The Syrian conflict in the eyes of the media

- A single case study of how Al-Jazeera news agency represents the Syrian conflict of 2011

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Abstract

Media representations of conflicts and events are constructed in different ways and by different media in this world. Media is a very important actor in real-life politics, since problems could be represented in different ways, which provides different constructions, meanings and understandings in this world. Representation theory and more specifically ‘what is the problem represented to be approach’ implies as a theoretical tool in this research regarding Al-Jazeera's’ representation of the Syrian conflict of 2011. The aim with this research is to analyze how Al-Jazeera news agency represents the nature of the conflict in Syria of 2011. The research is qualitative and uses Al-Jazeera’s articles as data material, all articles are analyzed during the first three months of the conflicts representation.

As a result to this research, the Syrian conflict is represented by Al-Jazeera news agency from a specific point of view. The conflict is represented as a domestic political problem facing a force of overwhelming power that oppresses the Syrian citizens of expressing any political opinions. Al-Jazeera highlights a representation of a lack of democracy and freedom in the country where peaceful protestors are being tortured by the regime whenever they are demanding political changes. The cause of the conflict is according to Al-Jazeera embodied in the incident with some young boys expressing their liberal political opinions regarding the Arab Spring, however imprisoned and tortured by the state force. To briefly summarize the main findings of this research, Al-Jazeera represents the Syrian conflict as a conflict of domestic political oppression from the governments towards the Syrian population.

**Key Words**: Media, representation, Al-Jazeera, Syria, conflict
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I. Introduction and General Aim

Much information individuals receive regarding events and conflicts such as that in Syria derives originally from the media. The media is a social and political actor that is supposed to reflect the reality behind social and political phenomena. The media is not only an actor of information but also of interpretations and stories about the world.

Events and developments such as the conflict in Syria of 2011 can always be interpreted in various ways depending on the news channels political principles. Al-Jazeera is an agency with political views in the Middle East and is economically subsidized by the Qatari government that supports and protects the press freedom of Al-Jazeera, which makes it more dependent on the protection of the government.\(^1\) Al-Jazeera is therefore an important information and representation actor in the Middle East and particularly the Arab World, since they are supported by the government in Qatar.

Al-Jazeera the Qatari news channel has, as scholars put it, moved towards a more assertive coverage of Syrian politics.\(^2\) This was the case at least before the conflict between the opposition and the military of 2011. Al-Jazeera has chosen not to consider the list of taboos the Syrian government requires following. For instance topics as democracy, human rights and Islamic fundamentalism have been critically discussed by Al-Jazeera.\(^3\) Al-Jazeera has a certain way of representing conflicts and events, scholars have studied Al-Jazeera’s general behavior regarding reality representations.\(^4\)

The Syrian conflict is interpreted by the media, and different media interpret and justify conflicts in different ways. Scholars in political science and sociology have studied media representation and how particular news channels construct conflicts. Unfortunately there is a lack of research considering the question of Arab media representation of the Syrian conflict, and particularly by Al-Jazeera news channel. This phenomenon is of great importance in

\(^1\) Fandy (2005):12
\(^2\) Ghadbian (2001):79
\(^3\) Ghadbian (2001):79
\(^4\) Aday et.al (2005):6
political science and real-life politics, as the process of representing reality is deeply power-laden and thus political. The general aim with this research is to describe how Al-Jazeera represents the nature of the conflict of 2011 in Syria.

Representation provides meanings for individual groups by using language to delineate the ‘real world’. News channels construct social reality, which further on causes individuals to construct that material from the media into further categorizations.⁵ The Syrian conflict is most likely to be constructed to create certain meanings into this world.

The Al-Assad family and the Baath party have had the power in Syria since Bashar Al-Assad’s father gained power in 1970. Al-Assad inherited the presidential power after his father’s death in 2000. According to other sources, Al-Assad started by improving multiple reforms towards a more “liberal” society for citizens, however the media in Syria is still controlled and the economic policy is structured and aimed towards benefiting the elite.⁶ According to certain human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Al-Assad has not improved any reforms to be legitimized as liberal.⁷ “Syria remained under a national state of emergency in force continuously since 1963 and which over many years has been used to suppress and punish even peaceful dissent. Political activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, Kurdish minorities’ activists and others who criticized the government or exposed human rights violations were subject to arbitrary arrest, unfair trials, torture etc.”.⁸ The religious majority in Syria is Sunni Muslims (74%), and the minorities are Alawites (13%) and Christians (10%). Bashar Al-Assad has described Syria as a secularized country, however most of the rebels against the regime are a majority of poor Sunni Muslims.⁹

The Syrian conflict according to Swedish media, started the 15th of March 2011, when a demonstration in Damascus was held by citizens in the country demanding for democratic reforms and a release of political prisoners. That was only the beginning of what was to

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⁶ SVT-nyheter (2013)  
⁷ Amnesty (2011)  
⁸ Amnesty (2011)  
⁹ SVT-nyheter (2012)
become a bloody and protracted conflict. The 18th of March 2011 four civil citizens were killed by the police in the city Daraa due to large democratic demonstrations.\textsuperscript{10}

According to the Syrian state owned Arab News Agency in Syria, there is another representation of what is happening in Syria. The state owned agency claims that armed forces are only destroying terrorists’ acts and threats for the country. The killings and damages are made from terrorist groups and the military is trying to prevent terrorist actions to protect the citizens.\textsuperscript{11} Obviously different news agencies represent the conflict in Syria quite differently, therefore this research aims at providing an answer to the question of how Al-Jazeera, represent the Syrian conflict of 2011. The Syrian conflict is only a chosen case among multiple cases Al-Jazeera has represented. This research aims at focusing on how Al-Jazeera constructs this conflict, rather than putting the conflict in focus.

The structure of the research is divided into seven chapters. Chapter two starts with discussing previous academic research done by scholars regarding the topic of media and thus relationship with the Arab world, and a clear discussion about the lack of research done regarding the media construction of the Syrian conflict of 2011. Chapter three describes and explains the theoretical implements we use to answer our research questions, media representation and constructivism theory. Chapter four explains the specific aim of the research and what particular questions we ask to reach the aim. What method and design this research is seeking to use in order to answer the research question, is presented in chapter five. Chapter six constitutes the analysis, and finally chapter seven completes the research with a conclusion.

\textsuperscript{10} SVT-nyheter (2012)  
\textsuperscript{11} SANA (2012)
II. Previous literature: on Al-Jazeera media representation of conflicts

This thesis is situated within the scholarship which addresses the topic of media representation during conflicts. Al-Jazeera has been a research field itself among general research about Arab media, due to the immense impact they have on their audience, and scholars have analyzed their representations during conflicts. Therefore in this literature review we are providing earlier knowledge done by scholars regarding Al-Jazeera’s representations during conflicts, and explain what knowledge is still yet missing.

There is a significant amount of scholarship on this topic that could be divided into two lines of inquiry: 1) literature that highlights on the content in Al-Jazeera’s rapports and texts. 2) Literature on the particular effects Al-Jazeera provides during conflicts. A description and discussion of these lines will be provided in this chapter to show that none of the strands have focused sufficiently on how Al-Jazeera has constructed the conflict in Syria of early 2011.

