

3. Methodology

3.1 Perspective on Language and Discourse

I conduct a discourse analysis that focuses on four different aspects: (a) the linguistic statements in the news reports; (b) the socio-political context of the news story; (c) the images that appear in the reporting; (d) and the ownership of the television stations. I evaluate the language in the television reports and examine how media ownership influences the socio-political views of the news television station. I look at television news reports and consider the speech acts¹, images, and videos as forms of language present in the dominant media discourse.

I draw on Stuart Hall's (1997) understanding of the difference between connotative and denotative meanings behind messages. Hall (1997) argues that it is only by understanding the connotative that can one analyze the cultural codes and the power embedded in the meaning. I refer to Foucault's concept of "object of knowledge" presented in his book *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) in order to understand discourse in relation to the manufacturing of knowledge. Foucault saw discourse as a structure that characterizes prevalent societal conversations and discussions about fields of knowledge within social sciences (Fairclough 1992). Stuart Hall (1992) also described the Foucauldian understanding of discourse using the following definition:

"A discourse is a group of statements which provides a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But... since all social practices entail meaning, and

1 Speech acts are requests, warnings, promises, apologies, greetings, or any number of declarations made by the person interviewed in the news reports.

meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect.” (p. 291)

Therefore, this research project examines discourse by looking at the *knowledge* and *language* produced in the news reports as *social practices*, which are understood by what Foucault termed as ‘discursive construction.’ I look at how these social practices are presented in a set of statements that are articulated in the news reports, and I examine their emergence and transformation. By examining knowledge, language, and statements, I am able to trace how the discourse is present in the news reports and how this discourse constructs subjects and events, which, at times, allows or limits the possibilities of the viewer to understand them.

In the context of this research, the subject refers to the different groups of Syrian women, whereas the events refer to the incidents the subjects’ experienced. Examples of these events and incidents include sexual violation, sexual harassment, imprisonment, detainment, snowstorms, child marriages, entering the workforce, and fighting in the military. Throughout the analysis, I perceive the dominant discourse present in the news stories as a force that facilitates, enables, and constrains the language and knowledge produced about the subjects and events.

I analyze semantics by looking beyond the linguistic structure of the text. I focus on examining the discourse through the meaning of words and the relationships between them (Van Dijk, 1983). According to Fairclough (1992), applying a discourse analysis in a traditional manner includes an intertextual analysis of the language within the text. Therefore, I examine “the grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, structure cohesion, and dialogue dynamics” (Fairclough, 1992) of the analyzed text. I then try to place the linguistic body in discussion using the chosen concepts, which supply my analysis with the needed socio-economic context (Fairclough, 1996).

I look at the language or speech used by the television reports depicting the subject and at the simple speech acts performed by the subject. Butler (1990) wrote: “Does speech continue to act on us at the very moment in which we speak, so that we may well think we are acting, but we are also acted on at that very same time?” (p. 16). Thus, throughout my analysis of the speech acts performed by the subject in the news reports, I always bear in mind that these speeches do not exist independently from prevailing social, economic, political, and environmental conditions.

Furthermore, because this research project conducts a discourse analysis of television news—a form of visual media—I examine the semiotic modalities that appear in the news reports, such as images, gestures and sounds (Lazar, 2007). I focus on how the subjects in the television news are given ‘visibility’ and how they are ‘viewed’ (Wang, 2014). Gillian Rose (2001) emphasized the importance of differentiating between ‘visibility’ and ‘visuality.’ “Visibility is embedded in the notion of vision, what the human eye is capable of seeing, while visuality is the construct of the vision, the notions of how and what we see” (Rose 2001; quoted from Najem 2016). Visibility influences visuality and vice versa. Nevertheless, by drawing differences between the two, I am able to question not just the regularity of the Syrian women’s visibility in the news, but also *how* they are made visible in the context of the power relations inherited in the media message.

3.2 A Critical Approach to Discourse Analysis

To understand the dominant media discourses concerning gender and agency and how the visibilities of different groups of Syrian women were constructed in Arab television news, it is essential to apply a critical approach during the analysis process and not to limit the understanding based on the obvious message. Therefore, this research implements a critical discourse analysis, which focuses specifically on the relations of power and inequality in language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). The purpose of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to examine “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001 p. 352). It is best used to study the “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 1995, p. 204).

