between speech marks distanced the BBC from the false allegations of the regime. In actual fact, one of the expected outcomes of lifting the emergency law was to 'abolish state security courts and allow citizens to protest peacefully'

(BBC, 21st April 2011), but the regime was still using the fake threat of armed insurrection not to end the emergency law in reality.

Indeed, whenever al-Assad's speech, his spokesmen's speech and the government news media SANA's reports were translated, they were negatively labelled. Look at the following examples:

Damascus has also accused Islamist militants, or Salafists, of waging an 'armed insurrection' in Homs and Baniyas. (BBC, 22nd April 2011)

The media campaign clearly aims to dismiss the protests as the work of hired agitators and armed gangs. (BBC, 14th April 2011)

The official media are geared to portray the troubles as an externally-driven campaign by terrorists and gangsters to undermine the country's security, stability and unity. (BBC, 14th April 2011)

On Wednesday, three men said to have been captured during disturbances appeared on Syrian state TV to 'confess' that they had been paid and armed by outsiders to open fire on demonstrators and security forces. (BBC, 14th April 2011)

Here, the BBC reported that the government had stated that armed gangs were responsible for the killings or were the cause of the crackdown; however, through labelling, it undermined what the Syrian regime had said. Placing the words 'confess' and 'armed insurrection' between speech marks implied that these were false accusations. Other expressions that implied that the government and its media were lying included 'The media campaign', 'aim to dismiss the protests as', 'are geared to portray' and 'The Syrian government claims'.

In the following examples, the regime's accusations were followed by witnesses and activists saying otherwise. They referred to a massacre that had happened in Jisr al-Shugur, where the government said that armed insurgents had killed 120 soldiers while witnesses said that the soldiers had fired on each other when some refused to follow orders. In addition, we may note here that the witnesses specifically referred to people from inside Syria who were witnessing the events first-hand and were likely to have spoken in Arabic. In this context, the activists did not seem to be any different from the eye witnesses, as there was no indication that they were speaking from outside Syria, so their reports were likely translations.

'Indiscriminate killing'

So far, most accounts agree. But what happened next is disputed. The government says armed gangs stormed public buildings in the town, killing soldiers, civilians and security forces indiscriminately. But other eyewitnesses say that the security forces, trapped inside their building and surrounded by an angry mob, called in support from the regular army. (BBC, 22nd June 2011)

State media said the army was chasing what they called the ‘remnants of armed terrorist gangs’ through the surrounding countryside. Activists said local men of military age were being rounded up, houses damaged and crops destroyed. The units involved in this assault are believed to be from the army’s much-feared 4th division, under the direct command of President Assad’s brother, Maher. This was the division that ruthlessly suppressed defiance down in the city of Deraa in the south, near the Jordanian border, where the whole uprising began in March and where dissent continues to smoulder. (BBC, 13th June 2011)

In support of what the activists and witnesses said, recent history was cited. The army division, commanded by Maher al-Assad, who the witnesses said had rounded up young men and destroyed crops and houses, had done the same in Deraa, where the dissent started. It is, then, reasonable to believe the opposition’s version of the massacre that happened in Jisr al-Shugur: that it was the army who had shot the soldiers for refusing to attack the peaceful protesters.

In *Syrian unrest: Inquiry into Hamza al-Khatib’s death* (BBC, 1st June 2011), the death of Hamza was discussed. Hamza was a 13-year-old boy who was lost during a demonstration near Deraa. Later, according to the protesters, he was abducted and tortured to death and ‘his mutilated body was handed to his family’, (BBC, 1st June 2011); the regime, however, said that Hamza had been shot in the demonstration. Although the statements of the regime were translated, they lost their credibility not only because they were surrounded by the statements of the protesters who said otherwise but also through labelling. For example, the word ‘say’ was used for the protesters and ‘accuse’ and ‘insist’ were used for the regime, as in ‘The authorities insist he was shot dead during a demonstration’ (BBC, 1st June 2011). This *insistence* of the regime was miserably sandwiched between the protesters *saying* that Hamza had been tortured to death and activists *saying* that the regime troops had killed 25 people in Rastan, leaving little doubt that the protesters’ version of Hamza’s story was the more credible; the regime, whose troops had shot civilians to death, was surely capable of torture, even if it *insisted* it had not done it. Interestingly, SANA, the Syrian state news agency, aired the story of Hamza:

Syrian state TV aired a programme about the teenager on Tuesday night in which a judge said death was due to ‘a number of bullet wounds without any indication of torture or beating on the body’.

Coroner Akram al-Shaar blamed the state of the body on decomposition, adding: ‘There are no marks on the surface of the body that show violence, resistance or torture.’ (BBC, 1st June 2011)

Just a few lines earlier, activists described his body as ‘mutilated’ and here the coroner blamed that on decomposition, but ‘decomposition’ and ‘mutilation’ are very different terms.

Decomposition would not make a corpse look mutilated unless it really was, so the words ‘blame’ and ‘the state of the body’ in reference to what the activists described earlier as mutilation make a joke of the regime. Moreover, the father had met the president and praised his kindness on Syrian TV:

A man who identified himself as Hamza’s father said: ‘The president considered Hamza his own son and was deeply affected.’

But the BBC’s Jim Muir in neighbouring Lebanon says the authorities’ efforts have not stopped Hamza’s death giving a new focus to the continuing revolt. (BBC, 1st June 2011)

By saying ‘a man who identified himself as Hamza’s father’, the BBC showed scepticism about whether the man was indeed Hamza’s father. What mattered was not whether the man was Hamza’s father or not – this was a gesture showing how far the BBC did not trust SANA, the state news agency. Jim Muir even referred to the coverage as ‘the authorities’ efforts’, alluding to the fact that SANA’s coverage was just propaganda to cover up for the regime and gloss over Hamza’s horrible death. Coinciding with Muir’s comments, to the right of the article was a photo of al-Assad in a gathering with members of his government, with a caption indicating the government’s efforts to tone down the ‘damage’ that had been caused by Hamza’s death.



Figure 6-2 The Syrian authorities trying to minimise the damage caused by the boy’s death (BBC, 1st June 2011)

This damage was the people’s fury at the government. As The Telegraph stated, ‘Syrians may have become hardened to deaths and disappearances, but the fate of the round-faced adolescent has caused unprecedented revulsion, and turned the boy from a small town in southern Syria into the face of the nationwide uprising’ (The Telegraph, 5th June 2011). This was followed by quoting US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Australian Foreign

Minister Kevin Rudd criticising the regime's brutality and Human Rights Watch criticising the regime's use of torture:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report on Wednesday that said 'systematic killings and torture by Syrian security forces' in Deraa could qualify as crimes against humanity (BBC, 1st June 2011).

Finally, the article continued listing the deaths of people in different cities at the hands of the regime to emphasise that Hamza's death was not an exception but the norm for the regime.

In the article *Syrian foreign minister condemns extended EU sanctions* (BBC, 22nd June 2011), after a report on the EU sanctions on Syria, excerpts from Syrian Foreign Minister Waleed Muallem's address on state television were translated:

Rounding on what Syria regards as unwarranted criticism by the European Union, Mr Muallem said; 'No-one from Europe has come to visit Syria. They do not listen to us. They learn about Syria from outside Syria only.

The world is not only Europe. We will forget that Europe exists on the map. We will ask to withdraw our membership from the Euromed.' (BBC, 22nd June 2011)

Right after Mr Muallem's call for the West to come and see for themselves the situation in Syria, Ban Ki-moon is reported to have asked Syria to allow 'fact-finding and humanitarian missions to investigate disputed events during months of anti-government protests.' Thus, the Syrian foreign minister grumbling about Europeans not bothering to come to visit Syria and see the situation for themselves stood as an illogical hypocrisy.

In other instances, when residents or witnesses from Syria spoke of the violence, they were foregrounded and respected as authentic sources of information. Again, if the regime was quoted, it was never to challenge the witnesses' accounts, but to show the regime's fallacies. For example, in the article *Syria's coastal town of Latakia: 'The army has taken the area'*, a resident was quoted:

Syrian government forces have attacked democracy activists in the port town of Latakia.

A resident told the BBC that the army stormed two residential neighbourhoods after shelling them with tanks and navy gunboats.

At least 28 people were killed and dozens more were injured. The BBC's Will Grant reports. (BBC, 15th August 2011)

The resident's account of the events was in the middle paragraph between two paragraphs that only served to add to his credibility.

Here, the same person was speaking Arabic in the video posted in the article, verifying that his speech had been translated. Actually, the video is the main material in the web article, with only a few lines summarising it. The speech of the resident was also foregrounded in the title, which featured part of his translated speech. In the video, the resident described the events accompanied by a voiceover, where the reporter described Latakia as a city ‘under siege’ from land and sea. It had been shelled heavily since the uprising began, and now it was reported that gunboats had been firing into the city. After that, the BBC reporter referred to the same resident quoted in the written text, saying that ‘one resident describes what he has seen’, making his account more authentic and credible. As translated in the BBC video, the resident said:

At 6am, this morning, heavy and intensive firing began from various light and heavy weapons... Now, the army has taken the area. I witnessed this with my own eyes from the rooftop of a building. My friends who live in the area told me the demonstrators are completely unarmed. (BBC, 15th August 2011)

This was followed by the sound of a regime spokesman on Syrian TV, whose speech has not been translated word by word but rather summarised. According to the BBC, the government denied using naval warships. ‘They also showed images of other cities... saying that normality was being restored after what they called “violence by terrorist groups”.’ Finally, at the end of the video, the reporter stated that, in many cities, ‘the protestors are continuing to raise their voices against the Assad regime, despite the suppression’ and that activists had reported that 1,700 people had been killed since the demonstrations began.

The fact that the regime’s speech was not given as much attention and was not directly translated but rather paraphrased was indicative of the little truth and value the speech of the regime had to the BBC. In addition, the placement of the regime’s account of the events between a resident’s rather detailed account of the same events and activists’ reportage of the number of people killed since the demonstrations began was good use of causal emplotment and weakened the regime’s argument that the violence had been incited by terrorists. Moreover, labelling was used to show scepticism of the regime’s claims, like ‘denied’ and ‘what they called “violence by terrorist groups”’, indicating that the regime was actually fighting innocent civilians, not terrorists. Finally, when the BBC reporter stated that protestors were still ‘continuing to raise their voices against the Assad regime’ in a matter-of-fact manner, he confirmed to the viewers which version of events was to be believed: that of the residents and activists. The speech of the regime and its spokesmen had been translated to

be refuted by others. The speech of witnesses and activists who countered the claims of the regime might have been translated as well, and in one case certainly was (the eye witness's speech can be heard behind the translated version). This could very well be the case of setting one translation against another.

6.2.3 Blaming both sides equally

From November 2011, the BBC started to shed light on the armed rebellion, mainly the FSA. In several articles, the rebels were given an equal share of responsibility for the violence. For instance, as reported in *Syria unrest: Protest in Homs as peace monitors arrive* (BBC, 27th December 2011), residents in Baba Amr complained of the regime's violence and said that their houses had been shelled and snipers had been shooting from the roofs of buildings. However, the regime responded to the accusations, as usual, by blaming armed gangs for the violence; after citing witnesses' reports of violence, the BBC reported the regime's accusations and unusually supported them by quoting a witness who said that the violence was two-sided:

The Syrian government says it is fighting armed gangs and that hundreds of members of the security forces have been killed as well.

Large numbers of army deserters are reported to have joined armed rebels in the Free Syrian Army in recent weeks to launch attacks on pro-government troops.

'The violence is definitely two-sided', one Homs resident told Reuters.

'I've been seeing ambulances filled with wounded soldiers passing by my window in the past days. They're getting shot somehow.' (BBC, 27th December 2011)

Here, the rebels killing soldiers and the regime killing unarmed civilians were treated as equal crimes. This was done by specifically choosing a witness who commented that both sides were committing crimes. It is significant that these comments came from the BBC when, at the time, a UN spokesman, also quoted in the BBC in *Syria 'violations' condemned by UN Human Rights Council* (BBC, 2nd December 2011), only blamed the Syrian regime:

A report for the UN earlier this week said security forces had committed crimes against humanity in Syria.

'The Syrian authorities' continual ruthless repression, if not stopped now, can drive the country into a full-fledged civil war,' Ms Pillay warned. (BBC, 2nd December 2011)

Indeed, the narrative that both sides were to blame had been developing since the armed rebellion was covered in November 2011. By January 2012, this narrative had become

powerful. In *Syria crisis: Arab League fails to stem conflict* (BBC, 24th January 2012), the armed rebels and the regime were described as equal in power, although the BBC itself described the rebels a few days later as ‘the loose groups of ill-equipped defectors’ (BBC, 28th January 2012):

More likely, perhaps, the situation will simply grind on, with more armed attacks by rebels – three Syrian Army brigadiers have been killed in the past week alone – and further repression by regime forces and their militia auxiliaries, the shabbiha, drawn almost entirely from Mr Assad’s Alawite community. (BBC, 24th January 2012)

In the previous quote, the BBC emphasised the fact that the armed rebels had killed three army brigadiers and predicted that a civil war was on the way because of the attacks by the rebels and the repression by the regime forces and their militia. The reader might assume that the two groups were similar in power and that they had both attacked each other in the same manner, although it was clear that the rebel attacks were limited (only against the army) and that they were much weaker, as the BBC indicated on 24th January in an article that will be discussed in section 6.2.4.

Also in January, the BBC stated that ‘violence is continuing despite the presence of Arab League observers meant to oversee a peace plan’ (BBC, 10th January 2012) and reported that Syrian officials had said that 2,000 soldiers had died; they had been ‘killed in the unrest, which has become increasingly violent as defectors from the army join the opposition’ (BBC, 10th January 2012). The BBC could have said that the unrest was becoming increasingly violent because of the increasing attacks by the regime on civilians, but it chose to attribute the increasing violence only to the fact that army defectors had joined the opposition. The BBC continued to attribute the violence to both sides equally in many other articles. One example is the video article *Inside Deraa: Town at centre of Syria uprising* (BBC, 19th January 2012), where a BBC reporter entered Deraa and spoke to both the governor of Deraa and the frightened people, who motioned to him from far away. All the people featured spoke Arabic, and there was a voiceover translation in the video. The BBC reporter was seen in the video challenging the governor of Deraa, saying that, ‘if things are fine, why were there military check points and sandbags?’ The BBC reporter spoke English but the governor responded in Arabic. In addition, people were frightened to come close to the reporter for fear of being targeted by the regime – they motioned to the reporter to come closer. They can be heard telling him in Arabic that al-Assad was killing them. Some even showed him pictures of their dead loved ones. None of the people said that they were being targeted by armed

rebels. There was a voiceover translation of most of the video. However, the BBC's comment in the written text was not reflective of the content of the video or the translated conversations:

In that time thousands have been killed as the protest spread to every major city in the country. The violence between government forces and their opponents shows little sign of abating. (BBC, 19th January 2012)

The BBC assigned the deaths of thousands of protesters to both the regime and the armed rebellion equally, despite meeting with victims of war who only blamed the regime; moreover, it described both sides as having a growing desire for revenge, justifying the regime's increasing violence on the one hand and ignoring the real causes that had pushed people to carry weapons on the other hand.

The longer this continues, the more bodies pile up, the greater the desire for revenge on both sides. Civil war is not inevitable. But Homs today could be Syria tomorrow. (BBC, 12th February 2012)

The army defectors who joined the protests had carried weapons, as reported by the BBC itself, 'because they could not stomach the orders to kill civilians' (BBC 24th December 2011, 26th December 2011).

Furthermore, the BBC did not allow people to defend the armed rebellion. When a woman leaving Baba Amr questioned the logic behind the attack (as appeared in the video posted in the website article), the BBC stopped at that, and her defence of the rebels was not translated, neither in the video nor in the written article. She said in Arabic:

أطفالنا عم بيتشردوا. احنا بننقتل ليه؟ عشان بدنا حرية؟ عار عليكم. احنا ماعندنا دبابات. انتوا اللي عندكم إرهابيين! انتوا اللي عندكم سلاح.
(Original Arabic)

Our children are being made homeless; they are being killed; why? Shame on you [seemingly addressing the regime from now on]. Is it because we asked for freedom? We have no tanks; you are the ones harbouring terrorists! It is you whose people carry weapons. (My translation)

'We're homeless,' a woman shouted. 'Why? Because we asked for freedom?' (BBC, 25th March 2012)

What she meant was that even if the armed rebels had weapons, they were only small weaponry, not tanks or any of the massive destructive weapons the regime had. She was thus arguing that the armed rebels could not be responsible for the massive killing of civilians. The BBC, however, chose to chip off the last bit, as the woman emphasised that all blame was on the regime – not the narrative the BBC seemed to be advocating at the time.

6.2.4 The armed rebels are not trustworthy either

In the article *Syrian rebel leader waiting in Turkey* (24th November 2011), it was reported that John Simpson had travelled to Turkey to meet with Col. Riyadh al-Asaad, who had been eager to meet Simpson and was very positive about what he thought was the imminent fall of al-Assad's regime. Riyadh al-Asaad spoke Arabic in the video posted on the webpage, which meant that all quotations of his speech had been translated:

'We assure everyone that the president of Syria is finished,' he said.