Research on Al-Jazeera

Al-Jazeera has been studied by several scholars.\textsuperscript{12} Research has fulfilled its purpose of clarifying that Arab news channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya aim to provide the Arab audience eliciting news when it concerns international, Western and American events. Scholars such as Nisbet and Myers (2011) have concluded that the media uses political identity to construct and control the public opinion, in their case an anti-American sentiment. Political identity is considered as nationalism and religion, where these concepts are used by Al-Jazeera to achieve certain aims.\textsuperscript{13} Unlike the Arab media, Western media is objective when it comes to presenting international events. Al-Jazeera diverges from this and tends to conspicuously present the information from a Muslim or Arab perspective.\textsuperscript{14} Sensationalism is something scholars have discovered embodied in Al-Jazeera’s representations, a focus on victims and images helping to highlight the consequences Al-Jazeera wants to provide.\textsuperscript{15} Al-Jazeera often pays high attention to questions concerning foreign policy and international affairs and the role of religious identities. Scholars have concluded that Al-Jazeera

\textsuperscript{13} Nisbet and Myers(2011):11
\textsuperscript{14} Nisbet and Myers(2011):4
\textsuperscript{15} Nisbet and Myers(2011):4
intentionally uses political identity such as nationalism, state-identity and religion to shape a certain opinion on the Arab audience.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Al-Jazeera} has developed an anti-American sentiment during the last decade due to actions concerning the innovations of Afghanistan, Iraq and the incident of 9/11 attack on the United States. Scholars call these phenomena the new Arab Public Sphere\textsuperscript{17} and \textit{Al-Jazeera} is held responsible for changing this public sphere.\textsuperscript{18} Aday et.al (2005) has also analyzed how \textit{Al-Jazeera} uses propaganda during conflicts. \textit{Al-Jazeera} often highlights incidents that are against Arabs and Muslims critically. The Iraq war was an example of how \textit{Al-Jazeera} had a strong intent to form the public opinion by using an anti-American sentiment. During the Iraq war \textit{Al-Jazeera} was the news channel that put most focus on exposing civilian casualties as an aim of providing an anti-American tone.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Al-Jazeera’s role during the Arab spring}

Research has also been done about how \textit{Al-Jazeera} behaved during the Arab spring\textsuperscript{20}, to view how Arab media behave during (Middle East and North Africa) MENA conflicts and not only American/Western interventions in conflicts. Another factor that scholars such as Haque Khondker (2011) have focused on is how social media was used and its role during conflicts. It is noted in earlier research that people have communicated and summoned the population to mass protest through social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and \textit{Al-Jazeera} has played a key role in the information spreading part.\textsuperscript{21} Media has been used as a democratic tool by the people to express opinions. The research done about social media is more extended than the research about the news channels and newspapers sorts of media. Farrell (2012) argues and agrees with Haque Khondker (2011) that \textit{Al-Jazeera} helped provide expressions published on Facebook and other social media, which gave the social media a significant role.\textsuperscript{22}

Haque Khondker (2011) argues that the media helped influence and spread revolutions from one country to another. People have through the internet spread information about injustice,
police brutality and to mobilize protests. He has shown how *Al-Jazeera* propagated the information spread through social media by civil citizens, as sources to their broadcast about the uprising in MENA countries.\(^{23}\) Abdelhay (2010) has also concluded from his research, that the media was an important factor for the success of the Arab spring. Governments lost their previous power to control how different news channels chose to forward supply information and opinions stated by social media.\(^{24}\) Social media and regular news channels became a powerful tool in the hands of the people to expand their message and successfully complete the revolution.\(^{25}\)

**Relationship between Syria and Al-Jazeera**

Ghadbian (2001) has specified research regarding the relationship between *Al-Jazeera* and Syria, however it is unfortunately not much. As a result of Ghadbians’ research, media has been very controlled and managed by the Syrian state. News channels in Syria are owned and managed by governmental employees who are considered being loyal party members. The Syrian regime has had a list of taboo topics that could not be broken by the media. For instance topics regarding the presidents’ family, military, the legitimacy of the regime and the sectarian questions cannot be discussed by the media.\(^{26}\) Ghadbian (2001) has studied how the media in Syria is used as a tool by the government to only promote the Al-Assad family.\(^{27}\) *Al-Jazeera* has, as scholars put it, moved towards a more assertive coverage of Syrian politics, or at least before the conflict between the opposition and the military 2011. *Al-Jazeera* has chosen not to consider the list of taboos the Syrian government requires following. For instance topics as democracy, human rights and Islamic fundamentalism have been critically discussed.\(^{28}\)

Ghadbian (2011) argue that the Syrian government has or will eventually lose their audience to *Al-Jazeera*. As previously explained several scholars argue that the news channel is independent to stand against authoritarian media due to the Qatari governmental support they

\(^{23}\) Haque Khondker (2011):678
\(^{24}\) Abdelhay (2012):533,537
\(^{25}\) Comunello and Anzera (2012):454,463,466
\(^{26}\) Ghadbian (2001):76
\(^{27}\) Ghadbian (2001).76
\(^{28}\) Ghadbian (2001).79
receive. Scholars believe that if Al-Jazeera becomes privately owned, the independence will be much less and limited.29

**Lack of existing knowledge**

Research about the Syrian conflict has been very limited and small. Simons (2012) has stated his arguments about the Syrian conflict as "The conflict in Syria illustrates the false dilemma very clearly, either you are supporting the ‘bad’ brutal and bloody dictator Bashar Al-Assad or the ‘good’ work and intentions of the international community".30 Unfortunately no research has yet been done concerning the question of how Al-Jazeera represents the Syrian conflict. Literature has exposed that Al-Jazeera, use concepts such as religion and nationalism during historical conflicts and events, however no research has yet questioned how Al-Jazeera represent the Syrian conflict of 2011.

There is therefore of great importance to make research about this topic. If different news channels represent the conflict with different interpretations, that could help cause or perpetuate political meanings among the public. The Syrian conflict is an ongoing conflict, and factors that affect the understanding of it, as the media, should be carefully studied.

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29 Ghadbian (2001):84
30 Simons(2012):9
III. Theoretical approach: Representation theory

In this chapter, we define and discuss suitable theoretical assumptions for our research to appropriately help answer our research questions. Constructivism and representation theory are theories used as tools in this research, where representation theory is applied in this research. This chapter provides a description on how theory of representation is applied. An explanation of important concepts that are used to explain various conflicts in the world is provided in this chapter. The end of the chapter provides a brief summary of how our analytical framework is organized.

Constructivism

Ontological questions are often concerned with the nature of being, existence or reality.\(^\text{31}\) Is there a ‘real world’ out there that is important and independent of it? What can be known about reality and what is the form and nature of it?\(^\text{32}\) Constructivism is an ontological theory that argues that reality is socially constructed by individual actors that shape social, political and cultural processes by their views and values.\(^\text{33}\) One way to see constructivism is to see it as a theory that holds that actors such as individuals and groups are constructed in a certain manner. People act towards others and objects based on the meaning those others and objects have. Constructivism argues strongly that there is a linkage between people’s actions and how ideas, values and norms shape their behavior. This specific interaction between people and meanings develop difficulties in gathering both self-reinforcing nature of structure and the methods in which individuals at times overthrow social order.\(^\text{34}\) Social constructivism emphasizes “the extent to which our understandings of the world are the products of social forces”.\(^\text{35}\) Knowledge is a construction in every understanding, knowledge does not exist separately from the factors that constitute them as statements and signs.\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{31}\) Marsh and Stoker (2002):18
\(^{32}\) Marsh and Stoker (2002):18
\(^{34}\) Klotz and Lynch (2007):3-4,7,24-25
\(^{35}\) Burr (2003):19-20
\(^{36}\) Bacchi and Eveline (2010):117
Representation theory

Western philosophy has for ages been obsessing with the question of whether the world ‘out there’ really is ‘there’ or is only constructed by us individuals. Realism is a theory that believes in a world ‘out there’ however constructivism is a theory that believes in a reality of construction.\footnote{Weber (2002):1} Representations provide meanings for the world and individual groups by using language to delineate the ‘real world’. There are three existing approaches to explain how representation of meanings through language is processed, and to answer the questions of where meanings come from, and how? We can tell the ‘true’ meaning of a word or image: Reflective approach, intentional approach and the constructivist approach. The constructivist approach is the interesting and suitable approach in this research.

The constructivist approach believes in the existence of the material world (a world of existing people and objects) however the argument is that these materials do not have a given meaning. The material world is shaped by a given meaning through the ‘language’ individuals use to represent concepts. Constructions of meanings are made by social actors that use ideas and norms to construct and represent through meaning, thereby also making the world meaningful to others. Representation systems are of great importance behind the construction of world meanings.\footnote{Hall (1997):9-10,16-17,24-25} Media is an actor that reflects and helps produce a meaning-laden reality.