This research project concerns itself with the three-dimensional framework for critically analyzing discourse. According to Fairclough (1992), the first-dimension deals with discourse as a form of text. The second dimension focuses on discursive practices within the discourse, which requires the researcher to regard the discourse as “something that is produced, circulated, distributed, [and] consumed in society” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). In other words, when analyzing vocabulary, text structure, grammar, and word cohesion, the focus should be on “speech acts, coherence, and intertextuality – three aspects that link a text to its context” (Blommaert & Bulcaen,

2000). Within the second-dimension, I refer to two types of intertextuality, 'manifest intertextuality,' and 'constitutive intertextuality.' Because the former constitutes the process of drawing on other texts to analyze the discursive practices, I refer to journalistic and newspaper articles as well as humanitarian reports to further explore the text within the given context. As for the latter, it constitutes the process of drawing similarities between texts, and outlining the heterogenous elements within the discourses. One important aspect of the second-dimension is the attention given to the quoted statements that appear throughout the news reports and how they are selected, altered, and contextualized in the news story.

The last and third-dimension of discourse analysis focuses on the social practice of the dominant discourse and how it influences representations in the television reports. In the context of this research, the social practice is specifically tied to the sociopolitical agenda of the television station, which dictates the agenda and gatekeeping in the reporting, and the knowledge the experts inherit and reproduce through their speech acts in the news stories, e.g., the experts interviewed in the news are the lawyers, humanitarian workers, government representatives, and other specialist or professionals who claim to provide objective reporting, and who speak from a position of authority. Thus, the third-dimension is primarily concerned with the power practice and how it is achieved and articulated in the media representations. The analysis of the third-dimension appears when I, for example, criticize the television media for having an elitist or bias viewpoint on the issues at hand. By analyzing the speech acts or utterances performed by the subjects in the television news, I expose the reproduction of the dominant discourse or an emergence of new orders of discourse. The reproduction of a dominant discourse is read as a reinforcement of the hegemonic discourse articulated in the television media, whereas an emergence of new orders of discourse is perceived as a counter-discourse or a struggle to resist the dominant discourse. If the subject speaks in a manner that challenges the dominant discourse, her speech act is seen as a 'hegemonic struggle' (Fairclough, 1992). Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) described the hegemonic struggle as a speech act that "struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and [resists] regimes of power" (p. 449). On the other hand, if the subject is represented (re)speaking or (re)articulating orders of the dominant discourses, the reinforcement of the dominant discourse is thus achieved.

Therefore, my analysis focuses on how news reporters, as well as the interviewees featured in the news story, create meaning through the use of par-

ticular words and phrases and how their speech contributes to the representations of the subject. Kenney (2009) explains that discourse analysis is used most effectively when the researcher aims to focus on “authoritative texts” from the media that claim to be demonstrating the “truth.” Television news media match these criteria, as the television stations usually have a preferred sociopolitical agenda, which is directly tied to their media ownership. Hence, when they represent certain events, the version of the reality they display is framed within this preferred sociopolitical agenda. Thus, the discourse analysis used in this research project aims to appropriately examine the patterns of language, and the common or opposing rhetoric within the news reports. This rhetoric most likely reinforces the television stations’ viewpoints on the Syrian conflict.

Furthermore, I explore the nuances in the language used, in order to examine the type of literary or rhetorical conventions, as well as the overarching themes that appear in the news reports. Additionally, I highlight the similarities and differences between the subjects’ representations on the different television stations. (Kenney, 2009; Long & Wall 2009; Fairclough, 2003).

3.3 Units of Analysis

To examine the representations of Syrian women and their experiences during the conflict in Arab television news, a sample of news reports was chosen for this case study. The coverage of the Syrian conflict has brought intensified levels of media coverage between different Arab television stations. Majalla (2012) asserts that there are roughly two opposing sides of news coverage in the Arab region: “The so-called moderate Arab states and the resistance axis.” The Arab television stations that are critical of the Syrian regime and are supportive of the uprising in Syria, are financed by Arab Gulf States. On the other hand, the Arab television stations supportive of the Syrian regime are either owned and controlled by the Syrian regime or are funded/owned by the allies of the Syrian regime, such as Russia and Iran (Majalla, 2012).

Therefore, this research project chose seven television stations, which are owned or act as mouthpieces for the political actors and regional powers involved in the conflict. The list of television stations consists of four Arabic-speaking television stations owned by or supportive of the Syrian regime, and three Arabic- television stations critical of the Syrian regime. The television stations that are politically aligned with Syrian regime are: *Syria Al-Ikhbariya*,

SANA, RT Arabic, and SAMA. The television stations that are politically opposed to the Syrian regime are: *Al-Arabiya*, *Al-Jazeera*, and *Al-Aan*.