'The Syrian nation is determined to bring this dictator down.' (BBC, 24th November 2011)

To this, Simpson commented that this was what rebels usually said but may not happen, indicating that Riyadh al-Asaad was being overly optimistic or exaggerating the strength of the FSA, so the first thing that readers learned about the FSA was that they could not be trusted. However, while Simpson's comment was logical, it may not have been necessary; it is normal for organisations or fighting groups to start weak and gradually gain strength. In *The Free Syrian Army grows in influence* (Al Jazeera, 16th November 2011), Al Jazeera also said that the number of defectors joining the FSA had been exaggerated. However, the comment that came next in the BBC article was unexpected:

Nevertheless people who know and have met President Assad often remark on his gentleness of character; he was, of course a practising ophthalmologist, and doctors rarely seem to make good dictators.

There has been a good deal of speculation in the West, as well as the Middle East, that President Assad is not happy with the butcher's work he has felt obliged to do, and that at some stage he will look for a way out. (BBC, 24th November 2011)

As said when discussing the same article in my detailed analysis of the BBC's November 2011 coverage of the uprising in section 5.6.2.3.2, this was the second time the BBC spoke of al-Assad in an overly positive tone. The first was in *Why there is no Egypt style revolution in Syria* (BBC, 4th March 2011), which described him as a reformer. However, the description was less flowery than the very kind ophthalmologist who was not happy with the 'butcher's work' he was forced to do. After reporting the crimes committed by the regime, Simpson reflected on the kindness of the man behind the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians; significantly, this sympathetic tone was present in the first article, which attempted to get close to and understand the FSA, where the main question should have been about what had pushed those people to carry arms, rather than whether al-Assad was happy with his crackdown on his people or not. This juxtaposition of a conversation with the leader of the newly formed armed rebellion, described here as weak and incapable, with the humanistic

description of a president forced to do a ‘butcher’s job’ might be an implicit note that he was the better devil in the conflict.

Moreover, Simpson said that Col. Riyadh al-Asaad had agreed with him on that and quoted him saying:

Colonel Asaad certainly seems to believe this. I asked him when he thought the regime would fall.

‘Inshallah, inshallah [God willing], very soon. The system is rotten to the core. It may look strong on the outside, but at the heart it’s weak.’ (BBC, 24th November 2011)

The fact that Riyadh al-Asaad said that the regime was ‘rotten to the core’ did not indicate that he agreed that Bashar al-Assad was unhappy about what he was doing to his people. Simpson attempted to cling to the old image of al-Assad as a reformer prior to the uprising and depicted al-Assad as forced to lash out on his people by the regime. This contrasted with the reaction of Lyse Doucet, one of his colleagues, who did not allow the king of Jordan to do the same in an interview she had with him in November, which was posted as a video in *Jordan’s king calls on Syria’s Assad to step down* (BBC, 14th November 2011) and *Syria’s Assad should step aside, says Jordan’s Abdullah* (BBC, 15th November 2011).

When the king of Jordan said that he believed that al-Assad had reform in his blood, Doucet responded by asking him if he still believed that al-Assad had the soul of reform and then directly asked him who he exactly believed had ordered the firing at his own people at minute 2:40, very early into the video. The king of Jordan responded that it was not a one-man show and that his brother and brother-in-law were in charge of the military.

The king of Jordan also said that the system had certain expectations, regardless of who was in the driver’s seat. Here, Doucet, not giving the king of Jordan the chance to escape from blaming al-Assad, interrupted him and said ‘but he is in the driver’s seat’, to which the king of Jordan stuttered, saying ‘Well, I mean, as president, I mean.’ She interrupted him again, saying ‘but if he could get out of the driver’s seat? If the car goes in the wrong direction?’ The king of Jordan then told her that he agreed with her.

What Doucet had said only ten days earlier showed that some BBC staff had already passed the stage where al-Assad could be described as a reformer and would not allow for apologetic

remarks about al-Assad, such as those of Simpson, who, unfortunately, seemed to be one of the main BBC staff covering the Syrian conflict.

Interestingly, this short encounter between Doucet and the king of Jordan was the only thing missing from the written detailed description of the conversation in the two articles that posted the video. This idea was not foregrounded in the text by whoever edited the summary, which, of course, was not Doucet.

What was foregrounded was that the king of Jordan had said that he believed al-Assad was a reformer and that he worried about who would come after him:

King Abdullah, like many others, also emphasised there was great concern about ‘life after Bashar’. He warned that any outside intervention in Syria would open ‘Pandora’s box’. (BBC, 15th November 2011)

The idea of who will come after al-Assad seemed to be really important to the BBC, taking the approach of ‘the devil you know’ (Brian, 2015). This was apparent when it discussed the religiousness of the rebels, which will be detailed in the next section.

Thus, interviewing the FSA leader in Turkey and translating his speech did not bring us any closer to understanding their cause but actually served to belittle them and their abilities on the one hand and to defend Bashar al-Assad on the other.

In addition to portraying the rebels as incapable, they were portrayed as weak and cowards. When they chose to withdraw out of Baba Amr to avoid having civilians targeted, as reported in *Syria eyewitness: Homs refugees tell of ‘slaughter’* (BBC, 5th March 2012), some residents were angry, according to the BBC. Under the subtitle *Betrayed*, it was reported that in a phone call to a friend, one resident said:

‘They betrayed Baba Amr,’ he said.

‘Those who took the decision to withdraw are cowards. Now they are drinking tea and chit-chatting in Qusayr [a nearby town] and watching Baba Amr being destroyed.’ (BBC, 25th March 2012)

6.2.5 The rebels are likely radical and sectarian

Because the majority of the protestors were Sunni Muslims, BBC’s Jeremy Bowen claimed that they were a threat to minorities. During his ten-day visit to Syria, as described and

videoed in *Syria rebels gain foothold in Damascus* (BBC, 28th January 2012), Bowen met with members of the FSA as they were protecting a funeral. They told him that they were only there to protect the people.

Three videos were posted in the article of Bowen's journey to Deraa. The majority of the people in these videos spoke Arabic, even if Bowen addressed them in English, and there was a voiceover translation of the conversations. In the main video, people were demonstrating and their chants were translated as 'We have none but you God, and God, we are yours'. When the regime came, members of the FSA ran to Bowen, warning of snipers shooting, so Bowen and his team left immediately. This was also paraphrased in the written article.

After this fair-looking description of the FSA, where the BBC reporter mingled and spoke with FSA members, Bowen commented that al-Assad could still count on the Alawites and other minorities who believed that he 'will safeguard minorities in a way that the mainly Sunni Muslims in the opposition and the free army would not' (BBC, 28th January 2012).

There was no evidence that the FSA was a danger to minorities or that they planned revenge against the Alawites, nor was there any proof that other minorities really supported al-Assad. It seemed from Bowen's comments that the rebels' problem was that they were Sunnis, not that the Alawite regime proved to be brutal and ruthless against its own people and that it did not tolerate the majority and their demands. This same attitude can also be noticed in other articles, for instance in *Syria's slide towards civil war* (BBC, 12th February 2012), which reported Paul Wood meeting with FSA members in Baba Amr. The rebels showed him a video of a group of Shabiha (regime militias) who they had captured and eventually executed. To this, Wood was appalled, and he said to them: 'You killed your prisoners?' The rebels then showed him a video of Shabiha torturing unarmed protesters:

To explain, they showed me a film taken from the mobile phone of a captured Shabiha. Prisoners lay face down on the ground, hands tied behind their backs. One-by-one, their heads were cut off.

The man wielding the knife said, tauntingly, to the first: 'This is for freedom.'

As his victim's neck opened, he went on: 'This is for our martyrs. And this is for collaborating with Israel.'
(BBC, 12th February 2012).

Wood then said that there were reports by human rights activists of Shabiha going from house to house and that they had murdered three families. Wood did not seem to be appalled

by the Shabiha men who had tortured and slaughtered protesters in the video or by the three families who the activists told him had been killed by Shabiha.

Seeing those attacks by the Shabiha, Bowen did not express any shock or exasperation at what he had heard and seen. However, he said that it was those incidents (i.e. when the rebels executed the Shabiha members) that created a dilemma for the West and thus made them unwilling to arm the rebels, despite the huge suffering of the people:

Such things will give Western governments pause as they decide whether, or, increasingly, how to help the FSA... If they help the rebels, will they fuel a civil war, or worse, a sectarian civil war? If they do not, how can the killings in Homs, and elsewhere, be stopped? (BBC, 12th February 2012)

Three things were achieved through this comment: firstly, giving the rebels an equal share of the blame for violence as the regime; secondly, accusing the rebels of inciting sectarian divisions, although up until now it had mostly been the regime killing the Sunni civilians; and, finally, as the rebels were also violent, and possibly sectarian, stating that the world was understandably reluctant to help.

In the same article, Wood described people demonstrating after Friday prayers as chanting ‘Salafi (Islamist) slogans’. He then commented that ‘everyone felt the town had come close to tipping over into serious sectarian bloodletting that week.’ Who is ‘everyone’, and what was so dangerous about those slogans that had made everyone worried? Why did he not translate those slogans, instead of using the word ‘Salafi’, which was usually portrayed in the media in affiliation with extremism or al-Qaeda? Did they say ‘Allahu aAkbar’ (God is the greatest)? Did they say ‘malna ghairak ya allah’ (we have none but you God)? Did they say ‘we should kill Christians and Alawites’? We want to know what these Salafi slogans were. Between brackets, ‘Salafi’ was explained as ‘(Islamist)’. I am not sure if the BBC was indicating that these words are synonyms. The BBC, specifically, is known to avoid using words like ‘extremists’ and ‘terrorists’ regarding Muslims but, nonetheless, allows the use of ‘equally loaded words such as insurgent, Islamist, or militant’ (Nahed, 2015, p. 256).

Salafism generally refers to the endorsement of Al-hadith and the Quran as the only sources for Islamic law. It is usually non-violent, and most Salafis are pure Salafists who do not encourage interference into politics (Drevon, 2016). However, Jihadi Salafists do encourage the use of violence for political ends (Drevon, 2016). Thus, the reference to Salafism seemed

to be incurring meanings of Islamic violence. As a result, equating Islamists and Salafists indicated that, in order to be a good rebel, you should not be a practising Muslim. After reflecting on the Salafism of the protesters because they were chanting some Islamic slogans (but we were not allowed to know what they were), Bowen worried about the future. Islamism, specifically Sunni Islamism, seemed to be a predictor of a bleak future:

Is that the **future** for Syria? Much depends on the character of the FSA.

All of the fighters we met were Sunni. Perhaps that does not matter. (BBC, 12th February 2012)

Choosing not to translate the slogans while using the word ‘Salafi’ allowed Wood to make unsupported claims. In addition, when the FSA commander near Qusayr told him that they were fighting for the freedom of everybody in Syria – Muslims, Christians, Alawites and others – Wood took notice of the commander, who said that ‘for the first time, we are able to proclaim the word of God throughout this land.’ To Wood, as he explained to readers just before the quotation, the commander’s words ‘left no doubt, either, that for many, this is a religious – and Islamic – struggle against the secular Baath regime’ (BBC, 12th February 2012). Claiming that this was a religious war because some commander had said that he was happy that the word of God would finally be proclaimed was massive, especially for a seemingly careful reporter who said, as will be shown in the coming paragraphs, that the people fleeing bombs were hysterical and telling ‘wild stories’. Wood surely needed to be reminded that Syria was a Muslim country after all and that the desire of the protesters to proclaim the word of God did not mean that they wanted to force their religion onto minorities.

Du and Chi (2016) studied religiousness at times of war, investigating 80,000 people from 57 countries. They started with the hypothesis that war brought death and thus people resorted to religion because it promised immortality (i.e. life after death). They found that conflicts correlated not only with stronger religious beliefs but also with higher attendance of group worship and individual prayer. This did not mean the hatred or exclusion of others. Hoffman and Jamal (2014) questioned the religiosity of the protesters in Egypt and Tunisia and found a high correlation between people who read the Quran and protesting. In fact, people who did not read the Quran were the least likely to protest. The authors explained the connection in a grievances or opportunities model. As for grievances, Quran readers might be more likely to protest because Arab governments are usually hostile towards them. In addition, it could be

the desire of these people to effect social change, as the Quran emphasises that the role of people is to improve life. Thus, when they find an opportunity to effect changes and bring about justice, they grab it:

Additionally, it is possible that Qur'an readers might be more supportive of democracy—which is perhaps more compatible with the basic tenets of social justice found in Islamic teachings—than non-readers and therefore more motivated to engage in protest against authoritarian regimes. (Hoffman and Jamal, 2014, p. 602)

Indeed, they found Quran readers to be more supportive of democracy than non-Quran readers. Thus, the rebel who was happy to have God's word prevail after saying that they would not discriminate against any ethnic or religious minority did not contradict himself. He was resorting to his religion for the moral support it offered; Paul Wood had no evidence that the rebel's speech indicated danger for minorities but used bias against Islam or, maybe, Sunni Islam to prove his point.

In addition, claiming that the Syrian rebels were radical contradicted the facts reported by the BBC itself that the rebels only asked for reforms and did not intend to overthrow the regime. They did not carry weapons either, until the regime responded to the peaceful protesters with utter brutality. See, for instance, *Guide: Syria crisis* (BBC, 9th April 2012). In order to prove this was a religious war, the BBC needed to report systematic targeting of innocent civilian minorities by the armed rebels, or at least report them saying that there would be no place for minorities in the new Syria or something similar, and not load words with more than what they meant.

A few years later, in *Syria's beleaguered Christians* (BBC, 25th February 2015), the BBC itself indicated that many Christians chose not to take sides, even though some supported Assad and some supported the opposition. Moreover, Bishop Ibrahim's speech to BBC Arabic was translated, in which he said that no one was targeting Christians in Syria:

'There is no persecution of Christians and there is no single plan to kill Christians. Everyone respects Christians,' he insisted. 'Bullets are random and not targeting the Christians because they are Christians'. (BBC, 25th February 2015)

Moreover, the bishop indicated that the Christians in Syria were indeed threatened 'not by Muslims but by... [the] chaos... and the infiltration of uncontrollable fanatical, fundamentalist groups' (BBC, 25th February 2015). In the same vein, Dr Georges Fahmi, an associate fellow of the Middle East and North Africa Programme, stated that, despite the perception that

Christians supported al-Assad, the majority actually took no sides (Fahmi, 2016). On the other hand, some Christians indeed participated in the revolution and fought side by side with Sunnis in the villages of Hawran, for instance; in Sidnaya, north of Damascus, Muslims and Christians shared 13 mosques and two churches to shelter refugees from Homs, Hama and Tell (Darke, 2016).

When Bashar made his first disappointing speech after the spark of the protests in March 2011, he spoke of armed gangs and infiltrators instead of issuing real reforms (Lesch, 2018). Not only did al-Assad want to demonise the rebels but he also wanted to present his regime as the only protector of minorities. The BBC started to adopt the same narrative as if it were a self-fulfilling prophecy, where indeed it was the strategy of the regime to inflame sectarianism in Syria through absolute repression against the protestors and through the majority Alawite army and Shabiha targeting Sunni people with tanks, shells and massacres. The effects of this strategy were twofold: on the one hand, it forced many peaceful protestors to carry arms and inflamed anti-Alawite feelings to make the conflict look like a civil religious war, pitting the Sunnis against the Alawites (Said, 2018), allowing the regime to be even more brutal and making it more difficult for the world to intervene (Khatib, 2018). On the other hand, this strategy increased fear among the Alawites that they would pay the price if the Sunnis won, locking them into the regime. Indeed, as Leenders (2015) put it, ‘repression is not a stupid thing’:

The strategic invocation of an Islamist threat (Presidential Speech: 2013) led to the regime immediately pointing the finger at the Islamists even while protestors were peacefully marching in the streets. The manipulation of Islamist threat can be seen in the fact that while secularist activists were imprisoned, Zahran Alloush, the founder of the Salafist group Jaish al-Islam who had been in prison since 2009, was released in June 2011. (Khatib, 2018, p. 101)

It can be noticed here that while the BBC mentioned sectarianism, it avoided mentioning the Alawites or talking to any, whether supporters of the revolution or of the regime. They were absent in the translations and their voices could not be heard, making them more like passive victims who had no say in the matter. More discussion about the role of the Alawites will be provided in section 6.3.3. and 6.3.5.

6.2.6 'Hysterical' Syrian victims of war

Moreover, as the rebels were treated as equals to the regime in terms of using violence, the BBC started to cast doubts and discredit the witnesses' narratives of the events, stripping them of their use and value. The article *Syria's slide towards civil war* stated that the BBC reporter Paul Wood had spent a few days in Baba Amr neighbourhood in Homs, where he reported that 'citizens [were] subjected to a relentless artillery barrage by government troops' (BBC, 12th February 2012). In a makeshift hospital, the majority of people did not want to be filmed, fearing the retaliation of the regime, except for Abdel Nasser, who, according to Wood, did not have much to lose. Some of Nasser's comments were translated, and the story he told was summarised:

'I have lost 11 already and now I am willing to sacrifice everything for God,' he told me, a large, bearded man, his voice booming down the hospital corridor.