Media constructions of reality are inevitable because the relationship between the world and media is in itself constructive.\footnote{Weber (2002):2} Media constructs social reality, which further on causes individuals to construct that given material from the media into further categorizations. Meanings are the only factor that determines our views on the world. How we understand the meaning of social categorizations such as gender, ‘race’, class, age, ethnicity etc. affects how our reality is shaped, and therefore the meaning of such categorizations are therefore extremely important. ‘The practices of representation’ describe how ideas, concepts and emotions can be interpreted’.\footnote{Hall (1997):28}
Representations of problems in policies are important since they affect the understanding of what can be seen as problematic and how people grasp these problems and their place in this world. What is the problem represented to be is an approach that claims that ‘problems’ are not given in this world with standard operating procedures to follow as in bureaucracies, rather policies ‘imagine’ ‘problems’ in certain ways that causes meaningful impacts.\textsuperscript{41} “What is the problem represented to be approach are those that accompany the way in which the ‘problem’ is represented”.\textsuperscript{42} The approach allows the opportunity of challenging hierarchal power relations since any ‘truth’ of any problem could be as correct as any other, depending on how one represents the problem.\textsuperscript{43} To apply this theory there are three questions one asks when analyzing problems: 1) What is the problem represented to be? 2) What is the cause of the problem represented to be? 3) What is the solution for the problem represented to be? This approach will be applied in this research to analyze how the Syrian conflict has been represented by Al-Jazeera news agency.

**Conceptual theory: Common causes of conflicts**

There are some general concepts that explain the causes for conflicts in the world.\textsuperscript{44} Research has shown how conflicts occur due to ethnic, religious, economic and political explanations. The genocide that occurred in Rwanda 1994 has been explained as an ethnical conflict between minority and majority groups. The majority group in Rwanda called Hutu, played an ethnical elite game of violence to reach state legitimacy control among Hutus by oppressing the minority group Tutsi, to maintain power in the country.\textsuperscript{45} Between the periods of 1946-2005, 32\% of the civil wars in Africa were ethno-political.\textsuperscript{46} Africa is not the only region where conflicts and wars have been caused due to ethnical reasons, the Pakistan civil war occurred in 1971 between ethnic groups of East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The largest ethnic group in Pakistan called Bengali claimed they had a representation group “Liberation Army” for being discriminated.\textsuperscript{47} The risk of having civil wars in countries increase when ethnic

\textsuperscript{41} Bacchi and Eveline (2010): 111
\textsuperscript{42} Bacchi and Eveline (2010): 115
\textsuperscript{43} Bacchi and Eveline (2010): 115
\textsuperscript{44} Miodownik and Bhavnani (2011)
\textsuperscript{45} Miodownik and Bhavnani (2011):439
\textsuperscript{46} Miodownik and Bhavnani (2011):439
\textsuperscript{47} Miodownik and Bhavnani (2011):440
minorities rule, conflicts are caused due to an occurrence of ethnical complications in a country.

Religious conflicts has received quite attention from the media\textsuperscript{48}, the 9/11 attack of 2001 on the United States was considered caused by multiple reasons, and among many, religious factors. Samuel Huntington uses his theory of “clash of civilizations” to explain that religious-based identities called civilizations are the reason for world conflicts.\textsuperscript{49} Religious identities and culture division around the world do clash with each other and therefore conflicts are easily developed and threats international peace and security.\textsuperscript{50} The Lebanese civil war took place between the years 1975-1990, the causes were sectarian and socioeconomic. Lebanon shared/shares citizens of multiple religious-ethnic groups, and unfortunately during the 70s there were an unbalanced sectarian power system between religious groups in the country with socioeconomic problems.\textsuperscript{51} The Lebanese civil war was also political, in the sense where Syria and the United States were of great impact. Syria intervened militarily for national interests, other factors were involved due to geo-political reasons.\textsuperscript{52}

Conflicts could also occur from economic explanations, when the government suffers from fiscal policy problems a collapse among the state is at high risk.\textsuperscript{53} When leaders face lack of revenues and the macro-economy in the country is at stake, a civil war is highly risky. Governmental spending is important for the economic cycle to prevent investment and GDP crises.\textsuperscript{54} Civil wars could also be explained in a sense of other economic angles, as the “problem of the poor”.\textsuperscript{55} Low incomes with low GDP in a country causes civil wars, poverty reasons to rebelling aiming towards better life standards and human rights.\textsuperscript{56}

Quantitative methods have been used in earlier research to see the correlation between GDP per capita and civil war, low GDP causes civil war.\textsuperscript{57} Poverty causes strong enough creations
of rebels to eliminate the government forces. Rebels during conflicts have some financial opportunities as in cheap labor, potential fighters receive low salaries which help ease the process of completing a rebellion.\textsuperscript{58} Poverty among the state in a sense that infrastructure is weak, provides important chances for rebels to establish military and political control over peripheral areas.\textsuperscript{59}

Besides economic, religious and ethnical explanations of civil wars there are other clarifications as well. There are political/economic reasons for experiencing conflicts, the risk of conflicts appear when countries are resource-rich. High rented commodities in a country such as oil, drugs and diamonds are a threat for the political economy. Rebels use drugs to accomplish a controlled military to fight authorities, this method is common in South America and Latin America.\textsuperscript{60} Africa is a region where expensive resources as diamonds are available, therefore the diamond market could cause an ethnic duopoly of conflict. When market-oriented groups compete in the diamond market, rebels could be developed to receive a monopoly of power in the market and eliminate any threat of competition.\textsuperscript{61}

As explained above conflicts could occur from economic, political, religious or/and ethnic causes in this world. In this research we seek to analyze how these four concepts are represented in the Syrian conflict, rather the main reason for it. The Syrian conflict of 2011 has not been analyzed to understand how Al-Jazeera represents this conflict, therefore this thesis seeks to analyze what kind of conflict the Syrian conflict is represented to be.

**Analytical Framework of media representation**

The core is to investigate how Al-Jazeera news agency represents the Syrian conflict of 2011, by considering the four concepts of possible representations during conflicts. As discussed above, conflicts can be represented as religious, nationalistic, economic or geo-political. Analyzing the representation of the Syrian conflict allows possible results among these four concepts. The concepts will be related to the ‘What is the Problem Represented to be’ theory\textsuperscript{62} that applies questions as: 1) What kind of conflict is this represented to be? 2) What is the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{58} Collier and Hoeffler, (2004): 659
\bibitem{59} Holtermann(2012):60
\bibitem{60} Holtermann(2012):43
\bibitem{61} Holtermann(2012):43
\bibitem{62} Bacchi and Eveline (2010)
\end{thebibliography}
cause of this conflict represented to be? 3) What is the solution of this conflict represented to be? The results will not be necessarily categorized or classified in this analytical framework, the results could rather be diverse among the boxes. The analytical framework derives from Bacchis’ theory regarding problem representations.63

(Table 1) Analytical Framework

| What kind of conflict is this represented to be? | Nationalistic(Ethnic) | Religious | Economic | Political/Geo-political | Other |
| What is the cause of this conflict represented to be? | | | | | |
| What is the solution of this conflict represented to be? | | | | | |

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63 Bacchi and Eveline (2010)
IV. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to analyze *how Al-Jazeera news* agency represents the nature of the conflict in Syria of 2011, using ‘What is the problem represented to be approach’.

More specifically, the thesis seeks to answer the following questions about *Al-Jazeera’s* coverage of the Syrian conflict of 2011.

1) What kind of conflict is the Syrian conflict represented to be? Is it a nationalistic (ethnic), religious, economic, political/geo-political or something else?

2) What is the cause of the Syrian conflict represented to be?