3.3.1 The Sample Selection

To explore how the experiences of different groups of Syrian women during the Syrian conflict were portrayed in the news in relation to the four concepts of *violence*, *vulnerability*, *resilience*, and *resistance*, I proposed a purposeful selection of television news reports, which was compiled in a non-random manner, as I viewed the reports as insightful and discursively in the context of this research. I followed three main steps.

Step One - Keywords: I noted keywords I deemed relevant to the case study. Drawing on my cultural knowledge, as well as political and social understanding of the Syrian conflict, I created a list of keywords for each concept. They are listed in the table below:

Table 1. Keywords for the main concepts

Concepts	Keywords
Violence	Violence, rape, torture, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, detention, imprisonment, shame, stigma, suffering, checkpoint, and prison.
Vulnerability	Vulnerability, child marriage, early marriage, poverty, domestic abuse, suffering, humanitarian crisis, impoverishment, infrastructure, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and refugee camps.
Resilience	Resilience, work, cash-for-work, humanitarian aid, vocational programs, survival techniques, coping mechanisms, protection, and refugee camps.
Resistance	Armed resistance, unarmed resistance, rebellion, fight, battle, struggle, military, sacrifice, weapons, defense, and opposition.

Certain keywords for each concept overlap with other keywords listed under a different concept. For instance, the keywords 'gender-based violence' and 'sexual harassment' are listed under the two concepts, *violence* and *vulner-*

ability. However, other keywords such as ‘shame’ and ‘stigma,’ were exclusive to the concept of *violence*.

Step Two - Sampling from YouTube: I visited the YouTube channels of each television station and typed in the keywords for each concept in order to obtain the available news reports published online. Not all news reports created by the television stations are downloaded online, especially not on YouTube. Hence, referring to the television stations’ YouTube channels was a limiting factor in the sampling process. Because I do have no access to any other source that allows me to acquire the news stories, I had to rely entirely on YouTube. The table below demonstrates all the news reports that were found:

Table 2. Initial sample of news reports

Arab Television Stations	Main Concepts				
	Violence	Vulnerability	Resilience	Resistance	Sub-Total
<i>Critical of the Syrian Regime</i>					
Al Jazeera	8	5	16	0	29
Al Arabiya	8	7	9	0	24
Al Aan	7	4	14	0	25
Sub-Total	23	16	39	0	78
<i>Supportive of the Syrian Regime</i>					
SANA	0	0	1	5	6
SAMA	1	0	0	4	5
Syria Al Ikhbariya	2	0	0	1	3
RT Arabic	1	0	0	2	3
Sub-Total	4	0	1	12	17
Total					95

I found 95 news reports, 78 of which were from the television stations with a sociopolitical agenda critical of the Syrian regime, and 17 were from television stations supportive of the Syrian regime.

Step Three - Final Sample Selection: I selected the most relevant news reports from the group. The objective here was to ignore any news reports

with redundant content and to ensure that all news reports are relevant to the purpose of this research. I accomplished this step by watching each news story three times. The relevance of the news report's content was measured in terms of context and the date of publication. The news story had to cover topics related to the experiences of Syrian women during the Syrian conflict. The events shown in the news reports had to have either taken place in Syria or its the neighboring countries. Furthermore, the news stories had to have been published between 2013 and 2018. The final sample selection contained 32 news reports. See the table below for more details.

Table 3. Final sample of news reports

Arab Television Stations	Main Concepts				
	Violence	Vulnerability	Resilience	Resistance	Sub-Total
<i>Critical of the Syrian Regime</i>					
Al Jazeera	3	2	1	0	6
Al Arabiya	2	3	2	0	7
Al Aan	2	3	4	0	9
Sub-Total	7	8	8	0	23
<i>Supportive of the Syrian Regime</i>					
SANA	0	0	1	5	4
SAMA	0	0	0	4	3
Syria Al Ikhbariya	0	0	0	1	1
RT Arabic	0	0	0	2	1
Sub-Total	0	0	1	12	9
Total	7	8	9	8	32

Lastly, because this research looks at Arabic-speaking television stations, all of the examined news reports were in Arabic. Thus, I translated the text of the news reports from Arabic to English.

3.3.2 The Selection of Dominant Themes

After the selection was finalized, I categorized the four main concepts under the dominant themes present in the news reports sample.