Of the 11 members of his extended family who had been killed – by shells or sniper fire – five were children under 14. (BBC, 12th February 2012)

Wood then commented: 'it was a typical story. Often people would tell that they have lost not one but many of their relatives.' Although Wood was trying to show neutrality, his words were very judgemental and loaded with labelling. Saying that the stories were the 'typical' narrative that people told in Baba Amr assumed that the people were either lying or exaggerating. In addition, using the expression, 'often would tell' gave the impression that people were exaggerating out of habit or maybe to get international attention. Wood's description of the physical features of the man lacked empathy as well. He focused on his beard, large size and loud voice, which was 'booming down the corridor'. Did the large man look sad? Did he choke or did his voice quaver as he talked about his deceased loved ones? Wood's cold stare did not seem to notice anything beyond the large size of the grieving man. Through this very careful choice of words, people were allowed to speak only to have their accounts belittled. Instead of undermining the accounts of the victims, Wood could have said that many people had told him that they had lost many family members without using derogatory, loaded expressions if he really wanted to be fair and not side with anyone, but he seemed to have sided against the people he met, despite giving them the assumption that he was listening to and translating their accounts so that the world could hear them. In an audio record linked to the article, Wood expressed concern that people were being hysterical and unreasonably fearful under the effect of bombs falling on them. In another example, as reported in the article *Syria eyewitness: Homs refugees tell of 'slaughter'* (BBC, 5th March

2012), he met with people running from Baba Amr: men, women and children. He also sat with six women and 17 children who had just arrived at a nearby house, where they took refuge. They told him of the men being separated and taken away; when he asked what they thought would happen to the men, they said they thought they would be slaughtered:

‘We were walking out altogether until we reached the checkpoint,’ said one of the women, Um Abdo.

‘Then they separated us from the men. They put hoods on their heads and took them away.’

Where do you think they are now, I asked. The women replied all at once: ‘They will be slaughtered.’ (BBC, 5th March 2012)

Before telling this story, Wood said that ‘a terrible fear has seized people’ about what the government would do after they regained control of the neighbourhood. After quoting and translating what the women had said, he commented that:

Wild stories were circulating of mutilated bodies in the orchards outside Homs; of men being killed in groups there; of a truck full of bodies taken away by the army. Was this fear talking? (BBC, 5th March 2012)

Again, Wood chose his words carefully, ‘wild stories’, ‘circulating’ and ‘fear talking’, to belittle the accounts of people who were witnessing the horrors of war first-hand. One may wonder whether people would normally be unafraid of a regime that had been firing at, killing and torturing them since the start of the uprising, including women and children, as reported by the BBC itself (see, for example, the story of Hamza al-Khatib in *Syrian unrest: Inquiry into Hamza al-Khatib’s death*, BBC, 1st June 2011). The story was discussed in section 6.2.2.

Moreover, it seemed that many people told Wood the same thing again and again. Instead of saying, for instance, that ‘many people, many witnesses, have said that there were trucks full of bodies’, which would be neutral, he resorted to using language that reduced the accounts of those people who were in real trauma and were fleeing their homes to hearsay, hysteria and wild imagination. At the end of the article, in which many stories were told and voices were translated, including that of a defected Alawite soldier who said that they were told to target anyone who was moving, Wood said that the world needed proof. However, the statement ‘the people of Baba Amr are in no doubt they are victims of a crime perpetrated by the regime’ distanced Wood from the accounts of the victims and emphasised again that what the people were saying to him may have been rumours and hysteria.

6.2.7 al-Assad and protestors through the lens of NVivo

Generally speaking, as can be seen from the previous discussion of how translation shaped the BBC's negative narrative of the regime and the protestors, from March 2011 to June 2012, the BBC's criticism of al-Assad became more forceful, which may also have been related to his increasing brutality against his people, who were still peaceful, and the increasing condemnation of al-Assad not only in the UK but also internationally. I used the *Text Search* feature in NVivo to look for the name 'Assad' in the texts in the period from March 2011 to June 2012: it was the third most frequent word after 'Syria' and 'Syrian' and appeared in the texts 702 times.

The highlighted instances of the word 'Assad' in the texts from April onwards really show that the BBC had moved away from the narrative of the reformer al-Assad. Below are several examples in chronological order showing the BBC's sustained narrative of al-Assad through the months:

A common explanation had Mr Assad as a reformer who understood it was in Syria's interest to align itself with the West but was constrained by his father's conservative old guard.

Over the last few years the reality that Bashar al-Assad was just a tough leader putting up an act as reformer became increasingly clear. (BBC, 30th April 2011)

'Jisr [al-Shughour] is finished, it is razed,' a man who gave his name as Abu Ali told the Associated Press news agency. 'Assad's men are killing anyone within the military, police or others who don't obey their orders blindly.' (BBC, 13th June 2011)

US President Barack Obama said reports from Hama were horrifying.

'Once again, President [Bashar al-Assad] has shown that he is completely incapable and unwilling to respond to the legitimate grievances of the Syrian people,' he said. (BBC, 1st August 2011)

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad agreed to the plan, but failed to honour it. (BBC, 18th November 2011)

BBC Middle East analyst Sebastian Usher says it is not a big surprise that the mission has been halted, as activists and human rights groups have accused Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of using it to buy time. (BBC, 28th January 2012)

On the other hand, 'people' (a term that occurred 650 times in the texts) were often portrayed as victims in the BBC's coverage from March to June 2012. Below, again, are examples in chronological order. The term 'people' often indicated the number of dead or injured, referred to protestors or described the dire conditions that had forced people to rebel. For references to 'people' as direct victims of abuse, killing, torture or arrests, see the following examples across the months:

Witnesses say dozens of **people** were killed in the pro-democracy protests. (BBC, 24th March 2011)

Human rights activists say more than 850 **people** have been killed and thousands arrested since the operation to quell dissent began in March. (BBC, 23rd May 2011)

At least 35 **people** are reported to have been killed in the north-western Syrian town of Jisr al-Shughour as troops and tanks try to restore control. (BBC, 5th June 2011)

Syrian security forces have killed at least eight **people** in a raid on the town of Kanaker near the capital, Damascus, rights groups say. (BBC, 27th July 2011)

But our correspondent says the **people** of Hama remain defiant, with some still out in streets shouting: ‘We will not be killed again’, a reference to a massacre in 1982 when tens of thousands were killed. (BBC, 31st July 2011)

More than 100 **people** were killed across the country on Monday, including 40 civilians, said activists. (BBC, 14th January 2012)

People in this part of Homs say these are the worst days they have known since the beginning of the uprising, almost a year ago. The bombing has been going on for several days now. (BBC, 6th February 2012)

The violence comes two weeks after troops backed by tanks entered the shattered Baba Amr district of Homs, which had been under bombardment for almost a month, leaving an estimated 700 **people** dead (BBC, 15th March 2012)

The BBC sometimes referred to the protesters just as ‘people’, which enforced the idea that this was a public revolt:

‘Thieves, thieves,’ **people** shouted at the police.

‘Syrians shouldn’t be humiliated,’ they chanted. (BBC, 4th March 2011)

There have been several student demonstrations at Aleppo in past weeks, but they have usually only involved a few hundred **people** and been swiftly dispersed. (BBC, 12th May 2011)

Thus, NVivo confirmed that the BBC had criminalised al-Assad most of the time in the period from March 2011 to June 2012. ‘People’, in the BBC’s coverage, were most of the time passive victims of the regime. This establishes how for the BBC, the two main actors in the conflict were the peaceful civilians and the regime. Another important issue that we discussed extensively in sections 5.6.2.3.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4 and 6.2.5 was how the BBC eyed the rebels suspiciously. One of the issues raised was the fear of sectarianism if the rebels took over. Interestingly, the BBC also seemed to focus on the fact that the majority of the rebels were Sunni as a sign of impending sectarianism, despite the fact that the majority of Syrians were Sunni and, as a result, the majority of the protesters were also Sunni (Kahf, 2014). In light of the fact that Sunni Muslims were targeted in Bush’s War on Terror in Iraq, the BBC seemed to be still functioning within this narrative (Rajamohan, 2004). In order to assess more objectively how the BBC treated the subject of the Sunni–Alwite divide, I searched for

the words ‘Alawite’ and ‘Sunni’ using NVivo. I found that the word ‘Sunni’ appeared 47 times in the period from March 2011 to June 2012; some of these references specifically indicated negative attributes, such as sectarianism, as in the following example:

The anti-government uprising in Syria is widely understood to be staged and supported by members of the majority **Sunni** Muslim population, with lesser representation from other religions.

There is a fear that the unrest – which began in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East – could lead to ethnic and religious polarisation, with different groups having to choose sides. (BBC, 9th December 2011)

In another example, the protesters were described coming out of Friday prayers and mouthing Salafi slogans. This description was followed by the expression of a fear of sectarianism, as if the religiosity of the protesters, in this case Sunni Muslims, were a sign of exclusion.

About a dozen attended the big Friday protest. In solidarity with them, the entire demonstration walked off when some at the front grabbed the microphone and started shouting Salafi (Islamist) slogans.

Everyone felt the town had come close to tipping over into serious sectarian bloodletting that week. (BBC, 12th February 2012)

Moreover, in the monologue pondering on the possibility of sectarian bloodletting, Paul Wood related it to the nature of the FSA, not the regime, as the decisive factor. He then mentioned that they were only Sunni, continuing his monologue. He then responded with an attempt at impartiality by stating that this may not be a problem, as if the first thought that came to his mind was that the Sunni nature of the rebels was a problem.

Is that the future for Syria? Much depends on the character of the FSA.

All of the fighters we met were **Sunni**. Perhaps that does not matter. (BBC, 12th February 2012)

Moreover, when blasts took place in Aleppo and the FSA denied being involved, the BBC mentioned that US officials thought that the blasts had been carried out by al-Qaeda members. To this, the BBC emphasised the fact that al-Qaeda was Sunni and also pointed out that these reports supported al-Assad’s claims that al-Qaeda was involved, which further added credibility to all of the regime’s accusations of the protests being infiltrated:

The deputy leader of the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA), a group of army defectors based in Turkey, told the BBC that its fighters had been attacking the bases at the time, but were not responsible for the blasts.

US officials are reported to believe that two recent bombings in Damascus were carried out by militants from al-Qaeda in Iraq, and that the **Sunni** extremist group was also likely behind the attacks in Aleppo.

The officials cited US intelligence reports, which appeared to support President Assad’s accusation that al-Qaeda was involved in attacks on Syrian government forces. (BBC, 11th February 2011)

The BBC went on to mention the violent history of Sunni Islamists, like their revolt in 1964 and when they were involved in violent attacks on Alawite officials leading to a rebellion in 1982; notably, here, the government's crushing of the dissent was described as a tactic, not a violent attack:

As early as 1964, Hama was said to have been the centre of a nationwide revolt by the **Sunni** majority against the secular and socialist policies of the Baath Party, which had seized power in a coup the previous year.

The government sent troops and tanks into Hama to put down the uprising with great brutality, leaving as many as 100 people dead.

The tactic was to be repeated on a far larger scale 18 years later. (BBC, 1st April 2012)

Meanwhile, underground **Sunni** Islamist opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, were involved in violent attacks on officials from the minority Alawite-led government and its supporters.

The unrest culminated in a rebellion in Hama in February 1982. (BBC, 9th April 2012)

Interestingly, this was a change in tone from the earlier descriptions of the Hama massacre in the BBC's coverage in the period from March to October 2011, where al-Assad was described as his father's son who continued to brutally massacre his people only for their dissent.

On the other hand, the Alawites, mentioned 33 times, were always victims of the regime, not his supporters in the killing of the people. They were depicted in the following quote as the most vulnerable because their fate was tied to the regime:

They are arguably the most powerful sect in Syria, but potentially the most vulnerable if there is regime change because of their association with President Bashar al-Assad, who is a member of the **Alawi** community. **Alawites** occupy top posts in the government and the security services, giving them a disproportionate amount of power. (BBC, 24th January 2012)

They were also hostages of the regime:

According to a briefing by the International Crisis Group, an organisation that seeks to prevent conflict, 'the regime in effect took the **Alawite** minority hostage, linking its fate to its own. It did so deliberately and cynically, not least in order to ensure the loyalty of the security services which, far from being a privileged, praetorian elite corps, are predominantly composed of underpaid and overworked **Alawites** hailing from villages the regime has left in a state of abject underdevelopment' (BBC, 24th January 2012)

When mentioning the crimes committed by the Alawites, the BBC distanced itself by saying 'activists said' or 'activists accused':

Activists have accused the government of employing heavily armed men derived from the **Alawite** community, as well as other minorities such as the Druze, to fight alongside regular army and security units. Commonly referred to by the opposition as 'Shabbihah', or thugs in colloquial Syrian Arabic, they have been accused of intimidating, beating and killing protesters. (BBC, 9th December 2011)

Survivors who spoke to the BBC, and the local commander of the Free Syrian Army, said the people who carried out the killings were militiamen – shabbiha – from nearby **Alawite** villages. (BBC, 28th May 2012)

Speculating over the Houla massacre, the BBC said that the UN commissioner for human rights had pointed the finger at Alawite militia:

But at whose hands they died remains a matter of contention. Activists, eyewitnesses and human rights groups – including the UN’s high commissioner for human rights – point the finger at the Syrian army and the shabiha, a militia dominated by members of President Bashar al-Assad’s heterodox **Alawite** sect. (BBC, 8th June 2012)

In addition, showing doubts, the BBC framed the possibility of the Alawite involvement in the massacre with ‘If that is the case’, distancing itself again from any narrative blaming the Alawite community:

If that is the case, it is possible the killers were drawn from a string of largely **Alawite** villages to the south of Houla region. Fearing reprisals, some residents there have apparently been donating blood to help the approximately 300 injured. (BBC, 31st June 2012)

Finally, the BBC stressed the importance of the Alawites’ future:

Future for **Alawites**

Finally any solution must deal with the very real fears of the minority communities, and most particularly the **Alawites**. (BBC, 13th June 2011)

Thus, adopting an oriental outlook on the Syrian rebels, the BBC viewed them with unjustified scepticism, overreacted to religious expressions, interpreted them as extremists, highlighted their mistakes, portrayed these mistakes as justification for the West not to interfere, demonised them for their Sunni identity and portrayed them as incapable of including other sects and religions in the future. On the other hand, the Alawites were portrayed as victims of the regime with no agency whatsoever, whether participating in the revolution or complicit in the crimes against the dissenting majority in the country. Indeed, the role of the Alawites in maintaining the brutal crackdown is well known:

That division of labor is passed onto the new generation, with Bashar and his brother Maher, who’s the head of the [army’s] Fourth Division and the Republican Guard and the elite Alawite troops that are at the heart of this repressive action that’s going on now. (Landis, 2011)

6.2.8 Discussion

The BBC criminalised al-Assad and his regime and placed the blame for killing the people on the regime most of the time. It used translation perfectly to discredit the regime’s claims and accusations that it was not killing its people but rather facing armed terrorist groups who

were responsible for inciting the violence. This was done by allowing them to speak by translating the regime's and its spokesmen's speech, including SANA, the Syrian news agency, while simultaneously discrediting their speech by choosing to report on events and quoting witnesses, the Arab League, Western leaders and the international community discrediting al-Assad and pinning the blame on him and his regime. In addition, labelling like 'accuse' and 'blame' was implemented to show scepticism of the regime's claims.

The rebels and witnesses were also given space to speak up and voice their opinions. Actually, two BBC reporters went into hiding in Syria: Jeremy Bowen, who met with Riyadh al-Asaad, the FSA leader at the time, and Paul Wood, who met with both armed rebels and witnesses of the regime's violence. However, this did not mean that the BBC had sided with the armed rebels either. It was rather like meeting with them to expose their weaknesses and pitfalls than to understand them and their motives. After Col. al-Asaad boasted of the FSA's power and expressed his confidence that the regime would fall, Bowen responded by praising Bashar al-Assad in apologetic language. Such language was not even used at the spark of the uprising in March 2011, when it was not clear how al-Assad was going to respond: whether he was going to crack down on his people or live up to his reputation and effect real reforms to appease the people. The fact that this was brought up in the context of speaking about the FSA indicated that the BBC might rather have had him stay than be overpowered by the rebels.

Moreover, contradicting the attitude the BBC had taken towards al-Assad's accusation of Islamic violence where it belittled them as fake, BBC reporter Paul Wood, who met with members of the FSA and translated their speech, hastened to accuse the protesters of being Sunni extremists only because they chanted religious slogans, loading the slogans with meaning or not translating them at all, so the reader was left with nothing but the reporter's possibly misguided interpretation of the religious slogans. Adding to this, Wood was appalled when the rebels executed some of the regime's militia, indicating that this was the justification for the West not to intervene, but was very cold when describing the video of the Shabiha, the regime's militia, slaughtering and torturing protesters. This way, he foregrounded an execution carried out by the rebels and played down the atrocities committed by the regime while appearing neutral by reporting both.

Finally, in almost the first vivid descriptions by the BBC of the suffering of the people, beyond the numbering business, Wood met with horrified women and children, whose men had been taken by the regime's militias while running from Baba Amr, and translated some of their speech, but ended up describing them as hysterical. He actually labelled the people's accounts as 'wild stories' and wondered if this was 'fear talking'. Despite a fake show of impartiality, he did not allow the readers to believe or sympathise with the victims of the ongoing violence, even though their accounts were partially translated.