3) What is the solution to the Syrian conflict represented to be?
V. Method and design

A qualitative approach
Qualitative research focuses on studies concerning individuals, actors and groups involved in the political arena and thus behavior and attitudes outside it.\textsuperscript{64} Qualitative methods are practiced in this research to describe how the representation and construction of the Syrian conflict has been done by Al-Jazeera news channel. The purpose for selecting qualitative and not quantitative research has to do with the fact that quantitative research generally focuses on multiple cases and only allows measurements on the surface, concerning more numerical questions.\textsuperscript{65} In our research we are more interested in words than numbers. Qualitative research is more suitable to practice in order to answer our research questions.

The study is theoretically both deductive and inductive. The origin of the analytical framework comes from prior research, so in this sense the research is deductive. The research is still open for other results than the one we look for, and it is therefore also inductive. Deductive study is defined as an approach where you have a theory, along with a gathered data that is supposed to be analyzed. Inductive study is the converse approach of deductive study, findings and correlations could also be possible to explore in the research without using original hypothesis.\textsuperscript{66}

Case study design
Case study design is used when a researcher studies a single case intensely in a detailed manner. The researcher is usually concerned with clarifications and features of the case.\textsuperscript{67} The case itself is an object of interest and the researchers’ aim is to develop a complete clarification of the particular case.

We selected descriptive single case study design in our thesis since we are only focusing on one case, Al-Jazeera’s representation of the Syrian conflict. The main reason for using the Syrian conflict as a case of how Al-Jazeera represent the conflict, is because, the conflict is still ongoing and no research has yet been done concerning Al-Jazeera’s representation of it.

\textsuperscript{64} Bryman (2012):408
\textsuperscript{65} Bryman(2012):408
\textsuperscript{66} Bryman (2012):24-26
\textsuperscript{67} Silverman (2010):138
A single case study helps us deeper focus intensely on Al-Jazeera’s representation. The Syrian conflict will in this case be our sample taken from a population of all conflicts Al-Jazeera has represented. Earlier academic research has focused on Al-Jazeera’s behavior and therefore we prefer to continue to focus on it deeply. We also prefer to concentrate on only Al-Jazeera since Al-Jazeera is one of the most important and audience affective and richest in the region. The sample is relatively small to make generalizations of the population from which the case was selected. Creating generalizations and representatives of a population in our research will therefore be quite restricted.

Method for gathering data: Articles published on Al-Jazeera’s homepage

Data means collecting information, any kind of information is perceived as data: observation records, numbers, interview transcripts, mass-media outputs, photographs or documents. Primary data is a data the researcher obtains directly from the original source. We are therefore using primary data in this research since we are analyzing texts from the prime source, there is no available data about these texts from other published sources.

Our primary data consists of articles on the Syrian conflict published by Al-Jazeera at their internet homepage. The text analysis in our research arises from carefully reading them. All 59 articles between the period of 15th March 2011 until 31 May 2011 are analyzed. We prefer to select the texts non-randomly to provide more reliable results. The material is taken in the beginning of the conflicts’ representation and therefore we have chosen to analyze all articles between 15th of March to 31 May 2011. The beginning of the conflict is what analytically interests us and therefore we will read all articles published within the first three months of the conflict. Al-Jazeera is a news agency that publishes broadcasts as well, however to provide as reliable and manageable results as possible in this research, we prefer to not consider any broadcasts the agency publishes.

Reliability measures how trustworthy the data material is. Reliability could be valued on different degrees, either low or high reliability. If the collection method of the data provides trustworthy data and consistency, then the reliability is measured as high. If this is not the

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68 Bahry (2001):89-92
69 Silverman (2010):138-150
70 Currie (2005):89-90
71 Currie (2005):89-90
case, then the reliability is considered as low. Validity is another word for truth, does an indicator really measures the measurement of a particular concept? Is the researcher using the right tools? According to some scholars reliability and validity are important for quantitative varieties of research, however their importance in a case study is far less clear. In terms of our research, we believe the method we have chosen will give valid results. This research is valid, since we are using text analysis to examine units that cannot change over time. Al-Jazeera’s texts will not vanish or change in order to risk receiving different results, which makes this thesis replicable.

Method for analyzing gathered data: discourse analysis

There are multiple methods for analyzing the collected data when doing your research. We have chosen to use discourse analysis since it would be the appropriate method for our research. Discourse analysis is not only used when analyzing conversations or normal occurring talks but can also be used when analyzing text, documents and newspaper articles. The discourse method has a constructivist approach that focuses on the construction of reality by members of the social setting, in our case Al-Jazeera and their representation of the Syrian conflict. Discourse analysis is the method used in this research for gathering and analyzing data.

“Discourse analysis focuses on knowledge about language and the world beyond the world, clause, phrase and sentences that is needed for successful communication. It considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used and looks at patterns of organization across texts. It considers what people mean by what they say, how they work out what people mean, and the way language presents different views of the world and different understandings”.

Discourse analysis focus on studying texts and interactions that are involved with social, political and cultural science problems. Discourse analysis provides important analysis of

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73 Thomas (2001): 62-64
74 Bryman (2012):390
75 Bryman (2012):528-529
76 Bryman (2012):528-529
77 Paltridge (2006):20
media language that is involved with multiple arguments concerning different complications in this world. The method offers an understanding of the connection between the media and the political, cultural and social life. Discourse analysis is an explanation of how language is used as a tool to achieve certain communicative goals, acts and events that could further be presented in public.

Discourse analysis has a variety that extends from a socially-oriented view to textually-oriented view. The socially-oriented view reflect on a particular “language behavior” of a text in a social and cultural setting, while textually-oriented views focus generally on language features of the text. Language is seen as an instrument that could to some extent shape individuals, and their opinions about the media.

Discourse analysis is among several other analyzing methods in the social constructivist approach, however discourse analysis is the most practiced method. There are several ideas connected to the theory of discourse analysis, which all relies on the social constructivist core and essence.

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78 Matheson (2005):2  
79 Paltridge (2006):9  
80 Matheson (2005):2  
81 Jorgensen(2000):11
The analytical framework is the instrument in this research for understanding the results. The outcome of the data will be analyzed in relation to our analytical framework.

(Table 1) Analytical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Nationalistic(Ethnic)</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Political/Geo-political</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>What kind of conflict is this represented to be?</td>
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<td>What is the cause of this conflict represented to be?</td>
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<td>What is the solution of this conflict represented to be?</td>
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Different approaches to discourse analysis

The philosopher Michel Foucault describes discourse analysis as a “term that denoted the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object”.\(^{82}\) A relationship between language and identity is apparent according to the constructivist view of discourse analysis. The relationship implies a correlation between how individuals express language to construct certain views of the world. The ways individuals practice language conduct the way we construct a particular

\(^{82}\) Bryman (2012):528
approach of an event in focus. In other words, with the use of language people create certain social and categorized identities.\textsuperscript{83}

Foucault claims that knowledge is not a mirror of the reality, the knowledge is constructed by actors. He describes discourse analysis as a “term that denoted the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it, frame the way we comprehend that object”.\textsuperscript{84} In other words, a version of an object is possible to constitute. Bryman (2012) highlights the example of having a mentally ill person where that particular person of illness needs to be identified, how it should be treated and who would have the legitimacy to treat that person. Discourse is therefore not only concerned with language, it is constitutive of the social world that is a focus of interest or concern.\textsuperscript{85} A relationship between language and identity is apparent, according to the constructivist view of discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is another approach to discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis derives from Foucault’s theories and approaches. Critical discourse analysis emphasizes the role of language that is related to ideology and socio-cultural changes. Fairclough discusses his theory behind the critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the tension between organizational discourse and structure.\textsuperscript{86} Fairclough and Kulick argues that “the instances of language in use that are still socially situated and need to be interpreted in terms of their social meanings and functions”, discourse analysis is a vision of language consisted in a text where Fairclough calls it ‘textually oriented discourse analysis’.\textsuperscript{88}