Themes in the category of Violence: Seven news reports were selected for the category of violence; two news reports were published by *Al Aan*, three by *Al Jazeera*, and two by *Al Arabiya*. They were published between Jan 9, 2012 and Mar 7, 2018, and focused on a specific group of Syrian women who were internally displaced or were (un)willingly living under the Bashar Al-Assad regime. The two main themes that regularly appeared in the news stories were: (a) Syrian women discussing how the Assad regime had committed crimes of rape, torture, and gender-based violence in different physical spaces (e.g., checkpoints, bakeries, and homes), as a way to publicly shame the female victims; and (b) Syrian female victims who were previously held captive and choose to remain silent with regards to their experience of gender-based violence, while others fled Syria and started a new life in exile.

Themes in the category of Vulnerability: Eight news reports were selected for the category of vulnerability. Three news reports were published by *Al Aan*, two by *Al Jazeera*, and three by *Al Arabiya*. The news reports were published between Jan 4, 2014 and Aug 8, 2017. The two main recurring themes in selected news reports were: (1) The increase in child marriage cases in the informal refugee settlements in Lebanon and Jordan; (2) the deterioration of refugee makeshift shelters in Lebanon's Beqaa valley during snowstorms.

Themes in the category of Resilience: Nine news reports were selected for the category of resilience. One news report was published by *SANA*, one by *Al Jazeera*, two by *Al Arabiya* and five by *Al Aan*. The news reports were published between Nov 13, 2013 and April 7, 2016. The news report from *SANA*, an Arab television station that is politically sympathetic towards the Syrian regime, included an interview with an internally displaced Syrian woman working as a tailor in Syria. The news reports published by *Al Aan*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Al Arabiya*, which are pan-Arab television stations with a political agenda critical of the Syrian regime, mainly focused on externally displaced Syrian women living in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey. In the news reports, these groups of Syrian women are shown taking part of vocational and cash-for-work programs funded by the United Nations and other NGOs.

Themes in the category of Resistance: Eight news reports were selected for the category of resistance. Three by *SAMA*, three by *SANA*, one by *RT Arabic*, and one by *Syria Al Ikhbariyya*. *RT Arabic* sympathizes with the Syrian regime;

SANA, *SAMA*, and *Syria Al Ikhbariyya* are controlled by the Syrian regime. Eight of the fourteen videos were selected for the research sample and were published between April 2, 2013 and Sep 27, 2018. In the news reports, different Syrian women were depicted in diverse contexts and situations: Syrian women serving in the Syrian Arab Army, Syrian women serving food for the men of the Syrian Arab Army, Syrian women marrying men from the Syrian Arab Army, and Syrian women taking part of social and cultural events promoting women's rights organized by the GUSW. Although these women come from different demographical backgrounds and socio-economic groups, the notion of the 'mother of the nation' appeared in the speech acts and in the television images regardless of whether or not the Syrian women represented were actual mothers.

The table below lists the main themes under the four main concept:

Table 4. Main Concepts and Manifestations

Main Concepts	Main Manifestations
Violence	Female Syrian Ex-Prisoners in Exile: - Imprisonment, Sexual Assault, and Deterring Mobility - Being Shamed to Being Silenced - Intersection of Shame, Violence, and Stigma
Vulnerability	Syrian Mothers and Child Brides in Exile: - Child Marriage - Failed Infrastructure during Harsh Weather Conditions
Resilience	Displaced Syrian Women at Work: - Training the Good Resilient Subject - Erasing the Past or Painting it through their Work - News Reports on Vocational and Cash-for-Work Programs
Resistance	Syrian women in Assad Syria: - Ambivalent Role of Motherhood in Assad Syria - From Masculine Female Fighters to Ornamented Flowers - Motherhood as a National Duty

3.3.3 The Analysis Process

I apply a non-linear model of discourse analysis by examining the images, captions, and spoken texts that appear in the news reports. During my analysis process, I underline statements related to the research themes. I highlight certain phrases and images featured in each of the news report, and make written detailed notes on the content. My notes include comments on the language used and on the images that appear in the news report. I note the potential meaning behind the content and the possible ways to interpret the text and image.

As suggested by Fairclough (2001), I then begin the discourse analysis by examining the production of text. During this step, I draw on the media ownership of every television station and consider its socio-political views. This provides a clearer understanding of the partisan entity embedded in reporting. The research draws attention to the producer of those images and videos and, how the reporting references and interviews 'experts' as a way to reinforce the socio-political views of the television station. This step connects the functions of the dominant discourse to the institutional practices of the television media that organize, regulate, and administer social life (Foucault, 1980); other institutional practices could be directed by family, social, health, political, and government organizations, etc. Here, the analysis reveals how the subjects and events are being positioned in the television media discourse.