The BBC's lack of empathy for the victims of the war in Syria may have reflected a desire not to side with the rebels. Empathising with the Syrians would emphasise the need for an international intervention to save the people suffering at the hands of the regime. The BBC was not advocating for any sort of international intervention. Thus, it undermined the suffering of the people and cast doubts on the rebels.

The way the BBC treated the rebels may be understood from an orientalist perspective, where Muslims were seen as a different and threatening other, and thus a threat was detected when the rebels showed religiousness. Moreover, orientalists have portrayed Muslims as lacking the capacity to govern themselves (Said, 1978; Rane, Ewart and Martinkus, 2014).

Yamaguchi (2012) describes the rise of new orientalism after the 9/11 events, where, in addition to being perceived as a threat, Islam is seen as incompatible with democracy and human rights. Thus, the rebels were not given the chance to prove themselves as capable; the BBC only attempted to highlight their mistakes while appearing to be impartial. Surely, the fact that BBC interviewers would risk their lives and venture into Syria to meet with the rebels was a sign that it was trying to find the truth, but it seems that the BBC reporters had already become preoccupied with certain ideas about the radicalisation of the rebels. Moreover, the BBC's reference to the war in Iraq and how the West was terrified that they would, in case they intervened, be faced with the same violence they had faced in Iraq highlights two important ideas: first, the BBC was still whitewashing the war on Iraq as a reaction to the threat of weapons of mass destruction and as a humanitarian mission that liberated the people of Iraq. This was despite the fact that it was later proved that not only was the weapons of mass destruction claim based on false information to mislead the public but that both the US and British armies had committed war crimes in Iraq, including

bombing, detaining and torturing in Abu Ghraib and other prisons similar to Guantanamo (Hagan and Hanson, 2016). According to Hagan and Hanson, this criminal aggression mostly targeted Sunni Muslims in Iraq under the narrative of the War on Terror, where Sunnis were targeted indiscriminately without any proof of them having resisted or having joined al-Qaeda. The second is that the comparison justifies the world lack of empathy towards the Syrian catastrophe as the suggestion is that intervening powers will be targeted in the end by extremist groups.

In addition to the BBC's orientalist outlook that viewed Islamists as savage and incapable, the BBC's coverage coincided completely with US and UK policies towards the Syrian uprising. On the one hand, these policies condemned al-Assad regime and said that his fall was inevitable; on the other hand, they refused to consider intervening. The BBC reported condemnations of the regime by UK and Western authorities throughout the period investigated:

In London, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague said the continuing violence was 'deplorable and must stop'. (BBC, 12th November 2011)

Meanwhile UK Foreign Secretary William Hague again called for President Assad to step down. (BBC, 19th February 2012)

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague said he would seek a strong global response to the 'appalling crime'. UN chief Ban Ki-moon said it was a 'flagrant violation of international law'. (BBC, 26th May 2012)

Using the same rhetoric, the BBC said many times that al-Assad must go and that he was falling:

[Video caption:] The BBC's Jeremy Bowen in Damascus suburb where President Assad appears to be losing his control (BBC, 28th January 2012)

With the Assad regime struggling for its survival, Moscow may find that its efforts to manage regime change in Syria is just as fruitless as the diplomatic pressures coming from the West and the Arab League (BBC, 5th February 2012)

Moreover, regarding the Houla massacre that was committed in May 2012, the BBC stated that evidence pointed to the regime militia, the Shabiha, in *Syria Houla massacre: Survivors recount horror* (BBC, 28th May 2012). Jim Muir could not verify the survivors' accounts testifying that the Shabiha went from house to house and slaughtered people but indicated that the stories were consistent:

Their accounts have not been independently verified, but the BBC's Jim Muir in neighbouring Lebanon says the stories tally with each other, and with reports from activists on the ground. (BBC, 28th May 2012)

Muir also undermined the regime's narrative, which insisted on telling a different account:

But Syrian leaders will be giving Kofi Annan a different account in his talks in Damascus. They **still insist that what they admit** was a massacre was the work of hundreds of armed rebels who massed in the area, and carried out the killings in order to derail the peace process and provoke intervention by NATO. (BBC, 28th May 2012)

'They still insist' indicated that they were telling the same fabricated narrative again and again. In addition, 'what they admit' was indicative of the fact that the regime did not usually tell the truth of the violence invoked against the people.

However, when Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN high commissioner for human rights, and the UN's Maj Gen Mood insisted that they did not know who had committed the massacre, the BBC changed its tone and spoke of a massacre done by an unknown villain in *Houla: How a massacre unfolded* (BBC, 8th June 2012):

Diplomatic sources in Damascus have told the BBC that most of the deaths were caused by rooms being sprayed with bullets rather than point-blank executions to the head, as earlier reports suggested. The sources also say no throats were cut as opposition activists have asserted, although one victim's eye was gouged out.

But at whose hands they died remains a matter of contention. Activists, eyewitnesses and human rights groups – including the UN's high commissioner for human rights – point the finger at the Syrian army and the shabiha, a militia dominated by members of President Bashar al-Assad's heterodox Alawite sect.

The government however denies all responsibility, saying its soldiers were attacked and armed terrorists went on to shoot and knife civilians. (BBC, 8th June 2012)

The BBC no longer believed the stories of the survivors and activists that tallied with each other; neither did it undermine the regime's narrative as it did in the May article. This shows how the BBC's narrative closely followed that of the Western elites, which also prompted the BBC to portray the Syrian conflict as an unsolvable issue. Despite the West's condemnation of al-Assad, they had no desire to interfere:

Earlier, **Mr Hague** told the BBC the situation was not comparable to that in Libya, where the UK and France recognised the opposition National Transition Council months before the former regime of Muammar Gaddafi was toppled.

'We are not at the point of a formal recognition, partly because there are differing groups not a single council as there was in Libya,' he added. 'They are not in control of territory in Syria as the council were in Libya and the international community has not reached that point'. (BBC, 21st November 2011)

As a result, the BBC's coverage of the uprising was rather bleak. There was no denying that al-Assad was a villain, but the rebels were not to be trusted either; they seemed to be extremist, and sectarian. Sadly, as well, it undermined the civilians' fear and suffering by calling them 'hysterical' and describing their stories as 'typical' and 'wild'.

The correlation of the BBC's narrative of the Syrian uprising with the objectives of UK foreign policy is an example of how Western media, as Malek (1997) points out, is influenced by Western foreign policy. The recent history of the BBC shows that it does support the narratives of the elites. For instance, Wahl-Jorgensen, et al (2016) studied the BBC's coverage of the UK public deficit debate in 2009: the BBC allowed powerful financial elites to dominate its coverage and thus the proposed solutions focused on austerity and cutting public spending. Other opinions expressed by experts and academics were not debated. The same issue applied here in the case of Syria but even worse, as no solutions were offered, such as military interventions, safe zones or support for the rebels. The Syrian conflict was left to grow into a serious humanitarian disaster.

BBC News has nonetheless been criticised for an overly Eurocentric news focus and that its coverage panders to the United Kingdom's political aims. (Bosio, 2013, p. 335)

Thus, the BBC criminalised al-Assad but did not sympathise with the rebels or the victims. The rebels in the translations were not to be trusted (they were likely radicals), and the Syrian victims were hysterical. The BBC did not empathise with the victims of the war in Syria. As a result of the demonisation of both al-Assad and the rebels, there was no possible solution to the conflict. There was no urgency either, as no empathy was shown towards the suffering of the people, whose stories were discounted as hearsay. The BBC translated the accounts of all to discredit them all.

6.3 Translations in Al Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian uprising

Al Jazeera showed solidarity with the protesters from the start by reporting demonstrations and translating the names of the demonstrations. Usually, their names were translated in the main titles of the articles on Al Jazeera's website: see, for example, *Syria braces for 'day of dignity' rallies* (Al Jazeera, 25th March 2011) and *Scores killed on Syria's 'day of rage'* (Al Jazeera, 29th April 2011). Moreover, possessives were used to connect all of Syria to these demonstrations.

In Chapter 5, in the detailed analysis of Al Jazeera texts from March and November 2011, it was concluded that Al Jazeera had fully supported the uprising and then the rebels. Al Jazeera saw the regime as a hopeless monster that had nothing to offer the people but a more violent

crackdown, as it always had. I investigated all of the articles in the following months to see if it kept the same narrative or changed with the evolving events.

Al Jazeera continued in the same fashion, reporting on al-Assad and his crimes against his people, comparing him to his late father and relating the present massacres to the 30-year-old Hama massacre; it also spoke to both the rebels and the Alawites in a bid to understand their narratives on the conflict. Among the basic narratives of Al Jazeera were the human aspects of the revolution, the brutality of the regime, and an outlook on both Sunnis' and Alawites' perceptions of the revolution.

6.3.1 Shedding light on the human aspects of the revolution

In-depth articles humanising the suffering of the people were featured where the Syrians were not reduced to numbers or labels like activists, residents or witnesses, but appeared full-dimensional as they related their suffering; these articles have peaked specifically in May, which may have to do with detaining a journalist from Al Jazeera who would then have much to say about al-Assad dungeons or with the story of Hamza Al-Khatib, whose murder by the Syrian authorities ignited people's wrath at the regime and made headline news in many media outlets. Examples are in *Dorothy Parvaz: Inside Syria's secret prisons* (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011), *Assad's regime of torture* (Al Jazeera, 15th May, 2011), *Tortured and killed: Hamza al-Khateeb, age 13* (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011), and *Love in time of torture* (Al Jazeera, 6th June, 2011) where a young man endured beating, whipping, and electrocution in Assad's dungeons by thinking of his beloved. In *Dorothy Parvaz: Inside Syria's secret prisons* (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011), Parvaz was detained once she arrived at Damascus Airport for her possession of a mobile phone and an internet hub.

Parvaz described being interrogated in blood-streaked rooms in which she had to find a bloodless corner to lean on; she talked about a young woman and a teenage girl she met in the cell who were just snatched out of the blue, blindfolded and taken to these detention centres where they were not allowed to speak to their families, served rotten food which made them very ill, and only had a toilet with no running water. More horrendously, they heard men being savagely beaten:

One afternoon, the beating we heard was so severe that we could clearly hear the interrogator pummelling his boots and fists into his subject, almost in a trance, yelling questions or accusations rhythmically as the blows landed in what sounded like the prisoner's midriff (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011).

While Parvaz was speaking English in her interview in Al Jazeera, she described her ordeal light in comparison to the Syrians held there. Only through translation could she relay the suffering of those Syrians to the English-speaking audience. For example, telling the story of the young woman she met:

On the floor, on a ratty brown blanket, sat a young woman whose face was puffy from crying. She said she was 25 and from Damascus and indicated that she had been there for four days. She didn't know why she'd been picked up by the Mukhabarat, the Syrian intelligence service (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011).

In the video posted in the article where part of the interview was run, the interviewer asked Parvaz if that young woman could be a protester, and she said that the young woman was wearing stiletto heels and that she expected a protester to be wearing comfy shoes instead. Parvaz could not give much detail about her. It might be the case that Parvaz did not speak much Arabic or that the young woman did not speak much English, but they still strived to communicate through whatever limited Arabic or English they could recall, or maybe Parvaz spoke Arabic but did not speak much so as not to draw the attention of the guard. She, however, did her best to speak up for those innocent detainees. Later, after release, Parvaz needed sleeping pills because the wails of the beaten men, as well as anxiety over what could have happened to them after, haunted her every night.

In *Assad's regime of torture*, a student from Baniyas was captured on his way home. The article was written by Hugh Macleod and Annasofie Flamand and full of translations, but those translations do not seem to be first-hand as the student told the story to 'a local activist he trusted.' In the event the activist spoke English, it is very likely he was the translator.

'Bashar is God! Bashar is God!'

As the fists and boots and sticks pummelled his body and bloodied his face, the college student screamed out what he thought his interrogators wanted to hear: The name of Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011).

According to Al Jazeera, the student had nothing to say to his interrogators, but the regime had other intentions which were to spread fear into the people in their attempt to quell the uprising:

The student was released after only a few days, but the message to the wider community of Baniyas was clear: A naked body, covered in blood, left to limp along the long road back to his village, clutching his broken hand, for all to see.

Three other young men, beaten, thrown down stairs and forced to drink water from a toilet after being starved, were also dumped naked and bloodied on a road outside Baniyas (Al Jazeera, 18th May, 2011).

The article also reported that more than 7,000 people have been detained arbitrarily from mid-March, i.e., since the protests started, who were put in horrific conditions and subjected to horrendous abuse.

However, the story that really captured media attention was recounted in *Tortured and killed: Hamza al-Khateeb, age 13* (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

In *Tortured and killed: Hamza al-Khateeb, age 13* (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011), Al Jazeera depicted a very human account of the boy's death. The page started with a picture drawn by another child of Hamza paying a tribute to him in the Arabic Facebook page, *We Are All Hamza*:



Figure 6-3 Many tributes to Hamza al-Khateeb were posted to the Facebook group set up to commemorate his life - and death [Facebook] (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011)

Al Jazeera reminded its readers of the similarity of the name to the *We are all Khalid Sa'eed campaigns*, a man whose torture sparked the Egyptian Revolution placing the Syrian Revolution in the same context of other Arab countries, a revolution against repression and deteriorating economic conditions. In the article, Hamza gets more than the *13-year-old boy killed and tortured* coverage. Al Jazeera had reached out to the boy's family, mostly gathering bits and pieces of the peaceful life of the murdered boy through conversations with his cousin. Little Hamza loved it when rain filled farmers' irrigation channels so he could swim with his friends, but, when a drought struck the city, he resorted to raising pigeons. He loved to watch them as they flew in circles. That was his world, an innocent playful world any child living in the country could very well relate to. Hamza was compassionate and was saddened that some people were poorer than he was and asked his family to give him money so he could help the poor who had no food or beds. Unfortunately, little compassionate Hamza got the treatment not even war criminals deserved:

In the hands of President Bashar al-Assad's security forces, however, Hamza found no such compassion, his humanity degraded to nothing more than a lump of flesh to beat, burn, torture, and defile, until the screaming stopped at last.

Arrested during a protest in Saida, 10km east of Daraa, on April 29, Hamza's body was returned to his family on Tuesday 24th May, horribly mutilated (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

According to Al Jazeera, his body had burns and lacerations as a result of electric shocks and being whipped by cables. It had referred to videos in Arabic where his body was shown.

These videos are no longer accessible in YouTube. However, Al Jazeera translated the speech of the man inspecting the body:

'Where are the human rights committees? Where is the International Criminal Court?' asks the voice of the man inspecting Hamza's body on a video uploaded to YouTube.

'A month had passed by with his family not knowing where he was, or if or when he would be released. He was released to his family as a corpse. Upon examining his body, the signs of torture are very clear' (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

A photo of Hamza's mutilated corpse posted towards the end of the article stood in stark contrast to the image drawn of him by a friend:



Figure 6-4 Hamza's mutilated, castrated corpse was riddled with bullet holes and burn marks [YouTube/SFP] (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

Moreover, Al Jazeera also stated that the wounds were consistent with the torture documented by human rights groups since protests started. Hamza's cousin told the story of Hamza's arrest. He had no interest in politics, but went along with people as they marched in a peaceful demonstration, where he disappeared. Another activist confirmed that 51 were arrested on that day alive; 13 came back as corpses.

Referring to the Syrian-only private TV station, Al Dunya, in coverage of the story a forensic doctor was interviewed who claimed that Hamza's body looked bad because of decomposition. Al Jazeera did not need to say much here as it was surely difficult to believe the forensic doctor's claims after reading the prior detailed description of the boy's body in addition to the consistent human rights reports that told of torture in the same article. Moreover, mentioning that Al Dunya was a pro-regime TV station was enough to cast doubts on its credibility.

Moreover, Al Jazeera chose not to translate Hamza's father's words who said as was reported on the BBC that the president showered him with his kindness and graciousness. It instead told us of the government's harassment of the parents of Hamza. They were threatened by secret police if they spoke to the media:

'They said: "Enough of what has happened because of you already. You know what would happen if we heard you had spoken to the media,"' said Hamza's mother, clearly terrified as she spoke to the local activist (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

Later, according to Hamza's mum, his father was detained and told to speak to state media accusing Salafists of kidnapping, torturing and killing his son. Finally, the article that started by describing the innocent life of a young boy, ended with the man who had never cried before breaking down and crying:

'How would any family feel if they saw that video of their own child?' asked Hamza's cousin. 'I have never seen Hamza's father cry in his entire life. Now we see only tears in his eyes' (Al Jazeera, 31st May 2011).

On Hamza's chest was a deep, dark burn mark. His neck was broken and his penis cut off (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

Finally, a Western reader cannot but be moved by the story of Love in a time of torture (Al Jazeera, 6th June, 2011), where Hugh Macleod and Annasofie Flamand recounted the story of a young man who survived the regime's torture by thinking of his beloved:

As his body was beaten, whipped, electrocuted and worse, the prisoner could think only of the girl he loves, clenching a note from her in his hand as the torturers did their worst (Al Jazeera, 6th June, 2011).