Laclau and Mouffes argue that discourse theory constructs the social world in meaning, this particular meaning can never be bond on the basis of the instability of language. Securing the language allows different discourses to interpret the social world, that helps further on achieve hegemony. Hegemony is defined in this sense as a determined opinion of domination.\textsuperscript{89} The

\textsuperscript{83} Paltridge (2006)
\textsuperscript{84} Bryman (2012):528
\textsuperscript{85} Bryman (2012):528
\textsuperscript{86} Bryman (2012):508-509
\textsuperscript{87} Paltridge(2006):8
\textsuperscript{88} Paltridge(2006):8
\textsuperscript{89} Jorgensen(2000):13
The main difference between the different visions of discourse analysis briefly, regards the discourse particular role in the constitute world and the analytical focus.\textsuperscript{90}

The research we are achieving cannot directly be categorized in the different visions of discourse analysis, \textit{Al-Jazeera}’s texts available from their homepage will be analyzed to see the representation of the Syrian conflict, the “boxes” in the analytical framework are discourses. The discourse analysis used in this research focuses on what kind of concepts the articles highlight and center upon, which constructs discourses in \textit{Al-Jazeera}’s representation. The concepts in their articles create a comprehensive picture of understanding the representation. “Discourse is both shaped by the world as well as shaping the world. Discourse is shaped by language as well as shaping language, it is shaped by the people who use the language as well as shaping the language that people use”.\textsuperscript{91}

The purpose of using discourse analysis is to analyses multiple texts by \textit{Al-Jazeera} regarding the representation of the Syrian conflict. The data is analyzed from a manner of constructivism and representation theory. This analyzing method is the most suited one to use in this research since it centers on analyzing texts of \textit{Al-Jazeera}’s discourses, which is precisely what this research is practicing.

\textsuperscript{90} Jorgensen (2000): 25-27
\textsuperscript{91} Paltridge (2006): 9
VI. Analysis

The analysis is systematically structured in order to answer the research questions effectively. The research questions are answered with a connection to our analytical framework, theory and methods chapters. The results will be delivered by making claims about the data, highlighting evidence by putting out quotes from our data and arguing for our interpretations of them to justify our claims. A further analysis of the results will also be provided by highlighting and discussing other ways Al-Jazeera could have represented the Syrian conflict.

What kind of conflict is the Syrian conflict represented to be?

Using our analytical framework, the first research question is answered in relation to the organization of the analytical framework, theory and method chapters. In the theory chapter we provided explanations behind conflicts. Political/geo-political, economic, religious and ethnic reasons are general causes to conflicts, however our research focuses on finding out how Al-Jazeera represents the conflict, is it from a political, economic, religious or ethnic point of view?

As a result Al-Jazeera represents the Syrian conflict mainly from a political point of view. In 59 articles the news agency represents the conflict as a problem of a lack of freedom, democracy, political and human rights. The conflict is a political conflict in a sense that Al-Jazeera highlights the problem as a massacre of civilians by Syria’s ruling family, The Baath Party.

The conflict is represented by Al-Jazeera as a peaceful protest by anti-government protesters, however the civilians have received nothing but disrespected human rights, political rights and executions. Al-Jazeera uses international organizations statements on the Syrian conflict such as the United Nations and Human Rights Organizations to help support their particular point of view in their representation. In all 59 articles Al-Jazeera has published between 15th of March until the 31th of May, the problem represented in the conflict concerns immense lack of political rights. Al-Jazeera highlights the problem of having an undemocratic regime with oppressed citizens facing no freedom of any political voice. The conflict is challenged by pro-democracy activists trying to establish a democratic system and an end to the Baath Party’s
monopoly of power. Following examples from the material are typical of this kind of representation.

“The ones who decide policy are the security forces, headed of course by Bashar al-Assad, and this is what people are rebelling against. The problem is primarily the issue of the immunity of prosecution the security forces enjoy and the overwhelming powers they have over all aspects of public life”.  

“A witness told Al-Jazeera that demonstrators gathering at a mosque after prayers in Hasakah in the mainly Kurdish northeast were attacked by pro-government protesters. Syrian activists’ coordinating mass protests against al-Assad’s rule have demanded the abolition of Baath Party monopoly on power and the establishment of a democratic political system”.  

“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 demonstrators were ‘most probably fabricated and organized by the regime”.  

Here Al-Jazeera puts the problem of facing attacks from anti-democratic protesters against the demand of a democratic system. The pro-democratic activists are facing threats from people supporting a party of monopolizing power. Al-Jazeera clearly represents the problem of oppressed activists, with no counter arguments from the pro-government protestors to show their justification of that particular behavior in the article, instead they determine on presenting that even those who support the regime are all fabricated by the regime itself. Therefore it is difficult to interpret their articles from other approaches since the agency is quite outspoken and straightforward. This clearly highlights a represented problem concerning oppressed protestors struggling against the ones trying to eliminate the idea of a democratic political system. In the theory chapter social constructivism highlight how reality is socially constructed by individual actors that shape social, political and cultural processes by their views and values. Al-Jazeera as an actor clearly shapes political processes by representing  

92 Al-Jazeera, Syrian opposition figure arrested in Homs (11-04-20)  
93 Al-Jazeera, Syrians hold ‘Great Friday’ protests (11-04-22)  
94 Al-Jazeera, Death as Syrian forces fire on protesters (11-03-26)
their understanding of what values and views are legitimate in this world. *Al-Jazeera* choses to publish the opinions of those who receive hinders of accomplishing peaceful democracy and the opinions of those who fight against any actions made by pro-government actors.

And here is another quote from an article stating the same representation by publishing the words of Colville a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:

“"We are greatly concerned by the recent killings of protesters in Syria and reiterate the need to put an immediate halt to the excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, especially by the use of live ammunition. Colville said that the use of excessive force was a ‘clear violation of international law’ and that perpetrators could be prosecuted”.”

“UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has described Syria’s harsh crackdown on protests and use of deadly force against demonstrators as “unacceptable”. The use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrators and their arbitrary arrest are unacceptable Ban Ki-Moon”.

“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 dissident”.

*Al-Jazeera* emphasizes the threat against developing peaceful political freedom from the ones given a monopoly of violence, the state. The quotes allow interpretations by us readers to understand the conflict as a conflict of domestic violence between the regime and the Syrian population, since the regime has practiced excessive force against the population. The conflict is represented from a domestic political discourse, human rights and international law have been broken when peaceful demonstrators have tried to exercise their political voice. This is the construction *Al-Jazeera* provides when representing the Syrian conflict. *Al-Jazeera* does not provide other possible versions of understanding their representation since they use the international community to strengthen their determined representation. Therefore the articles analyzed are easy to interpret and do not confuse the audience of misunderstanding the representation of the problem.

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95 Al-Jazeera, UN calls for Syria probe as hundreds protest (11-03-23)
96 Al-Jazeera, UN chief slams Syria’s crackdown on protests (11-03-18)
97 Al-Jazeera, Protesters killed in Syria shooting(11-04-24)
Al-Jazeera focuses on questioning the Syrian state news agency SANAs’ representation of the Syrian conflict:

“The state news agency SANA said ‘acts of sabotage’ had broken out at the protest, which promoted 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 actors of violence which resulted in damage to private and public property,’ the agency reported. ‘The infiltrators also set cars and shops on fire, which obliged security forces to intervene in order to protect citizens and property. They were also attacked by the infiltrators before the latter dispersed’.”

“According to the country’s official SANA news agency the government also abolished the state security court, which handled the trials of political prisoners, and approved a new law allowing the right to peaceful protests. However the interior ministry also passed a law that says citizens must obtain permission to demonstrate, the agency said, hours after the ministry imposed a total ban on political gatherings.”

“Security forces have attempted to storm a mosque in the southern Syrian city of Daraa, reportedly killing at least six people. The government, however, blamed the violence on an “armed gang”, according to the state-run SANA news agency.”