To do so, I focus on the prevalent themes that appeared under each of the four main concepts. These themes are considered examples of "sociocultural practice." This step advances the analysis and examines the media discourse in greater depth. It places the analyzed text in discussion with the partisan inclinations of the television stations and the socio-political context of the Syrian conflict (Fairclough, 2001). Examples of the questions asked at this stage of analysis is: How can the research draw a connection between the news reports' representation of child marriage in decaying refugee settlements and the television station's socio-political position on poverty, gender equality, and public health in the context of the Syrian conflict? In other words, what is the television station's political agenda regarding the advocacy of displaced Syrian women and girls living in vulnerable states and how does this affect the distribution of the media images representing these particular women?

Because this research project is immersed in questions related to discourse, language, and power in the news reports, I draw on a Foucauldian discourse analysis model to further guide the analysis. Graham Gibbs (2015)

provides a methodological explanation of this model, by suggesting 16 main questions to explore:

1. What are the hidden relations of power present in the text?
2. Who is exercising the power; whose discourse is being presented, the discourse of any specific institution such as humanitarian aid organizations or government, etc.?
3. “Who is the ‘ideal subject’ or audience for the text?”
4. Who is the text aimed at?
5. Who is meant to be listening to it, or responding to it?
6. What is left unspecified or unsaid (not mentioned by the discourse)?
7. “Is there a use of passive voice or processes expressed as (things, reification), such as things rather than people?”
8. Is there a use of colorful description language (adjectives) to indicate a strong discourse? – metaphors, other descriptive indicators, etc.
9. “What alternative wording of the same information have resulted in different discourses?”
10. How are the events presented?
11. How are people – individuals involved in those events, certain kinds of individuals, certain kinds of subject behavior, etc. – characterized in the text?
12. “What message does the author intend you to get from the text?”
13. “What are they trying to say to you?”
14. Why is this particular image chosen or chosen to accompany the text (if applicable)?
15. What repetition exists within the text and between different texts on the same topic?
16. What professional media practices assist with the presentation of dominant discourses?

3.4 Methodological Questions on Agency and Points of Reversibility

Because this book addresses the agentive attempts of the different groups of displaced Syrian women throughout the conflict, I draw on a Foucault’s methodological approach to power and its points of reversibility. According to Foucault (1980), knowledge is directly tied to power, and power itself is

reversible. In other words, the idea of power as something that constrains—in the sense of a force that controls, prevents, represses, censors, and conceals—is rejected. I pursue Foucault's understanding of power to further investigate how power operates throughout the dominant media discourses, as well as how subjects react to these discourses through language, speech acts, etc. I explore the reality, the domains of object, and the rituals of truths represented in the television news, which, according to Foucault (1980), are produced by the dominant discourse itself.

While power may construct a reality and produce ways that restrict the subject's behavior within this constructed reality, Foucault (1980) claimed that this constraining power has points of reversibility that also enable, conversely, certain behaviors; this is the point where the subject's agentic attempts are questioned. Therefore, throughout my analysis, I do not take the complexities of the discourse for granted. I endeavor to see other ways of seeing how the notion of power in the dominant discourse has an *enabling*, and not just a constraining, quality.

3.5 Methodological Reflections

This research project applies a Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the news reports. Thus, the authorial intention behind the media message is not addressed. Rather, the news report analysis focuses on the rhetorical force behind the television news. In other words, the intention of the journalists and news producers is largely ignored. Moreover, this research project does not concede how most television news reports are limited to a certain time duration; this is usually a result of the editorial standards to which the news production team must abide. This suggests that the journalists may have acquired information and may have intended to include more (investigative) content and (critical) perspectives in the news story, irrespective of the brief duration² of the news reports to which the editorial team had to abide, which may have hindered these possibilities.

Moreover, because this research focuses on the *encoding* stage of the news reports, it does not explore how viewer audiences are *decoding* the messages. This research does not analyze whether the media messages are being accepted, resisted, or rejected by the viewers. Stuart Hall (1974) asserted that, in

2 Most of the analyzed news reports that were two to four minutes long.

the decoding stage, the viewer could either challenge the “dominant preferred reading” or possibly accept or interpret it differently than the dominant culture intended it to be. Hall also claimed that the “dominant preferred reading” would continue to exist in larger forms and will possibly prevail.

In the following chapter, I start the discourse analysis by examining the news reports in the context of violence.