'I would smile when I was forced to take off my clothes at night and I was shaking from the cold. How could I be cold knowing that she was enjoying the warmth? Since when can the cold find its way into our bodies while the warmth of love is filling our every cell?' (Al Jazeera, 6th June, 2011).

The article went on describing the horrible torture the young man endured in detail, but, after he was finally released, sick and reliant on drugs to ease his pain, he said he wanted to marry his beloved if she still wanted him, but he would never tell her of what he had been through. Indeed, such a romantic story of deep love despite the torture would move any reader, some of whom might have identified with the young man as a human just like them who had noble feelings and who was loyal to the girl he loved, who surely did not deserve to be the subject of such abuse.

Early on, in contrast to the BBC, Al Jazeera used translation and detailed accounts of witnesses to show how miserable life was in Syria for the majority, how the protesters, the majority of whom were Sunni, meant no harm to other minorities, and that the Shabiha were allowed by the regime to mingle among protesters in civilian clothes to create chaos or savagely beat the protesters. In *The Syrian Revolution on Campus*, an anti-regime demonstration was held by students at Damascus University, students described how they were brutally attacked by fellow students who were loyal to the regime:

‘We tried to ignore them at first, but they kept coming closer’, said Mohammad, 22, one of the student protesters. ‘Then they began to beat us with wooden sticks and their belts.’ (Al Jazeera, 21st April, 2011).

Before the testimonies of the students, Al Jazeera described a serene scene:

Holding olive branches and flowers in their hands, 150 medical students gathered outside their faculty at Damascus University, their white coats bright in the midday sun (Al Jazeera, 21st April, 2011).

However, after the beating from the regime supporters, Al Jazeera wrote a moving description of ‘the white coats scattered, olive branches and flowers left to be trampled underfoot.’ Moreover, students, especially from Deraa, where protests started, were taunted for being from there and for being Salafists:

‘They shout at us, “You’re a traitor!” or “You’re a Salafi!” or say that we are linked with foreign forces.’ Classes have been broken into by groups of thugs, said Ahmed, shouting ‘Long live Bashar!’ and ‘There are traitors among us and we’ll kill you!’ (Al Jazeera, 21st April, 2011).

This seemed to be already an atmosphere ripe for sectarian strife and the people targeted were the protesters, not the other way round. In the article, Al Jazeera described the atmosphere of fear where young informers, students who report on their peers if they criticised the regime, were given privileges. Moreover, many students told of arrested relatives who were reported on and were never seen again. In *The ghosts of Syria*, Al Jazeera defined the Shabiha as exclusively Alawite and ‘the private militia of the Assad family itself.’ While al-Assad was reported to have warned of the existence of foreign militia among the protesters, Al Jazeera declared that, according to the testimonies of the journalists, residents and human rights activists, the gangs were none but Bashar’s Alawite Shabiha. Ali, a Sunni shopkeeper, as translated by Al Jazeera, described the Shabiha attack on peaceful protesters:

‘Hundreds of security men in plain clothes demonstrated against us shouting pro-Assad slogans. They came close to us and started to push us,’ said Ali. ‘It was then that the security forces began to fire on us. We were demonstrating in a peaceful and civilian way and shouting national slogans. None of us were shouting anti-Alawite slogans.’

A local journalist who says he has spoken to 10 residents of Lattakia over the past week said they had all delivered the same message about who the agitators roaming the streets were. ‘All of them are saying one thing: “They are shabeha”,’ he said (Al Jazeera, 3rd April, 2011).

Then, under the subtitle *Divide and rule*, Al Jazeera explained the history of the Shabiha since the 80s at the time of Hafiz al-Assad. They were above the law, given privileges and gained riches by smuggling drugs and distributing tax-free goods. They had access to arms through their relationship with the army. Those were allowed to beat and torture and always got away with it. Al Jazeera posted a video where the head of a private Syrian university, Abul Majid Saadoun, was being beaten by those thugs only because he didn't allow a female student from al-Assad's family to take an exam after coming late. The Shabiha were saying to him (as translated by Al Jazeera), 'Are you trying to get one over al-Assad family?' while he cowered to the ground. Al Jazeera indicated that utilising the Shabiha was a deliberate strategy by the regime to sow sectarian divisions. Moreover, many stories of torture and several testimonies were translated in *Assad's regime of torture*:

'I was being beaten all over my body. I was bleeding and was saying the shahada to myself, 'There is no God, but God', because I thought I was going to die at that moment,' he said (Al Jazeera, 15th May, 2012).

That student was arrested while travelling back to his village and had nothing to say to his torturers. He was later thrown out naked, covered in blood and limping towards his village for all to see. This, however, was not new to the regime and Al Jazeera told of past stories when Akram Bunni, for example, a communist critical of the regime, was paralysed when his back was stretched in what was called the German Chair. It also recalled Muslim Brotherhood members who were beaten with cables and stunned with electric shocks. When an Alawite participated, he or she was given the choice between either supporting al-Assad or being labelled as a Salafist:

Ali, an Alawite, the sect from which the Assad family and much of the ruling elite hail, was captured by secret police during a small protest in Mezze, a suburb of Damascus.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Ali said the beating began as soon as he was on the bus to prison. 'You are Alawite and you don't like Bashar?' the police officer screamed at him. 'Are you with the Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood?' (Al Jazeera, 15th May 2012)

6.3.2 A brutal regime with no credibility in translation

Like the BBC, every time al-Assad's speeches, or his spokesmen's, were translated, labelling was used to discredit their accounts and promises like *claim* and *accuse*. This would usually be surrounded by other events and voices that proved the fallacy of the claims of the regime.

For example, in *Scores killed on Syria's 'day of rage'*:

The government claims its forces are battling 'extremist and terrorist groups in the town' and said two soldiers were killed on Friday (Al Jazeera, 29th April 2011).

'The Friday of Ending the siege on Deraa' (Al Jazeera, 29th April 2011).

However, labelling indicated that the regime's claims could be false. Using *claim* and placing the phrase *extremist and terrorist groups* between inverted commas showed that the regime's statements were likely untrue. Moreover, an Al Jazeera correspondent was quoted right after stating that Deraa had been under siege and that, as people tried to get through to obtain supplies, they were met by 'hostile' security forces that fired on them. Using *hostile* to describe the security forces supposed to be protecting the people is a response to the claim that the people trying to get their everyday supplies were terrorists. It was the regime that terrorised its own people, not the other way round.

When a small pro regime group demonstrated, their chant, 'with our soul and blood, we sacrifice to you Bashar', was translated only to be followed by a translation of the chants of the protesters along with a description of the brutal response of the regime:

Witnesses told the AP news agency that security forces had fired on around 2,000 protesters chanting 'God, Syria and freedom only' in the central Damascus neighbourhood of Midan.

The AFP news agency reported that 10,000 turned out in Baniyas, shouting 'liberty, solidarity with Daraa' and 'down with the regime' (Al Jazeera, 29th April 2011).

Moreover, the witnesses' accounts of the death and dire situation in the city were translated in detail:

The witness said he had collected the names of the dead from different neighbourhoods and counted 25 bodies in his own area.

'Some areas smell really bad due to the bodies rotting in the street. No one can collect them for fear of being shot,' he said, 'the sound of continuous gunfire audible over the phone. Those bodies which have been collected are being stored in refrigerated lorries.' (Al Jazeera, 29th April 2011).

6.3.3 Speaking to both Sunnis and Alawites

In Al Jazeera's account, there was nothing called Salafi slogans; there were either anti- or pro-Assad slogans. People did beseech God as a natural reaction to being faced by utter human savagery. There was nothing dangerous about it; nothing that would indicate any sectarianism looming by the demonstrators:

When a small group of pro-Assad demonstrators chanted, 'With our soul and blood, we sacrifice to you Bashar,' the protesters chanted, 'God, Syria and freedom only' (Al Jazeera, 29th April, 2011).

Also, witnesses told Al Jazeera that their revolution was inclusive of all sects. Their chants were translated, for instance, in the *Ghosts of Syria*, in addition to a testimony of a trusted source that asserted the truth of the protesters' chants:

'The protesters were chanting "freedom, freedom" and "no Sunni and Alawites, we are all Syrians",' said Hiam Gamil, a youth activist in Lattakia.

A trusted source who has been gathering reports from Syria since the uprising began on March 18 said: 'It is not sectarian - this is the great lie of the regime. In video you see Sunni and Alawite walking side-by-side calling for reform.' (Al Jazeera, 3rd April, 2011).

Tackling the issue of the Syrian minority that might be targeted or the possible downslide of the Syrian Revolution into sectarian civil war, Al Jazeera's Nir Rosen met both sides and translated his conversations with them. These made his observations more objective as he did not rely on media prejudices against any side of the conflict, nor did he suffice himself with speaking to only one side of the conflict. Thus, his observations were built on a rather comprehensive outlook to the situation.

In *Assad's Alawites: The guardians of the throne* (Al Jazeera, 10th October, 2011), Rosen started the article by mentioning some history of how the Alawites rose to power. During the reign of Hafiz al-Assad, the Alawites were stripped of their religious identity and reduced to some tribal sense of identity, which was very much related to the family of al-Assad, who gave them privileges in return. As such, in addition to the exaggerated fear of the majority Sunnis takeover played upon by the regime, the Alawites saw the demise of al-Assad as their own demise. Moreover, Rosen observed that Syria had always been sectarian: 'sectarianism has been taboo, ever-present but unspoken of' (Al Jazeera, 10th October, 2011), but people were never allowed to openly discuss it.

Accompanying Alawites, they told him of the untrustworthy Sunnis. On their way to their village, which was surrounded by Sunni villages, they detoured away from the Sunni villages and into only Alawite or Christian villages. They told him stories of the Sunnis killing their people who were soldiers in the security forces. They referred to the Sunnis as Al-Qaida sleeper cells, and even the most mildly spoken ones, who claimed they did not tolerate sectarianism, thought the army should enter these Sunni villages with tanks.

Except for once, when Rosen used the word hostile describing one Alawites's speech of the Sunnis, he did not comment or label the Alawites. Actually, as it was October 2011 and, given the fact that most readers by then had seen for themselves the brutal crackdown on the protesters by the regime, it is telling that those Alawites were asking for more. Rosen did not need to comment on the viciousness of this:

He was afraid to stand on the road he said, 'afraid of terrorists.' He wore civilian clothes. 'Because they'll slaughter me', he explained. He was hostile to all Sunnis, blaming them for the brutality with which soldiers had been killed. Abu Laith was uncomfortable. 'Not all of them are like that', he admonished (Al Jazeera, 10th October, 2011).

Abou Laith did not like it when another Alawite spoke ill of the Sunnis, but when he went home with Rosen, they were met by his 6-year-old son who greeted Rosen saying, 'are you with us or them?' Abou Laith asked his son who he was with, to which the boy responded, 'with Syria.' This just showed how far sectarianism ran deep in the Alawite community who saw Syria, and indoctrinated their children to see Syria, only in the grasp of the Alawite Assad family, and anyone who fought against the injustice of that family was against Syria itself. The article finished with Rosen walking with a Sunni rebel who also told him stories of vicious Alawite attacks against the protesters and detoured away from Alawite villages to go only through Sunni or Christian villages. It indeed seemed that the Christians had no interest in supporting either side of the conflict, nor did they feel threatened by either.

Rosen's accounts of his meetings with the Alawites continued 10 days later in *A tale of two villages* (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011) showing more of the grim reality of the Alawites he met, not by fabricating lies or making unsupported assumptions, but simply by translating his conversations with the Alawites. In the village of Bureen, Rosen met with General Aref Bayumi in his house, which was adorned with pictures of al-Assad and Hassan Nasrallah, the

Hezbollah leader, and a flowerpot made from a tank shell. The General was proud that he fought Israel in 1973 and in 1982. Ironically, Bayoumi was also so proud of his participation in the brutal massacre in Hama that he was offended that the operation was named after Rifaat al-Assad:

He resented that Rifaat, brother of then President Hafez al-Assad, took the credit for the operation. ‘Rifaat didn’t do anything in Hama,’ he said. ‘The west just blamed him [so as] to attack the president; it was the army’ (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011).

Rosen reminded readers of some history of the Hama massacre in that it killed more than 10,000 men, women and children. This massacre had been reported many times by both the BBC and Al Jazeera (See, for example, Al Jazeera, 15th May, 2011; 23rd November, 2011; BBC, 29th March, 2011, 31st May, 2011). The fact that the General spoke so proudly of it was utterly shocking. Not only that, but Bayoumi was unhappy with what he called *the soft response* of the regime:

The current uprising is a mere repetition of the one he had helped suppress, he said, but he was frustrated by what he perceived as the state’s restrained response. ‘The state is responding slowly,’ he said. ‘As a former military man, I am against what [the] security forces are doing. I would finish it in a month. I could solve the whole country’s problems in one month, if the president only listened to me.’ (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011).

‘I told them: “Give me eleven soldiers [and] I’ll finish this whole thing in Hula” - but the new leadership is softer.’

‘They don’t want to negotiate,’ he said of the opposition. ‘Kill them.’ He made a gun out of his hand and executed an imaginary person’ (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011).

There was no need for Rosen to comment here, as it was clear what a man proud of committing a previous massacre would want to tell the government. Upon visiting an injured soldier, Bayoumi commented:

‘There is no village here that doesn’t have a martyr or two,’ General Bayoumi told me, referring to slain members of the Syrian security forces. (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011).

Bayoumi and other Alawites were able to recite by heart the names of Alawite members killed in the 1982 Brotherhood uprising. They also told many stories of current attacks by rebels against security forces. Anyone who followed the news would see this to be just a drop in the ocean in comparison to crimes committed against the Syrian Sunni civilians.

In addition to the vicious remarks towards the protesters, Bayoumi and other Alawites he met seemed delusional as they repeated conspiracy theories. Later, Rosen was joined by a group of Alawites, the General son’s, a police officer in Latakia, an army major, and a retired

colonel who insisted that the whole uprising was the Brotherhood and takfiris' (Muslims who believe other Muslim are infidels) doing. Under the subtitle *The conspiracy grows*, which is in itself telling of how unverified those claims were, it read:

The retired colonel insisted that 'they' were trying to provoke sectarianism by assassinating Alawites. 'But Alawites are not responding as a sect,' he said. 'We are relying on the government, we know the size of the conspiracy, it's the Brotherhood and *takfiri* [those who declare other Muslims to be 'infidels'] – with help from the Mossad, America and France' (Al Jazeera, 12th October, 2011).

In the following paragraph, Rosen dutifully reiterated the stories of the protesters' aggression that they told him, without failing to discredit them by labelling:

The men recited a list of recent incidents they claimed were perpetrated by their Sunni neighbours. Alawites from Bureen and other villages of Masyaf had been prevented from entering Hama to take their high school examinations, they told me – blaming it on sectarian demonstrators. Two security officers in a taxi were stabbed to death coming home from work in Hula. The assembled party claimed the officers' corpses were dragged down the road by a tractor. Another security officer was stabbed to death coming home from Idlib, they told me. General Bayumi claimed that they had recently dismantled an improvised explosive device made of fertiliser (Al Jazeera, 12th October, 2011).

Saying that the *men recited a list* shows us that Rosen does not believe in their stories. Other phrasings that discredited the men's narrative were *blaming it on sectarian divisions*, *the assembled party claimed*, and *Bayumi claimed*. Finally, when Rosen recalled that a driver told him not to enter Sunni villages saying that 'they chop you up piece by piece', Rosen concluded that, despite the warnings, he did not see armed men in the Sunni villages, but he saw 'many Alawite men standing in the dark beside their motorcycles, carrying rifles and shotguns' (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011).

In *A tale of two Syrian villages: part two* (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011), Rosen started by talking to two Alawite families who fled their village, Akrab, after they had been threatened by the rebels. They had left the comfort of their houses to live in unfurnished apartments in Jbeili. The families claimed that they had been intimidated by the rebels who chanted 'what Miyada [the housewife of one of the families] dubbed "sectarian slogans"' (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011). Rosen did not seem to believe there were sectarian slogans nor were there any reported by Al Jazeera or the BBC except for what the Alawites claimed. Rosen interviewed another family who commented on the events:

'Their hatred appeared,' said one of the men in the family. 'It's finished, we can never go back,' said another. They worried that armed men would prevent them from returning to reclaim their belongings. 'We are waiting for the army to remove the armed men,' one told me (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

However, the comment ‘their hatred appeared’ would look shallow in comparison to what the rebels had to say about the events. Rosen met with three men: a policeman, a school teacher and a young medical student. They all told stories of how they were detained and tortured by the security forces:

The first demonstration in Hula took place on March 25th. Four days later, the medical student was arrested for demonstrating in Homs. He said he was hung from his arms and beaten, as well as given electric shocks; they called him ‘gay’ and stepped on his face. There was sewage water on the floor of his cell (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

Four stories were told by the Sunni rebels Rosen met of torture and of targeting peaceful demonstrators. Moreover, they told him of the privileged treatment the Alawites got, how their cities were more cared for with electricity and other services better provided in addition to the fact that higher ranks in the security forces were not given to Sunnis:

‘As someone from Hula, I cannot reach a rank over colonel,’ said the police officer. ‘Every year, only five or six people from here get to be officers. Most officers are taken from [among] Alawites. Hafez al-Assad started this’ (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

From the conversation, it was evident that the Alawites who met Rosen had no compassion whatsoever, neither to the protesters and their cause nor to the suffering that was brought upon them by the regime. They were so deep into the conspiracy theory that they were unable to see right through the fog, unable to compare their little suffering to the much greater suffering of the rebels and the Sunni people. Rosen noted that, in Hula, ‘Most houses we drove past had large bullet holes in their windows or in the walls near the windows’ (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

They also kept repeating the regime’s accusations that they were Jihadis coming after them, and that they wanted revenge. Those claims were unsupported. However, the rebels showed more understanding of the Alawites’ motives behind standing with the regime:

They conceded that most Alawites supported the regime. ‘They think if the regime goes, they will go,’ the teacher said. Khaled added: ‘They believe that if the regime leaves, they will die’ (Al Jazeera, 26th October 2011).