Al-Jazeera emphasizes in multiple articles how the state news agency represents some events during the conflict in the favor of the Syrian regime. Al-Jazeera questions how SANA tries to provide positive news coming from the government although according to Al-Jazeera most of the information is not correct or valid. Al-Jazeera tries to expose to their audience how state agencies construct the reality to benefit the elite. Al-Jazeera wants to emphasize how the state uses their tools (SANA) to manipulate the public and cover the true story behind the actions.

As discussed in the theory chapter, social actors construct meanings in this world. Knowledge is a construction in every understanding and does not exist separately from the factors that constitute them as statements and signs. Al-Jazeera constructs the ‘reality’ about the Syrian conflict by using a certain language to provide meanings. Al-Jazeera represents this conflict from a political point of view supporting pro-democratic protesters, freedom fighters fighting

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98 Al-Jazeera, UN chief slams Syria’s crackdown on protests (11-03-18)  
99 Al-Jazeera, Syria to lift decades-old emergency law (11-04-19)  
100 Al-Jazeera, Deaths as Syrian forces ‘storm mosque’ (11-03-23)
against the regime and, a liberal language is always expressed in their articles. Media constructions further on causes individuals to construct that particular representation into further understandings, therefore representation theory applies here in the case of the Syrian conflict constructed by *Al-Jazeera*.

*Al-Jazeera* discusses in their articles how Al-Assad blames conspirators for the events in the Syrian conflict.

“From the opening remarks of the speech and a further near dozen times, President Assad referred to the “conspiracy”, “plots” and “sabotage” targeting Syria from outside, of which the protest for change which have centred in the southern city of Daraa, “a border area”, were a part. ‘The objective was to fragment Syria, bring down Syria as a nation to enforce an Israeli agenda,’ said the president, a message that resonates with his supporters”.

Here are some quotes published and highlighted by *Al-Jazeera* in order to represent the governments and Al-Assad’s conspiracy theory:

“Bashar Al-Assad, the Syrian president, has blamed “conspirators” for two weeks of anti-government protests that have rocked the nation. In his first address to the nation since the start of a violent crackdown on the protests, Assad said Syria was going through a “test of unity”.

“I know that the Syrian people have been awaiting this speech since last week, but I was waiting to the full picture…to avoid giving an emotional address that would put the people at ease but have no real effect, at a time when our enemies are targeting Syria, he said”. Spoken by Al-Assad.

“Government media adviser Buthaina Shaaban told reporters that ten people were killed on Wednesday, in what she called an attempt to target Syria because it supports resistance against Israel. ‘What is being targeted is Syria’s position, Syria’s security and ability to be a pillar of resistance against Zionism and US schemes,’ she said. She said the Syrian government had no objection to peaceful protest, and claimed that demonstrators in Daraa had attacked security

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101 Al-Jazeera, ‘Assad announced himself as a dictator (11-03-31)
102 Al-Jazeera, Assad blames ‘conspirators’ for Syria unrest (11-03-30)
103 Al-Jazeera, Assad blames ‘conspirators’ for Syria unrest (11-03-30)
forces. ‘The demands of the people are being studied night and day and Syria will witness important decisions that meet the ambitions of our people,’ she said”.

“Wissam Tarif, a founding member of Insan, a human rights, democracy and development agency, who is currently gathering reporting in Syria said Assad had only thrown fuel on the fire of the anti-regime protest. Assad announced himself as a dictator. He did not address the nation, he addressed the regime, said Tarif. People are angry and will continue to be angry”.

“Our correspondent Cal Perry, in Damascus reported that more than a dozen people had been wounded in what officials said was a ‘co-ordinated attack from both rooftop sniper fire and fire from the ground’. He said it was unclear who was behind the firing. Officials blamed ‘foreign elements’ while protestors said it was security forces dressed in civilian clothes”.

“Syrian officials, clearly unnerved, have flown thousands of security forces into the city and brutally cracked down on demonstrators”. When making interpretations of this kind of representation, Al-Jazeera signalizes to their audience that the state is blaming the situation on foreign policy. Al-Jazeera clearly criticizes the presidents’ response to the situation, Al-Jazeera is representing the conflict from a determined angle, and a domestic political problem is the main issue and not foreign. The right for free political opinions and ideas should be essential in Syria, and by not having a constitution that allows political freedom and democracy the Syrian population are therefore suffering from oppression.

Simons (2012) describes the Syrian conflict in the following way: ”The conflict in Syria illustrates the false dilemma very clearly, either you are supporting the ‘bad’ brutal and bloody dictator Bashar Al-Assad or the ‘good’ work and intentions of the international community”. Al-Jazeera clearly represents the dilemma of this conflict by supporting the intention of the international community, when Al-Jazeera emphasizes how the state blames the conflict on conspiracy theories. The news agency clearly helps the audiences towards making a certain construction of the conflict. The conflict is represented as political, where
citizens are suffering from oppression and a lack of human and political rights. The conflict is domestically political and not foreign, the political system in the country requires rectification towards a democratic political system, made by the people and for the people.

In the methods chapters we discuss the meaning behind discourse analysis when analyzing texts. “Discourse analysis considers what people mean by what they say, how they work out what people mean, and the way language presents different views of the world and different understandings”. 109 Al-Jazeera uses a language such as claiming that the president and the government blames the situation on foreign sabotage. They create views and understandings of the world by only using value-laden words. The actual meaning behind the academic word blame implies not taking responsibility, using that language by Al-Jazeera categorizes them in a field of representing this conflict as anti-regime. The regime and Al-Assad has blamed the protests on foreign powers, accusing organizers of stockpiling smuggled weapons from Israel. Here again Al-Jazeera highlights the problem of the state blaming the conflict on foreign elements.

The analytical framework in this research provides support on representing the results. As discussed earlier analyzing the representation of the Syrian conflict allows possible results among four concepts: religious, ethnic, economic or political representation. When it comes to religion and ethnic nationalism, Al-Jazeera does not mainly represent the problem of the Syrian conflict as a neither religious or ethnic nationalistic. Al-Jazeera rarely emphasizes that the conflict is based on any neither religious nor ethnic problem among the people. However the news channel does in some articles highlight how religious groups have been categorized in this conflict as anti- versus pro-regime.

In our data we found one typical article published by Al-Jazeera discussing the question of religion and ethnic groups in Syria:

“They are known to the locals of Lattakia as the ghosts - al-Shabea – but when these phantoms dress up it is in black and their terror is tangible. In a port city dominated by Sunni Muslims, who comprise three quarters of the Syrian population, and surrounded by mountain villages that are home to Alawites, a minority that has ruled over the country for 40 years, these roaming

gangs of black-clothed thugs have turned peaceful protests calling for freedom into deadly chaos. Bashar Al-Assad, Syria’s president, warned in a speech this week that such gangs are part of a foreign plot to drive a wedge between Syria’s different religious and ethnic communities. But in interviews with residents, journalist and eyewitnesses in Lattakia almost all say the same thing: Shabeha are almost exclusively Alawites from the region, described by one reliable source as the private militia of the Assad family itself’.  

“The president has said Lattakia is a sectarian problem firstly to get carte blanche to quell it-no-one wants to see a new Iraq’, said a local political analyst who did not want to be named. ‘And second in order to mobilize minorities, Alawites, Christians, and Druze out of fear of life under a Sunni majority. They argue it’s the regime or the Muslim Brotherhood’. Yet eyewitnesses to the pro-democracy protests in Lattakia over the past fortnight insist they began with both Sunnis and Alawites calling for change together. The protests 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 reporting 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 Alawites walking side-by-side calling for reform”.

“Syrian officials and state-run media have tried to portray Baniyas as a hotbed of Islamic extremists to justify the crackdown there. Al-Watan said ‘armed groups’ had used heavy weapons and mortar rounds against the army. Syria is home to many different ethnic and religious groups, and some analysts say the government is trying to ignite fear among the people that if the government falls, the country will be thrown into sectarian unrest”.  

“The meetings were the first between the opposition and senior officials since demonstrations calling for political freedom and an end to corruption erupted in the southern city of Deraa on March 18. Shabaan made a similar statement to the one on Thursday at the beginning of the demonstrations in March. Authorities have since blamed most of the violence on ‘armed terrorist groups backed by Islamists and foreign agitators’.