Regarding the rebels, *Free Syrian Army grows in influence* (Al Jazeera, 16th November, 2011) was the first article devoted to armed rebellion. Al Jazeera quoted and translated conflicting opinions regarding arming the rebellion, but still gave the chance to the armed rebels to explain their goals as was discussed in 5.5.4.5.

In *Inside Homs with the Free Syrian Army* (Al Jazeera, 8th February, 2012), Jane Ferguson was smuggled into Homs to spend a few days with members of the FSA. She described how she was smuggled into Homs by moving from one safe house to another, or in the car with activists fearing military checkpoints or being hit by regime snipers who shot indiscriminately. She described the FSA as having very few members who were ‘woefully under-equipped’. When she asked one commander what they planned to do after they overthrew the regime, his answer was one word, ‘justice’. Having read other news media’s expression of fear that the Sunni rebels might seek revenge, this word can be easily interpreted as such, but Ferguson didn’t jump into unreliable biases. She said:

If the international community’s fear that a change of power is being controlled by a group with strong self-interests is true, this room of men were not qualifying that (Al Jazeera, 8th February, 2012).

Ferguson and the civilians felt safe around the FSA, who never targeted civilians. Civilians and activists mingled freely with them and asked them about the events. Fear only came when the regime forces were around threatening everybody:

He tried to reassure me that there would be no pro-Assad forces on our way out of the country, saying: ‘This area all Free Army!’

He was wrong.

With the lights of Lebanon in our sights as we trundled along tiny country lanes, a rocket flew out from behind a row of trees (Al Jazeera, 8th February, 2012).

Four videos were posted in the article, all from the same visit in Homs. The first talked about how dangerous it had become to get food. Civilians described their situation in Arabic with Ferguson commenting as a voiceover. One told the story of a teenager shot while holding bread, another complained that it was difficult to get flour, sugar or even baby milk. Those people were not armed, but Ferguson said that their survival itself was considered a gesture of defiance against the regime. Ferguson’s comment was telling. It was not the armed rebellion that provoked the regime, but people’s resistance whether armed or not. Two other videos discussed the daily targeting of civilians and the regime’s torture of the injured. One elderly woman described what happened to her son who went to a pro regime area to get cooking gas for his family. He was shot in the leg and then disappeared, returning 17 days later as a corpse showing marks of having been burned, electrocuted and tortured. The last video discussed citizen journalists who chased footage of the government’s brutal crackdown on the

protesters. She went with Danny, a British Syrian, snaking through the city and gasping out of fear of being shot by snipers. It ended with meeting Atef Idris, a commander in the FSA.

Ferguson described the FSA as the protector of civilians and activists holding regime tanks back. But Idris appears saying in Arabic that if there was not a no-fly zone, they may not be able to defeat the regime, because one jet could wipe out everybody, civilian or military. Both the article and the videos shed light on the suffering of the Syrian people who lived in areas where demonstrations happened or are still happening; everybody was paying the price for those protests as the regime targeted all indiscriminately. The FSA seemed to be necessary for the protection of those people. It was not malicious and never targeted civilians, who felt safe around it.

In *On the front lines of Syria's guerrilla war* (13th June, 2012), Tracey Shelton made an exclusive report about the Sham Falcons rebel group; she started by stating the logic behind the fighting, in that those people had been met with utter brutality and had to fight back:

Like other armed fighting groups, they were drawn from local towns and villages that carried fierce resistance to the Damascus government of President Bashar al-Assad and claimed to have suffered from its brutality. Like so many Syrians, they decided to fight back (Al Jazeera, 13th June, 2012).

Shelton recounted a military offensive carried by Sham Falcons against a regime infantry carrier. On the way to a government position, they had planted a TNT explosive at a key point and, when the soldiers approached, the triggerman detonated the bomb, which ripped up parts of the road, but not the soldiers. This was returned immediately by gunfire and mortars. The rebels were happy no one was injured at least, but told Shelton that they could not keep things like that; Fatalah, a member of Sham Falcons, said they were 'using very simple weapons against the highly sophisticated weapons of the regime' (Al Jazeera, 13th June, 2012).

The fighters were depicted as fathers who were staying away from their families. Indeed, the majority of the men were fathers with families living nearby. Since the uprising, their lives now centred around the fight and most of their meals were shared at the base. On any given night, around half of the men slept at the base with rotating shifts to stand guard. They were just simple men who had neither dangerous agendas nor money and who shared their poverty with the other protesters who demanded reforms and a better life:

As he dipped bread into a bowl of hummus, unit commander Asad Ibrahim said their meals are basic, but hearty.

‘We eat this every day. It gives us fast legs so we can run from the enemy,’ he joked (Al Jazeera, 13th June 2012).

After telling the story of an eight-year-old boy who was shot dead as he was on his way to visit his mother in the hospital, who had just given birth, Shelton said that such stories were what pushed people to carry weapons. Finally, the article finished with one defected soldier describing the horrible incident that gave him no choice but to defect when a university student was thrown from a building on the sixth floor for protesting. The soldiers then went on as if nothing had happened. If he had protested the brutal treatment, he could have been thrown as well:

‘We were ordered to shoot the protesters demonstrating at Aleppo University,’ he said.

‘Most of the time I would shoot in the air, but many of my colleagues would use excessive force, hitting, cursing and humiliating those arrested. They dropped one student from the top of a six-storey building onto the grounds of the university. They continued as if nothing had happened. It was a horrible feeling. I felt pity, but I could say nothing or I would be treated like those students.’ (Al Jazeera, 13th June, 2012).

Indeed the Syrian war has become a proxy war where international players support different parties in the conflict in relation to their sect. Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni rebels in a bid to get rid of the Alawite regime and weaken Iran, while Iran and Hizbullah supported the Alawite regime. Some blame Saudi Arabia and Qatar for exacerbating the conflict, but their role was very weak and fragmented. They had no experience in mobilising militias and competed with each other, ending up supporting different groups and further weakening the revolution (Hokayem, 2014; Allinson, 2015).

On the other hand, Iran and Hizbullah jumped to the support of the regime from early 2012. They provided the regime with experienced militias, advice and even weapons including barrel bombs that the regime used to flatten cities (Bartolomei, 2018).

Iran immediately threw its weight and proxies behind Bashar Al-Assad’s savagery, and saw within the revolution a golden opportunity to eliminate the Sunni Arabs yet further, as well as to pull the Syrian dictator even deeper into its orbit by making him indebted to the mullahs. Without Tehran – and, in the past year, Russia – there is little doubt that Assad would have crumbled long ago. (Abdulrazaq, 2016)

Iran may have introduced improvised and highly lethal weaponry to the Syrian regime, including the notorious barrel bomb, thrown indiscriminately onto residential areas from helicopters and first used in August 2012, and so-called improvised rocket-assisted munitions, or ‘lob bombs’ (Leenders, 2018, p.337).

6.3.4 Through the lens of NVivo

Having concluded through the qualitative analysis that Al Jazeera demonised the regime while supporting the protesters, often referred to as people, I researched these two words in NVivo. Indeed, since *Assad* and *people* were the most frequent words after *Syria* and *Syrian*, it seems that they were the most important two parties reported in this conflict. I will look at the concordance of these two words and study the context of their use in the text. When you choose a word to explore in NVivo, it shows you the number of times it occurred and its context with the word highlighted in yellow. This has enabled me to revise my initial analysis and ensure I have not missed a thing.

Assad surfaced 433 times in Al Jazeera texts from March to October of 2011. He was literally given no chance by Al Jazeera as I could not find one single positive description of him. He was always responsible for the killing of his people. For every issue, I will put examples across the months to show the continuity of the narrative through the period:

Political state

Assad has responded to the protests, now in their fourth week, with a blend of force and vague promises of reform (Al Jazeera, 13th April, 2011).

His father's footsteps

The uprising in Syria began with the torture of children: 15 boys, aged between 10 and 15, from Deraa, who were beaten and had their finger nails pulled out by men working for General Atef Najeeb, a cousin of President Assad.

Like the father from whom he inherited power, President Assad has sought to crush the uprising against him with force and mass arrests (Al Jazeera, 15th May, 2011).

read the above lines and failed to comprehend the totality of the horror and violence perpetrated against Hamza.

Gradually, a picture began to form in my mind. Here was a child, torn from his family and plunged into the darkest recesses of Assad's despotism. Grown men - adults - separated him from everything sacred to him; his mother, his father, his home and routine (Al Jazeera, 5th June, 2011).

Syrian tanks again opened fire on besieged districts in the northern port city of Latakia, residents said, in the fourth day of a military assault aimed at crushing protests against President Bashar al-Assad (Al Jazeera, 16th August, 2011).

Regarding al-Assad's protection of minorities, al-Assad was accused of aggravating the sectarian tension through the conflict, the regime ideology made to protect the sect was what led to the Hama massacre, and, finally, al-Assad has done more damage than good to the Alawites by distancing them from their religious identity and tying their identity and fate to him:

They accuse President Bashar al-Assad of causing sectarian strife among the city's Christians, Sunni Muslims and members of his Alawite minority (Al Jazeera, 22nd July, 2011).

To protect his sect, Assad implemented laws and policies to secure all minorities from the rule of any religious-majority ideology. The Baath party heavily opposed any inclusion of religion in matters of state. This policy against the rule-of-majority ideology culminated in the bloody 1982 massacre which aimed at eliminating the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement strongly opposed to Assad's radically secular and socialist regime (Al Jazeera, 16th September, 2011).

With an identity based on Assad's rule, they have adopted slogans such as 'Assad for ever,' unable to separate themselves from the regime or imagine a Syria without Assad. Alawites who dare to oppose the regime believe they will face extra punishment for their 'betrayal' (Al Jazeera, 10th October, 2011).

Even when pro-regime demonstrations are reported, it was either suggested that they were staged or their value belittled with a reminder of the people protesting against al-Assad:

But regime supporters also took to the streets in sizeable numbers on Friday, waving flags and images of al-Assad. A large crowd gathered in the evening outside Al Jazeera's bureau in Damascus, demanding to be shown on the network.

'Thousands and thousands are now out in the streets of the capital, driving around the capital, showing their support for President Assad. There is no doubt the president does have support in this country. Bashar al-Assad is a popular leader,' said Al Jazeera's correspondent Zeina Khodr.

But Anas al-Abda, the chairman of the Movement for Justice and Development in Syria, told Al Jazeera that pro-government demonstrations were 'most probably fabricated and organised by the regime' (Al Jazeera, 26th March, 2011).

Tens of thousands of Syrians have rallied in central Damascus in show of support for President Bashar al-Assad, who is battling a six-month uprising against his rule in which the UN says about 2,900 people have been killed.

'America, out, out, Syria will stay free', chanted the crowd on Wednesday, many of them carrying pictures of Assad and Syrian flags.

They also shouted slogans warning the European Union not to intervene in their country. 'God, Syria and Bashar', they sang (Al Jazeera, 12th October, 2011).

When a university student showered praise on al-Assad, Al Jazeera reported it with no comment because the student's speech only proved how authoritarian the regime is that it instilled in the people the idea that protesting meant biting the hand that feeds you:

'Universities are for education not for demonstrations. Without the Baath party and President Assad none of us poor could get into university,' said Khaldoun.

'Those students who are protesting are studying in the government's buildings: No one eats from a dish only to spit in it. Everyone against the country and Assad should be punished.'

But for many students, the fear barrier that kept politics off campus for so long has fallen in a matter of a week (Al Jazeera, 21st April, 2011).

People, on the other hand, often indicated the number of the dead or injured, referred to protesters, or described the dire conditions that forced people to rebel. For the *people* as direct victims of abuse, killing, torture, or arrests, see the following examples:

A witness told Al Jazeera that more than 100 **people** were killed. He said many **people** have gone missing and bodies have been dragged away from the streets (Al Jazeera, 25th March, 2011).

Now there are more than 300 secret police patrolling inside the university alongside members of the Students' Union', said Ahmad, a student at Damascus University. 'They swear at **people** and if anyone answers back they will be beaten.' (Al Jazeera, 21st April, 2011).

'Syrian security is now releasing detainees with unhealed wounds caused by torture in order to spread panic and fear among **people**, hoping it will reduce the numbers participating in demonstrations,' said Wissam Tarif, Director of Insan, a leading Syrian human rights organisation, which has documented cases of torture (Al Jazeera, 15th May, 2011).

At least 20,000 **people** are believed to have been killed in the crackdown (Al Jazeera, 8th July, 2011).

A resident of the al-Ramel al-Janoubi neighbourhood, who called himself 'Ismail', told Al Jazeera that random shelling from gunboats and tanks continued in Latakia. He said five **people** had already been killed, and snipers were stationed around the city, shooting at anyone who ventured into the streets (Al Jazeera, 16th August, 2011).

Rights groups have estimated that at least 1,600 **people** have died since the start of the uprising in Syria in March, but that number might increase considerably by the end of the fasting month of Ramadan (Al Jazeera, 1st August, 2011).

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva has put the number of **people** killed in the crackdown at more than 2,700 since March 15 (Al Jazeera, 26th September, 2011).

The resolution sought to impose 'targeted measures' against the government of Bashar al-Assad for a crackdown that has killed 2,700 **people**, according to UN estimates (Al Jazeera, 5th October, 2011).

Al Jazeera has referred to the people as the protesters, which reinforced the idea that this was a public revolt:

At least 200 **people** marched in the centre of Damascus after Friday prayers in support of the **people** of Daraa, scene of protests against Baath Party rule, Reuters reported (Al Jazeera, 26th March, 2011).

The current emergency law allows **people** to be arrested without warrants and imprisoned without trial (Al Jazeera, 26th March, 2011).

Activists said Baida was targeted because its residents participated in a demonstration in Baniyas last week in which protesters shouted: 'The **people** want the overthrow of the regime' - the rallying cry of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions where the leaders were toppled.

Syria is one of the most repressive states in the region; hundreds, if not thousands, of **people** have disappeared into its infamous prisons. Some reappear after years, some after decades, many never resurface at all (Al Jazeera, 3rd April, 2011).

‘More than 1.2 million people marched. In Deir az Zor there were more than 550,000, and in Hama more than 650,000,’ Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the London-based independent group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), told AFP on Saturday (Al Jazeera, 22nd July, 2011).

‘What’s happening here in Syria and Hula is popular,’ said the teacher. ‘It’s a people’s movement. There is no leader. We are against oppression, insults and [a] lack of dignity.’ Like many opposition supporters, they felt a strong sense of injustice. ‘I don’t feel Syrian,’ the teacher said. ‘Syria is for the Assad family... A security man without [even] an elementary school degree can insult me in front of my family,’ he added (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

Finally, Al Jazeera recounted people’s grievances against the regime which caused them to revolt:

‘So the Syrian people are very angry. They gave him the benefit of the doubt, they stood by him when the US tried to isolate him following the assassination of [then Lebanese prime minister] Rafik Hariri, and their loyalty was paid back by blood, by bullets, by the massacre that we saw in Daraa this morning’ (Al Jazeera, 23rd March, 2011).

It was here on March 6 that the spark that lit the Syrian uprising was struck: The arrest, detention and torture of 15 young boys for painting graffiti slogans of the Arab revolution - ‘As-Shaab / Yoreed / Eskaat el nizam!’ ‘The people / want / to topple the regime!’ on a wall, copying what they had seen on television news reports from Cairo and Tunis (Al Jazeera, 19th April, 2011).

Reporting from Beirut, Al Jazeera’s Rula Amin said that protesters are dismissing the draft law. The people are demanding ‘political freedoms, not just a law to organise how to form political parties’ (Al Jazeera, 25th July, 2011).

Furthermore, Syria has been surprisingly quiet about the Israeli expropriation of land, building of settlements and transfer of Jewish settlers to the occupied Golan Heights. There are more than 30 Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights, supposedly on some of the best agrarian land, inhabited by at least 20,000 settlers. The Arab population of the region has dwindled from 130,000 people in 1967 to 20,000 today, while Israel has expropriated all but six per cent of the land there (Al Jazeera, 3rd April, 2011).

‘It is one of the most important demands because people are spending many years in prison because of their demands for the human rights of our people’, Anwar Al Bunni, a lawyer and human-rights activist in Syria, told Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011).

A significant number of people there have taken up arms to defend Assad’s clampdown on anti-government protesters (Al Jazeera, 29th July, 2011).

In order to confirm my first assumptions regarding how Al Jazeera dealt with both Sunnis and Alawites, I resorted to NVivo where I can use the Explore tool and do a word search. I searched for the words *Sunni* and *Alawites* in both news media. Sunni occurred 62 times in Al Jazeera coverage of the uprising from November 2011-June 2012. Sunnis were usually referred to neutrally, mentioning the fact that the majority of the protesters were Sunni:

hundreds of anti-government protesters in one of the most conservative Sunni districts and chanted against Assad’s rule (Al Jazeera, 23rd November, 2011).

President Bashar al-Assad and the ruling elite are mostly Alawite, an offshoot of Shia Islam, while the majority of the country is Sunni (Al Jazeera, 6th December, 2011).

Al Jazeera also spoke about the causes that led Sunnis specifically to revolt. In conversation with Nir Rosen about the opposition, he said that the majority of the Syrian conscripts were Sunnis whose relatives are demonstrating and were targeted by the regime (Al Jazeera, 13th February, 2011).

Moreover, those Sunni conscripts were not trusted by the regime and many were shot for disobeying it:

Meanwhile, **Sunni** members of the army are coming under increasing suspicion by the security agencies, and there have been cases of security men killing soldiers for refusing to obey orders to shoot. Hundreds of soldiers and officers have also been arrested. 13th February (Al Jazeera, 13th February, 2011).

Sunnis were referred to when comparing the regime crackdown on Alawites that was described to be more brutal than on Alawite dissidents, which can be a factor of fear for Alawite dissidents, ultimately silencing them:

In other cities, however, like Sweida [in the south of the country] or Tartous [in western Syria], where residents are predominantly from minority groups, the situation is very bad. People cannot voice their opposition because the government is even more brutal on dissidents belonging to minority groups than those from the majority **Sunni** Muslims. They threaten them and their families and children even before they decide to protest. 23rd November (Al Jazeera, 13th February, 2011).

If Al Jazeera ever alluded to sectarianism, it referred to circumstances.

Syria's civil war is increasingly turning into a sectarian conflict pitting majority **Sunni** rebels against government forces supported by the country's religious and ethnic minorities, a new UN human rights report has said (Al Jazeera, 20th December, 2011).

Not only that, but as circumstances might have pushed Sunnis to sectarianism, minorities who supported the regime also targeted Sunnis specifically:

While the sectarian divide is sharpest between the **Sunni** and Alawi communities, from which most of the senior government and military leaders hail, other minority groups have been increasingly drawn into the conflict, the report said.

'As battles between government and anti-government armed groups approach the end of their second year, the conflict has become overtly sectarian in nature,' it said, adding that Christians, Armenians, Druze and others have largely aligned themselves with President Bashar al-Assad's regime (Al Jazeera, 20th December, 2011).

Heavy assault

In addition to the kidnappings, the opposition Syrian Revolution General Commission said on Tuesday that 25 people had been shot dead by security forces in Homs and elsewhere.

The group said 23 people were killed in Homs, while one person died in Hama and another in Idlib.

President Bashar al-Assad and the ruling elite are mostly Alawite, an offshoot of Shia Islam, while the majority of the country is **Sunni**.

Protests against Assad that began in March have escalated into an armed conflict between the government and its armed supporters on one side, and civilians and defected soldiers on the other (Al Jazeera, 6th December, 2011).

This support is what increased anti-Alawites feelings among the opposition according to Nir Rosen:

Since the crisis started, sectarian fears have grown. The security crackdown and the loyalty most Alawites have to the regime have also increased anti-Alawite sentiment. The security forces, those shooting, arresting, abusing and killing citizens - opposition activists or even random **Sunni** citizens - speak with Alawite accents, say the opposition.

In parts of Homs, Damascus and Latakia, there is a feeling among **Sunni** communities that pro-regime militia, the *shabiha* ['thugs'], have been recruited from among the general Alawite population. Anger has increased and it is common to hear anti-government Sunnis condemning all Alawites (Al Jazeera, 18th February, 2012).

In response to the idea that Sunnis were radicalised, Al Jazeera Nir Rosen described the Sunni Muslims in Syria as conservative but not radical; they did not aspire to an Islamic state, but have resorted to religion as a source of inspiration and support:

They fight for a multitude of reasons: for their friends, for their neighbourhoods, for their villages, for their province, for revenge, for self-defence, for dignity, for their brethren in other parts of the country who are also fighting. They do not read religious literature or listen to sermons. Their views on Islam are consistent with the general attitudes of Syrian Sunni society, which is conservative and religious (Al Jazeera, 13th February, 2012).

AJ: Does Islam play a role in the uprising?

NR: Undeniably, Islam is playing a role in the revolution. The majority of Syria's population is **Sunni** Muslim - and so are most of the opposition.

But very few in the opposition are struggling for an 'Islamic state'. They say Islam is not 'the goal'. It does, however, provide a creed or inspiration and it colours the discourse for many protesters and fighters. In part this is natural. People will refer to their local culture and history and values when struggling for political goals. This is especially true if they are devout and their struggle involves great risks (Al Jazeera, 18th February, 2012).

Nevertheless, Al Jazeera did not deny sectarianism in Syria, but Sunnis resentment of the Alawites was not due to religion as much as it was related to their rise in power and their dominance in high positions:

In my journeys in Syria, members of **Sunni** communities have told me they came to resent Alawites - a heterodox sect which practices elements of Shia Islam - after the rise of the Alawite Assad dynasty. Some of this was due to prejudice against Alawites and some due to urban prejudice against those from rural backgrounds.

Many among the **Sunni** in Syria also believe that Alawites are disproportionately represented in the security forces, as well as in various government positions, especially the most sensitive ones (Al Jazeera, 18th February, 2012).

Al Jazeera also reminded people of the anti-sectarian slogans and of the fact that other minorities did join the revolution:

AJ: Is the opposition making efforts to prevent sectarian strife?

NR: In every anti-government demonstration there are anti-sectarian slogans and speeches. The opposition is very sensitive to the regime's charges that it is a sectarian **Sunni**-Islamist movement (Al Jazeera, 18th February, 2012).

But, while YouTube clips - allegedly recorded a week ago in Aleppo - are running on the screen, the young Syrian activist makes me notice that these protesters are still chanting 'You are our brothers!' to the army, despite the fact that all media attention is catalysed either by the armed clashes between Assad's soldiers and the defected Free Syrian Army, or by the sectarian conflict allegedly going on between Syria's Alawi minority and **Sunni** majority (Al Jazeera, 6th April, 2012).

Rosen has also stated that as many Christians were afraid of the rise of the Sunni majority, he has 'never heard any resentment towards Christians or the Druze or Ismaili minorities from **Sunni** opposition I have spoken with' (Al Jazeera 18th February, 2011).

They also cheered any Alawites or member of minorities who joined the revolution, according to Rosen. In many articles in Al Jazeera, it relates the growing sectarian divide to ignoring the conflict as the longer violence took place in Syria, the more people resorted to sectarianism:

The longer the conflict drags on, the more likely it is to devolve into a battle of Sunni militia fighting Alawite militia. Both sides will become further radicalised as fear of extermination will likely lead to pre-emptive attacks and then revenge attacks (Al Jazeera, 24th February, 2011).

Alawites, on the other hand, occurred 39 times in Al Jazeera coverage from November 2011-June 2012. They were basically discussed when mentioning their participation in the uprising and the conditions to which Alawites are subjected when revolting:

Fadwa Soliman, a Syrian actress brought up as an **Alawite** - the sect of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad - shocked many Syrians when she stood on a high platform in front of hundreds of anti-government protesters in one of the most conservative Sunni districts and chanted against Assad's rule (Al Jazeera, 23rd November, 2011).

I have been to many demonstrations in Damascus where groups of Ismaili youth from Salamiyah, Druze from Suweida and others took part. On December 31, a delegation of **Alawite** activists joined about 500 Sunni demonstrators in the Damascus neighbourhood of Barzeh (Al Jazeera, 18th February, 2012).

Al Jazeera, as well as did the BBC, described massacres committed by Alawites. Up to this moment, no massacre was committed by the opposition as reported in both news media:

Heavy shelling on Wednesday reportedly targeted the villages of Jerjees and Maarzaf, where activists told Al Jazeera they suspected the army was trying to quell opposition fighters. Al-Qubayr, with a population of around 150 people, was close enough to take some of the artillery fire as well.

‘After the shelling, the army withdrew and shabiha entered the town and slaughtered people,’ Mohammad said.

Tal Sikkeen and Aseelah, where activists claimed the shabiha came from, are inhabited mainly by members of the Alawite sect, the offshoot of Shia Islam to which Assad’s family and many high-ranking government officials belong.

Al-Qubayr is a town inhabited mainly by Sunni Muslims, and Mousab al-Hamad, an activist in Hama, said he believed the acts of the shabiha were motivated by sectarian feelings (Al Jazeera, 7th June, 2011).

Al Jazeera did not demonise the Sunni rebels for their Sunnism and was very understanding of the situation that pushed them to carry weapons. As for the Alawites, Al Jazeera recognised two main issues; the first was that some Alawites participated in the uprising but were met with more brutality by the regime, and, secondly, that many Alawites supported the regime and participated in its slaughter of the civilians.

6.3.5 Discussion

Similarly to the BBC, Al Jazeera criminalised al-Assad and pinned the blame for the violence mostly on him. In translation, it used the same tactics used by the BBC, which were to translate the speeches of the regime or any of its spokesmen, including SANA, and play down their credibility by placing them between other speakers and events that contradicted the narratives of the regime. For example, most of the time, when the regime blamed the violence on armed gangs, it was condemned by the witnesses’ accounts, human rights organisations, and the Arab and Western elites. The regime usually *blamed* and *accused* while protesters and others *said*.

As for the victims of the violence, Al Jazeera showed much more compassion to the suffering of the people than the BBC, which rarely brought in details about the life of the civilian Syrians except for a few examples. One of them is the story of Hamza Al-Khatib, a 13-year-old boy who was captured by the regime during a demonstration and reported in the BBC in *Syria unrest: Hamza al-Khatib a symbol of uprising* (Al Jazeera, 1st June, 2011) and by Al Jazeera in *Tortured and killed: Hamza al-Khateeb, age 13* (Al Jazeera, 31st May, 2011). Both described the horrendous state of the body, translated the regime’s false claims and

contradicted them through the accounts of eye witnesses. Al Jazeera, however, went much further by mentioning the Facebook page dedicated for Hamza and posting a drawing of Hamza by one of his bereaved classmates taken from the Facebook page. Al Jazeera also managed to meet and translate a conversation with an older cousin of Hamza who told a moving anecdote of the innocent child who liked to help the poor and enjoyed swimming in puddles and raising pigeons. The BBC coverage of the story waned not only in comparison to that of Al Jazeera but to some Western news media that spoke more passionately of the story that caused outrage inside and outside Syria.

How a 13-year-old boy became the face of the Syrian uprising (The Telegraph, 5th June, 2011) and *Teenage victim becomes a symbol for Syria's revolution* (The Guardian, 31st May, 2011) are examples of news media that humanised Hamza by describing his childish round face, talking to his family who described his innocence and describing the pain invoked on the family of Hamza.

In the one example when the BBC got close to the Syrian victims, as Paul Wood met women running from Bab Amr and who told him that their men were taken by the regime and that they expected them to be slaughtered, he described the running people as *hysterics*, their stories as *wild stories* and wondered if that was *fear talking*. Thus, he translated their accounts but downplayed them, casting doubts on their credibility and failing to empathise. From that we understand that when a news media decides to translate the accounts of victims of war, it does not necessarily entail that it was going to be fair with them, but it is important for every news media to translate or talk to different aspects of the conflict to maintain the appearance of impartiality.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera sympathised with the civilians and never downplayed their credibility. In addition to the story of Hamza, when Jane Ferguson in *Inside Homs with the Free Syrian Army* (Al Jazeera, 8th February, 2012) met with civilians, she described their suffering in detail. Actually, four videos were posted in the article where she described how difficult it was to get food, and how journalists and people were targeted indiscriminately. Even when Alawites described the Sunni rebels as extremists who will 'chop [him [to] pieces' in *A tale of two villages* (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011), Rosen only responded by saying that, when visiting the Sunni villages, that he did not see the *chop* men or any armed

men, but he ‘did see many Alawite men standing in the dark beside their motorcycles, carrying rifles and shotguns’ along the borders of their villages.’ Thus, he responded by telling the truth of what he really saw without labelling the Alawites in any manner, like saying they were *hysterics*. That was contrary to how the BBC’s Wood described people fleeing from real danger.

As for the rebels, both news media spoke to the rebels and translated their speeches, but with the BBC rather dehumanising them and portraying them as extremists who possibly would take revenge if they won, which put the Alawite minority in danger. This was done by praising al-Assad as a reformer trying to challenge the system at the time while the rebels seemed to be weak, unfit and unrealistic. It was also done by not translating their chants and simply describing them as Salafist, a synonym of extremist in the media, only because they were religious. The reader was not given the chance to judge for himself if the slogans chanted were dangerous or not, but he gets the idea that those people would be as malicious as al-Assad. Significant also was the fact that the BBC chose not to speak to Alawites who feared for their future.

Al Jazeera did, however, reach out to both sides. The accounts of Nir Rosen humanised both. He went to the Alawites, ate, travelled and visited their houses and saw their families. He did not throw out unjustified judgements, but translated his conversation with them and provided context if needed. When Col. Bayioui bragged about his role in the Hama massacre, Rosen just provided basic information about the massacre, which was already reported several times by both Al Jazeera and the BBC. The Alawites Rosen spoke to not only supported al-Assad’s crackdown, but thought it was not enough, in, for instance, *A tale of two villages* (Al Jazeera, 24th October, 2011). Also, they seemed to be very difficult to negotiate with as they were adamant that what was happening was a conspiracy and that rebels were sectarian who had no brains, as in *Assad’s Alawites: Syria’s entrenched community* (Al Jazeera, 12th October, 2011) and *A tale of two Syrian villages: part two* (Al Jazeera, 26th October, 2011).

Finally, while the BBC was sceptical of the armed rebels, Al Jazeera humanised them and described them as poor fathers who had to leave their jobs and families to fight, understood their motives by giving them the chance to speak up and by accompanying them and seeing first-hand how they were helping and protecting civilians who were constantly targeted by

the regime, as in *The Free Syrian Army grows in influence* and Jane Ferguson's in *Inside Homs with the Free Syrian Army* (Al Jazeera, 8th February, 2012).

This full-swing support for the uprisings by Aljazeera could be because of what the Western elites said about the uprising, the Arab Leagues and, specifically, Qatar support of the uprising, and, finally, Al Jazeera's Pan-Arabism.

Western elites, at the time, very much criticised the regime crackdown on civilians, as is reported in both the BBC and Al Jazeera. For example:

Earlier this month, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, called Assad to say he was 'greatly disturbed' by the reports of violence. Many Western leaders, including President Barack Obama, have condemned Syria's harsh tactics to quell dissidents (Al Jazeera, 25th April, 2011).

US President Barack Obama said reports from Hama were horrifying.

'Once again, President [Bashar al-Assad] has shown that he is completely incapable and unwilling to respond to the legitimate grievances of the Syrian people,' he said.

Mr Obama, who said he was appalled by the government's use of 'violence and brutality against its own people,' added that the US would continue to work to isolate Mr Assad's regime (BBC, 31st July, 2011).

Moreover, Al Jazeera's enthusiastic coverage of the Syrian conflict coincides with the Qatari foreign policy that started from the 1990s to promote itself internationally. Qatar has always sought to be more effective in the region and often assumed the role of the mediator (Ulrichsen, 2014). However, when uprisings swept the region, it swiftly changed positions and sought an even more progressive role, which not only supported the revolts but also advocated their cause and sought intervention, specifically in Libya and Syria. More of the Qatari role in Syria will be discussed in the next section (Ulrichsen, 2014; Akpinar, 2015).

While the Qatari position might have affected Al Jazeera coverage of the Syrian events, I see the effect more due to not censoring its coverage on Syria as it did regarding Qatar and neighbouring countries. Generally speaking, Al Jazeera enjoys a lot of freedom and since its launch, 'Qatar has decided to abolish its Ministry of Information and Culture and put an end to all kind of censorship on freedom of the press' (Lahlali, 2016). Al Jazeera has been viewed by some critics as a Pan-Arab news media (Ayish, 2002; Cherkaoui, 2010). Pan-Arabism is a national Arab movement that stresses Arabism over religion and race. It came as reaction to the Western colonisation of the Arab World and dividing it arbitrarily into small countries in

1918. Pan-Arabism encouraged coups and the ousting of Western-friendly leaders (Cherkaoui, 2010).

Many workers in Al Jazeera came from countries neighbouring Israel and where Pan-Arabism flourished, like Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Egypt (Cherkaoui, 2010). While this was translated in Al Jazeera coverage of Iraq that saw the American invasion as *occupation*, and the liberation of Baghdad, as *Baghdad burning* as Cherkaoui found in his study where he compared CNN and Al Jazeera coverage of the war in Iraq. I believe, in the Syrian war, it was translated in showing empathy with the Syrians' cause who were finally rising against an authoritarian regime that allowed no dissent. Of course, staff in Al Jazeera English were not mostly Arab, and people who ventured into Syria and me with the rebels were neither Arabs nor Muslims including Nir Rosen and Jane Ferguson, but they approached the revolution with an understanding of the situation in the Middle East up to this moment, Al Jazeera identified with the suffering of the Syrians, humanised them and advocated their cause while, at the same time, sticking to the truth. Even when it discussed sectarianism in Syria, it did not speak out of pre-assumptions but through getting close and speaking to both sides. It still did not pass judgements but allowed readers to arrive at theirs.