“Authorities blamed armed groups and infiltrators for stoking unrest and firing on civilians and security forces”.

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110 Al-Jazeera, The ghosts of Syria (11-04-03)  
111 Al-Jazeera, The ghosts of Syria (11-04-03)  
112 Al-Jazeera, EU imposes arms embargo on Syria (11-05-09)  
113 Al-Jazeera, Demonstrations flare across Syria (11-05-13)  
114 Al-Jazeera, Hundreds jailed over Syria protests (11-05-04)
Al-Jazeera highlights how a particular religious group could hinder the future of Syria’s freedom, our interpretation of these quotes is that Al-Jazeera is providing a representation of how religious/ethnic groups are not in conflict with each other regarding their religion nor ethnicity, but on the other hand they are disagreeing on the political front. Below are some of the following quotes highlighted from above for confirmation:

“Bashar Al-Assad, Syria’s president, warned in a speech this week that such gangs are part of a foreign plot to drive a wedge between Syria’s different religious and ethnic communities. But in interviews with residents, journalist and eyewitnesses in Lattakia almost all say the same thing: Shabeha are almost exclusively Alawites from the region, described by one reliable source as the private militia of the Assad family itself”\textsuperscript{[115]}

“Not Sunni, not Alawite. Freedom is what we all want,’ the women chanted, according to a rights campaigner quoted by the news agency. The city and surrounding villages have many Alawite residents, belonging to the same religious minority as President Assad”\textsuperscript{[116]}

“Protesters also marched in Daraa on Saturday, chanting ‘the people want to overthrow the regime’, according to Reuters”\textsuperscript{[117]}

Al-Jazeera tries to highlight the importance of not mistakenly believing that minority groups are in a conflict with each other, it is not a problem of sectarianism in this conflict. We understand this kind of publishing as a critic towards the government by Al-Jazeera, the government merely uses sectarianism and foreign conspiracy as a whitewash to cover up the real representation of the problem: the lack of freedom, human and political rights.

Nisbet and Myers (2011) argued that Al-Jazeera focuses on victims to help highlights the core Al-Jazeera want to provide.\textsuperscript{[118]} In the Syrian case, the victims represented are pro-democratic protesters, scholars earlier research about Al-Jazeera corresponds in this case as well since they highlight weight on particular victims (anti-regime protesters) to accomplish a certain aim: developing freedom, political and human rights.

\textsuperscript{[115]} Al-Jazeera, The ghosts of Syria (11-04-03)
\textsuperscript{[116]} Al-Jazeera, Syria to lift emergency law (11-04-16)
\textsuperscript{[117]} Al-Jazeera, Syria to lift emergency law (11-04-16)
\textsuperscript{[118]} Nisbet and Myers(2011)
To briefly summarize the answer to our first research question, *Al-Jazeera* clearly represents the conflict in Syria as a political kind of conflict. *Al-Jazeera* represents the essential problem in the case of Syria as a nation struggling for eliminating the oppression existing in the country, according to *Al-Jazeera* the Syrian conflict is a problem represented as a lack of political and human rights. Tyranny is the main problem represented to be, *Al-Jazeera* puts focus on constructing the conflict to be pro-democratic and anti-oppression for the Syrian citizens, democracy and freedom should not be held responsible on foreign infiltrators. Since our data has confirmed how *Al-Jazeera* highlights in their articles and texts that the problem represented to be is a discourse of a domestic political concern. As evidence to our claim, we have chosen some of the suitable quotes from their articles and texts as shown above, to prove the particular representation *Al-Jazeera* provides. *Al-Jazeera* emphasizes how important it is to not represent the conflict as a sectarian problem between religious and ethnic groups in their discourse.

**What is the cause of the Syrian conflict represented to be?**

The cause of the Syrian conflict represented by *Al-Jazeera* is also mainly political in a sense where citizens have faced restricted and limited political rights in their own country. The cause of the Syrian conflict is to some extent economic due to political oppression of an emergency law in the country, lack of freedom and a high corruption and poverty in the country. Following quotes from our material highlights clearly the cause of the conflict represented to be.

“It was here on March 6 that the spark that lit the Syrian uprising was struck: The arrest, detention and the 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”¹¹⁹

“Friday’s protest was fuelled by the arrest of 15 schoolchildren detained from writing pro-democracy graffiti inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt”¹²⁰

“On March 18, several hundred protesters in Deraa called for an end to corruption, the release of the boys and greater political freedom. Security forces opened fire and killed three. Two days

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¹¹⁹ *Al-Jazeera*, Inside Deraa (11-04-19)
¹²⁰ *Al-Jazeera*, Syria protesters torch buildings (11-03-20)
later, furious crowds set fire to the offices of the Baath Party, calling for the first time for freedom and an end to emergency law.”\footnote{121}

“Protesters have been demonstration in Daraa since Friday, calling for an end to corruption and 48 years of emergency law. Rallies intensified after five civilians were killed on the first day of protest”\footnote{122}

“But it is the Deraa protests which bear the most resemblance to the rallies that have swept Arab countries since December. Protesters have chanted ‘God, Syria and freedom,’ and ‘the people demand the downfall of corruption’, the latter a variant on the familiar slogan (‘the people demand the downfall of the regime’) which has become the standard of this year’s Arab revolt”.\footnote{123}

“The protests are becoming a major challenge for Bashar al-Assad, Syria’s president, as activist inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt call for action. Haitham al-Maleh, an 80-year-old lawyer and a prominent activist, said the ruling hierarchy was incapable of launching the political reforms that could avert a crisis. ‘All the Syrian provinces will erupt. There is near consensus that this regime is unsustainable. The masses do not want it,’ he told Reuters in an interview. ‘Corruption has eaten the system to the bone. The security apparatus is not accountable to any law’.”\footnote{124}

“It’s very difficult to have one voice after 48 years under emergency law’, he told Al-Jazeera [Haytham Manna, Syrian and co-founder of the Arab Commission for Human Rights] ‘Most of the [the protesters] are in the streets for the first time in their life. They have to discuss, to speak together, because they didn’t have this right before. Now they’re together for freedom’.\footnote{125}

“Inspired by the wave of pro-democracy protest around the Arab world, Daraa residents have held protest since last week, with more planned across the country on Friday”\footnote{126}

Unmistakably the cause of the conflict represented to be, is due to the lack of political freedom and liberty in the country. Al-Jazeera represents the emergency law as the main reason behind this oppression, since no freedom of expression is allowed and the emergency law allows people to be arrested without warrants and imprisoned without trials.\footnote{127}
conflict is therefore represented as primarily, a cause originally placed in a domestically political problem.

The incident with the inspired schoolchildren that expressed political opinions is according to *Al-Jazeera* the beginning of a new path towards democracy, liberty and freedom and an end to tyranny. *Al-Jazeera* highlights the cause of the problem as a problem of extreme oppression and tyranny towards the Syrian citizens. If democracy and freedom were available in Syria, this conflict would not have entered. *Al-Jazeera* implies justifications and legitimacy towards the behavior of the pro-democratic citizens in their discourse. *Al-Jazeera*’s discourse tends to represent a determined angle of the conflict. Western values such as democracy, freedom and human rights are protected and supported in this representation, the oppressed opinions of the government hinders these values from expanding.

The corruption and the economic struggle of unemployment and poverty gave citizens further justifications of demanding a new reform. *Al-Jazeera* has an encouraging language in their articles, they create legitimatizations to the pro-democratic reform by reminding the audience how Syria has been influenced by the Arab Spring, and how the revolutions in MENA countries succeeded and therefore the uprising in Syria will eventually be successful.