Indeed, regarding the sunni-Alawite conflict, comparing the regime's and its supporters' human rights violations, they go way beyond any violations committed by even the most extremist Sunni groups. The Houla massacre where 'a total of 108 killed in the Houla massacre, thirty-two were children and many were women. Some were stabbed to death and others beaten to death' (Ismail, 2018, p.179) was only the beginning with many massacres to follow (Leenders, 2018). According to human rights organisations, the regime committed more than 50 massacres of Sunni families from March 2011 to February 2018 (Memo, 2018). Moreover, according to a UN human rights investigation report in 2013, p.1, 'violations and abuses committed by anti-government armed groups did not reach the intensity and scale of those committed by government forces and affiliated militia' (cited in Bartolomei, 2018, p.232).

This barbarity towards Sunni protesters was not produced by religious extremism, if one leaves aside the Shias and Iran, as Alawism is believed to be ‘pre-Islamic religion, which incorporates elements of Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism’ (Darke, 2016, p.25). They generally do not observe the basics of Islam like praying, fasting and abstaining from alcohol (Darke, 2016). The fact that Alawites are locked into supporting the regime out of fear is not an explanation of the utter brutality with which loyal Alawites flattened cities and massacred whole families. Many researchers attribute the Alawite support of the ruthless regime to the Alawite Assabiyya (Darke, 2016; Bartolomei, 2018; Goldsmith, 2018).

In his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, TE Lawrence observed the Alawi Asabiyya even before the Assads rule: ‘The sect, vital in itself, was clannish in feeling and politics. One member would not betray another, and would hardly not betray an unbeliever’ (cited by Darke, 2016, p.134).

Bartolomei states that:

This strategy relied on Alawi assabiyya ‘group feeling’ (Tibi 1997)² to forge a coherent elite, commanding high-ranking positions in political and military institutions. Indeed, Alawi assabiyya signifies the backbone of the Assad regime and, notwithstanding that Assad never engaged in direct sectarian rhetoric, he covertly exploited the Alawi identity and encouraged Alawis to view the regime as ‘theirs’. p.243

The Syrian regime crimes might be downplayed by Western media for the fact that the regime belonged to a minority persecuted sect, but their Asabiyya might be a far more dangerous ideology than religious extremism or specifically, in this context, Sunni extremism. To keep their sect in power, the group feeling of the Alawites loyal to the regime compelled them to accept or participate in flattening villages and bombing civilians, rather than losing power and being reduced again to second-class citizens. The fact that tens of thousands of Sunni people were indiscriminately killed in Hama in 1982 in retaliation for a small insurgent group and people were too afraid for over 30 years to even mention it (Ismail, 2018) shows the unprecedented huge level of persecution that was practised against a majority of the Syrian population by a sect who should have known what it meant to be persecuted. Indeed, more attention should be made to Assabiyya and its effects in fragmenting societies in the Middle East rather than Islamic extremism.

6.3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how translation was crucial to the narratives advocated by the news media by selective appropriation, causal emplotment, and framing (through labelling, photo and links) in the news coverage. It has also shown that selecting to speak to people, whether parties of the conflict or victims of war, does not necessarily mean support of the people speaking nor an attempt to understand their perspective regardless of how foregrounded the speakers or their stories looked on the text, because it was causal emplotment and framing that determined the effect of these selections.

Both the BBC and Al Jazeera translated the speeches of the regime, its spokesmen, and reports from SANA, the state news agency, but that was mostly to undermine them by selecting other speeches, events, photos and links that told otherwise. The BBC spoke to the rebels, but often made comments that undermined them, showed suspicion and a lack of understanding of their perspectives. BBC reporters were smuggled into Syria, spoke to victims of war who expressed utter fear and showed desperation, but it labelled them as *hysterics* telling *wild stories* that one might question the purpose of speaking to them altogether if determined not to believe them.

More importantly, not selecting to translate something might be more important than what is selected. The BBC accused protesters of chanting Salafi slogans, labelling the slogans without translating giving the reader no chance but to accept the interpretation imposed on them by the BBC journalist. When a woman shouted in a video posted in the BBC website defending the rebels, the BBC chose to ignore her defence and did not translate at all.

This helped the BBC create the narrative it wanted that demonised the rebels and showed no empathy to the victims of war. More importantly, the BBC chose not to speak to the Alawites altogether, although they were a very important aspect of the conflict, which enabled the BBC to throw all of the blame for sectarianism on the Sunni rebels.

Al Jazeera, on the other hand, met with both in a sincere attempt to understand their perspectives, which made the conversations had with both enlightening to the readers who were allowed to judge for themselves. Even though Al Jazeera was Pan-Arab and may have been affected by the Qatari foreign policy, there was no evidence of bias.

In this way, Al Jazeera was more of a gap bridger that spoke to all parties of the conflict and certainly sympathised with victims of war by translating for all. The BBC, unfortunately, did not bridge any gaps, but built its coverage and translation around pre-assumptions. It also failed to sympathise with victims of war.

This chapter has, indeed, shown through narrative theory that it was not only what is translated, but how a translation is labelled and situated that affects the final narrative.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The story of the Syrian uprising that has taken more than seven years and resulted in the deaths, injury and displacement of thousands of hundreds is a very sad story of a revolution that had raised hopes of a better life for Syrians, but eventually turned many people's lives upside down. While this research did not seek to investigate the international politics that let the Syrian people down, it started from an observation that news media, while all claimed objectivity, told the Syrian story from different perspectives. While most acknowledged that many Syrians were victims of a regime that tolerated no dissent and responded brutally to the peaceful revolutions, differences seemed to grow when some Syrians started to carry arms. I have specifically chosen two news media that are widely viewed, and are reflective of the perspectives of two different cultures: the Western culture, for which I have chosen the BBC News, and the Arab culture, for which I have chosen Al Jazeera. Not only did this research seek to see the different perspectives of these news media, but it investigated how that was achieved through narrative theory, specifically causal emplotment and selective appropriation, and framing. The research also paid considerable attention to translations in these texts, looking at the perspectives suggested by the translations through the same aspects of narrative theory bearing in mind how these translations, regardless of their purpose, actually added a lot of credibility and rather confirmed the news media objectivity for having sought to reach out to the people residing in conflict places and make their perspective more powerful.

7.2 Significance and context of the study

In this research, I have sought to apply the narrative theory and framing in the news context and their translations. It specifically utilised the social narrative theory first developed by Somers (1992;1994), and Somers and Gibson (1994) ,and then adapted to translation by Baker (2005; 2006). I have also utilised framing analysis discussed by many critical discourse analysis scholars including Fairclough (1981; 2001) and Entman (1993; 2004; 2007). I have designed a narrative theory and framing model in order to study the applicability of the narrative theory to the news context.

Using my narrative and framing theory model, which I have explained in 4.3.1, which focused on selective appropriation and causal emplotment, along with paratextual framing, I sought out the narratives suggested by both the BBC News and Al Jazeera English websites even if they were not spelled out conspicuously. I have looked at the changing narratives of these two websites from the eruption of the uprising in March 2011 going through the armed rebellion that started to be covered in these media in November 2011 until May and June 2012 when the Houla massacre was covered. Among the most important issues observed were who was blamed for the violence, the loss of lives, destruction in Syria, how were the protesters and the regime represented in the initial period of the revolution, and if the blame had shifted after protesters carried arms. Another important question was whether the perspectives offered by these news media were justified by the real events reported by the same news media or based on presupposition.

More importantly, I have investigated the function of translations in these texts, whether they were an objective tool that offered a better understanding of the situation in Syria or if they were a tool to support the narratives intended by the news media. This was done as well by looking at the selective appropriation, who was chosen to speak and who was neglected, and what parts of conversations were translated and which were not (this was possible only if there were videos or links leading to the origins of the translations) and causal emplotment, the placement of the translations among other quotes or translations and comments on them, in addition to how these translations were framed, which served to either add credibility to these translations or belittle their value.

7.3 Observations regarding the BBC and Al Jazeera

I have analysed the data of this research in two phases in Chapter Six. The first was a detailed analysis of the coverage of the Syrian uprising in the months of March 2011, studying the initial reaction of the news media to the uprising that had just erupted, and November 2011, when the two news media started to cover the armed rebellion. In the month of March, the BBC started by being hopeful that the regime would effect reforms and that Al-Assad was hindered by elements of the old regime, but still loved by his people. When he responded brutally to his people's demands, it blamed him completely, but occasionally hinted at the danger of Islamists, justifying the regime's ferocious response to the peaceful

demonstrations. Al Jazeera, on the other hand, never gave the regime a chance and blamed it and al-Assad right from the start. It never mentioned any looming Islamist danger either, giving no justification whatsoever to the regime.

In the month of November, both news media were distracted from the regime and focused more on the armed rebels. Both acknowledged the fact that those people were pushed to carry arms because of the brutality of the regime and, thus, needed to defend themselves. However, Al Jazeera was more balanced. While admitting the weakness of the armed rebellion and the exaggeration of its promises, it never failed to see their humanity and understand the motives behind carrying weapons. It also allowed them to speak, and tell people what they were doing and what their intentions were without belittling them. The BBC, contrastingly, was eyeing them more suspiciously. It failed to see their humanity and had them speak only to make them look detached from reality at the least. Sadly, the armed rebellion had created a leaning in the BBC to al-Assad and one reporter, after interviewing Riyadh Al Asaad, the FSA leader, lamented the gentle nature of al-Assad who was unhappy with the ‘butcher’s job’. That was a very bewildering comment by the BBC after months of reporting al-Assad’s crimes, the desire to paint him as an innocent man came at the occasion of discussing and conversing with the leader of the Free Syrian Army, which the BBC and Al Jazeera had never reported to have attacked civilians at the time of the data investigated in this research.

Having deduced two main ideas, the first was that the BBC blame of Al-Assad was wavering, especially after the forming of the armed rebellion, which it eyed suspiciously, and the second that Al Jazeera was more steadfast in its blame of the regime, and more understanding of the cause of the armed rebellion, although it did not seem very excited either, I have proceeded to investigate the role of translations in these media. I wanted to know if translations bridged gaps and was a tool for these news media to understand the opinions and situations of those people residing in conflict areas or if they were only used to support the initial perspectives. This was discussed in the lengthiest chapter in this research, Chapter Six, where translations from March 2011 to June 2012 were sought and discussed.

Regarding the BBC, I have found that in the earlier phases of the revolution, it blamed Al-Assad and compared him to his father, who committed the Hama massacre in 1981 which killed 10 thousand people (BBC, 24th March, 2011). Thus, it translated the speeches of al-

Assad and his spokesmen all to belittle him, specifically when he blamed the violence on infiltrators or armed Islamists. This was done by quoting other speakers' sayings, negating the speeches of al-Assad, and condemnations of the actions of the regime internationally and in the Arab world.

However, when it covered armed rebellion, it pinned equal blame on both sides of the conflict. This was also done by translating for speakers who blamed both sides or by blaming deaths, injuries and displacement on the conflict, generally giving the impression that both sides were responsible. Also, through comments and quotes, the BBC spoke to the FSA members, not to understand them or to consider their motives or line of thinking, but, rather, to eye them suspiciously. Ironically, once rebels carried arms, it hastened to embrace the regime's accusations that the revolution was infiltrated by Islamists without evidence. The BBC failed to provide sufficient reasons for claiming that the rebels were extremists but seemed to be wary of the fact that the majority of the rebels were Sunnis and tried to relate that to extremism. It also chose not to approach Alawites or discuss their role in the conflict, not wishing, as it seemed, to shed any negative light on them.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera pinned the blame on Al-Assad and his regime always and it, too, reminded people of the Hama massacre. In addition to that, it reached out to victims of war in torture and covered their suffering compassionately. It followed specific people's stories describing them as the suffering of normal people anyone could identify with rather than the hysteric or extremist other as purported by the BBC and, thus, allowed people to empathise with them. The major contribution of Al Jazeera is that it reached out to both sides of the conflict, as discussed in 6.3.3, and, although it was very understanding and more respectful of the rebels and their cause, it did not pass judgements on the Alawites, but gave people the chance to read the conversations and arrive at their own conclusions. It did not belittle the complaints of Alawites who told their stories even though it was more compassionate with the rebels.

In this research, as well, I have reflected on the possible relations of the coverages of the BBC and Al Jazeera to their ideologies and foreign policies of their host countries.

The manner in which the BBC backed off from blaming Al-Assad alone after some rebels carried arms and its paranoia at any Islamic expressions by the rebels who were Muslims in a country of a majority of Muslims reflects the orientalism where there is a tendency for Islamic fundamentalism frame through which it framed the armed rebellion; crimes were indeed committed by the Alawite regime, but the BBC seemed to focus more on possible aggressions by the majority Sunnis who were being targeted and bombarded at the moment of the coverage.

As for Al Jazeera, it was affected by its Pan Arab ideology where it was believed that Arabs deserved democracy and should revolt against governments that did not represent them. Although reporters and journalists in Al Jazeera English were mostly, unlike Al Jazeera Arabic, non-Arabs, they were understanding and supportive of the Arab causes.

Moreover, none of these news media steered away from the foreign policies of their host countries. The UK government did not want to intervene and help the rebels even if it verbally supported their cause. The BBC eying the rebels suspiciously as possible extremists is justification enough for not supporting them. Also, empathising with the victims of war would bring about the need to interfere and help people facing war crimes as a moral value for Western nations. Qatar, on the other hand, was very critical of Al-Assad and pushed for supporting the rebels by providing them with weapons. Thus, Al Jazeera's unwavering blame of the regime, understanding narrative of the rebels, and its compassionate accounts of the victims' suffering justified the interventions of Qatar and its support of the armed rebels.

Of course, there was no solid evidence whatsoever that the coverage of the BBC and Al Jazeera was affected by the foreign policies of their host countries. They correlated this time; they may not correlate at another time.

This research hopes to enable readers and critics to spot bias and to compare between the news stories and the real events taking place by utilising the narrative tools used in this research. The BBC coverage of the Syrian uprising became biased once the rebels started carrying arms. It attempted to pin the blame on both sides while, in reality, the regime was doing most of the killing. It accused the rebels of extremism relying on presumptions without solid evidence from the real events, and it chose not to translate parts of conversation that

could have proved otherwise. It belittled the suffering people and called them hysterics while it was known at the time, as reported in both the BBC and Al Jazeera, that civilians were targeted by the regime. Al Jazeera was not neutral either. It was compassionate with the rebels and victims of war, but that was justified looking at the events as those were innocent civilians targeted by the regime. Also, Al Jazeera reached out to both Sunnis and Alawites and did not rely on presumptions.

7.4 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The research is a modest contribution to media and translation studies as I have developed a narrative theory and framing model for the use of news context and translations within the news context. This analysis model has proved very useful for this research and can pave the way for other research in the field of narrative theory in the news context and translations. This research also has been the first to investigate the changing narratives of the Syrian uprising spanning over a long period of time from March 2011 until June 2012.

There are a few shortcomings in this research. While I have investigated in detail the developing coverage of the Syrian uprising and translations through the period of more than a year, it was difficult to trace the translation to their original sources and make comparisons, which would have been very helpful, but in the news, it is not usually acknowledged which is translation and which is not and, thus, I have resorted to other means to trace translations, which were the videos and links posted in addition to quotations from the BBC Arabic or Al Jazeera Arabic, or to the fact that the government sources were mostly in Arabic, like SANA news and the speeches of the president. This, however, did not mean that I could arrive at the complete sources and see the manipulation of the translation and their sources. However, as this research had proved, comparing translations is neither possible nor necessary. Selective appropriation, causal emplotment, what surrounded the translated texts, and framing were very effective in investigating the role of translations in the news.

Moreover, this research did not go beyond 2012, which means it missed out on many events that happened after June 2012; this, however, can open doors for more research applying the same narrative framing model proposed by me. This is an uprising that has been ongoing for more than eight years. A lot of events have taken place, including the infiltration of foreign

fighters, both Sunnis and Shias, and the Russian interference and their effect on the revolution. There is so much to be observed from those eight tumultuous years in the Syrian uprising, it will be worthwhile investigating these issues in the coverage of the Syrian Revolution.

Moreover, another causal emplotment technique identified in this research, or framing technique, as I have already said that I considered all narrative features to be framing, is monologues. I have only observed one example where the BBC reporter I discussed earlier was talking to himself in a show of objectivity. He pointed out that the majority of the rebels were Sunni, and then responded back to his own comment that this ‘may not be a problem’ suggesting indeed that *it was a problem*. Using the word ‘may’ indicated that his initial thought was that they were a problem and, while he was trying to shrug the idea away, ‘may’ showed that his doubts were still there, even if unfounded and, thus, passing those negative feelings to the reader. It will be very interesting to see if monologues are used in other instances in the BBC or any other news media. A study of monologues and their functions in the media and if they have any effect on translations within the media will be a significant contribution to media and translation studies.

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