“The protesters in Deraa have chanted pro-democracy slogans, but they also have more localized grievances: farmers are struggling with water shortages, and the city is straining to cope with an influx of migrants from dried-up agricultural towns in eastern Syria. The city’s leaders have also demanded the sacking of the governor and the local security chief”. 128

“Assad told the newspaper that he expected to sustain 5 per cent annual economic growth rates for the next five years. But despite the cheerful proclamations from Damascus, the Syrian economy is undoubtedly troubled on a micro level: the unemployment rate is between 12 and 20 per cent, depending on who you ask, and 14 per cent of the population lives below the official poverty line”. 129

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128 *Al-Jazeera, Syria: Simmering unrest a worry for Assad*

129 *Al-Jazeera, Syria: Simmering unrest a worry for Assad*
“And there is perhaps growing frustration with the divide between rich and poor: At one rally, they were chants of ‘down with Makhoul’ – a reference to Rami Makhlouf, the president’s first cousin and a businessman who controls billions of dollars of Syria’s economy.”

The cause of the conflict represented to be is not mainly economic, but Al-Jazeera highlights economic problems as another cause in the country in order to strengthen the importance with a new democratic reform. Al-Jazeera represents the economic struggle and unemployment as a contribution factor but not as a main cause. However, Al-Jazeera emphasizes how the protesters hold the regime responsible for the poor economic conditions by chanting slogans against Al-Assad’s cousin Rami Makhlouf alongside with their protest against the regime. Al-Jazeera justifies their representation of the cause of conflict by strengthening other problematic factors in the country to refute the states blaming on foreign plots and terror groups. The cause of the conflict could be more difficult to fully interpret in their articles since they vary the discussion between economic and political causes to the uprising. We claim the representation of the cause of the conflict is mainly domestically political, however according to Al-Jazeera’s representation economic factors affected the uprising to the conflict as well.

Al-Jazeera does not highlight any ethnic or religious causes for the conflict as the state does in the articles. Political oppression has made citizens demand for both economic and political freedom, as an original cause of the conflict. The emergency law in Syria has according to Al-Jazeera been for 48 years a danger of raising a political voice, this emergency law is a clear evidence of oppression and the cause for this conflict. Al-Jazeera is an actor responsible for representing world reality, however constructivism claims that reality itself is constructed by observing how peoples’ actions, shape their behavior depending on what ideas and values they recognize. Knowledge is not given it is also constructed depending on the specific understanding of it. Al-Jazeera recognizes certain values and ideas in the representation of the Syrian conflict, reality is true in all representations since the actual truth in every reality is constructed. What is the problem represented to be approach argue that any truth of any problem could be as correct as any other, depending on how one represents the problem.

130 Al-Jazeera, Syria: Simmering unrest a worry for Assad
131 Klotz and Lynch (2007):3-4, 24-25
132 Bacchi and Eveline (2010):117-118
Political and human oppression is according to *Al-Jazeera* a problem in this conflict and therefore they represent the conflict from that point of view, constructing problems provides meaningful effects to actions since they are constituted in *Al-Jazeera’s*’ discourse.¹³³
What is the solution to the Syrian conflict represented to be?

The solutions to the Syrian conflict represented by Al-Jazeera in their articles are exact and clear. The representation Al-Jazeera provides at the beginning of the conflict started with peaceful protests towards achieving political demands and aspirations, which escalated towards a demand of an overthrown regime. The solution in March consisted of simple changes requested by the people, however the resistance from the state expanded the people’s requirements of eliminating the government fully, which resulted in more advanced solutions in May.

Al-Jazeera implies the solution as a solution of a regime overturn. Ending tyranny and establishing democracy and freedom for all citizens in Syria despite religion and ethnicity, is the suitable solution represented. The 48-year old emergency law that oppresses political freedom in Syria must be abolished to accomplish the dream of democracy. Al-Jazeera uses international organizations and community as a legitimized source of decision, statements from international organizations are being represented in the majority of their articles to justify a certain act for the Syrian solution. Using international organizations to represent a solution for the conflict creates demands international intervention. International intervention is required to achieve democracy. As discussed in the theory chapter, constructivism and media representation explains how constructed meanings shape our reality. Al-Jazeera creates meanings to determine views on this world, meanings of freedom, democracy and the importance of international organizations opinions and acts.

In an article published by Al-Jazeera a human rights activist, author, dissident and founder of the Tharwa foundation, a non-profit organization promoting democracy and development in Syria and the broader Southwest Asia/North Africa region expresses his opinion:

"It is as though protesters throughout Syria are telling the Assad to take their security forces, unofficial militias and loyal army divisions and shove them where the sun does not shine, pardon my Syrian".\(^\text{134}\)

"Ban urges the Syrian authorities to refrain from violence and to abide by their international commitments regarding human rights which guarantee the freedom of opinion and expression.

\(^{134}\) Al-Jazeera, Mutiny in the Syrian army? (11-04-27)
including the freedom of the press and the right to peaceful assembly’. Ban ‘believes that, as elsewhere, it is the responsibility of the government in Syria to listen to the legitimate aspirations of the people and address them though inclusive political dialogue and genuine reforms, not repression,’ Nesirky said. The statement came as the United State said it ‘strongly condemns the violence that has taken place in Syria,’ and called on the Syrian government “to allow demonstrations to take place peacefully,’ said National Security Council”.

Rupert Colville, a spokesman for Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:

“People have the legitimate right to express their grievances and demands to their government, and we urge the Syrian governments to enter into a broad, meaningful dialogue with the protesters in an attempt to address those grievances’, he said”.

“In the first joint statement since protests erupted five weeks ago, the Local Co-ordination Committees, representing provinces across Syria, said ‘freedom and dignity slogans cannot be achieved except through peaceful democratic change.’ All prisoners of conscience must be freed. The existing security apparatus has to be dismantled and replaced by one with specific jurisdiction and which operates according to law,’ said the joint statement”.

“Human Right Watch said Assad ‘has the opportunity to prove his intentions by allowing [Friday’s] protests to proceed without violent repression.’ ‘The reforms will only be meaningful if Syria’s security services stop shooting. Detaining, and torturing protesters,’ Joe Stork, the groups deputy Middle East director, said”.

Al-Jazeera highlights a representation of a solution where international laws and human rights should be respected and followed. The democratic language is emphasized in their article and the quote implies how democracy should be practiced. By the people and for the people is the essence. The liberal language is optimistic in their articles towards a new Syria. The language and reality construction practiced by Al-Jazeera provides categorizations among the audience of pro versus anti regime. The representation done by the news agency allows the reader to be categorized as either for Western values such as democracy, freedom and human rights, or against. Al-Jazeera allows their representation to be further constructed by the audience, What’s the Problem Represented to be approach implies that representation of problems create categories of people.

135 Al-Jazeera, UN chief slams Syria’s crackdown on protests (11-03-18)
136 Al-Jazeera, UN calls for Syrian probe as hundreds protest (11-03-22)
137 Al-Jazeera, Syrians hold ‘Great Friday’ protest (11-04-22)
138 Al-Jazeera, Syrians hold ‘Great Friday’ protest (11-04-22)
“In a video message posted online, Haytham Maleh, a Syrian human rights lawyer, called on protesters to keep up their pressure until the government bows their demands. ‘I appeal to Syrian to continue to put pressure on the authorities to fulfil the legitimate demands they have’, he said, warning the government would ‘assume full responsibility for the consequences’ of failing to satisfy the protest movements’.  

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state:  
“We call on the Syrian authorities once again to refrain from any further violence against their own people,’ she told reporters in Berlin after a NATO meeting.”  
“The Syrian government has not addressed the legitimate demands of the Syrian people. It is time for the Syrian government to stop repressing their citizens and start responding to their aspirations”.

Anwar Al Bunni, a lawyer and human-right activist in Syria expresses himself in one of Al-Jazeera’s articles:

“Bunni, who spent five years in jail before being released last week, said that while amnesty for political prisoners is an important step, Syria needs to undergo many more changes. ‘We need to form parties, we need to work politically, we need to meet, we need to have our independent media,’ he said. ‘We need to open a new page in Syria – a democratic Syria, a free Syria’.

“They said Baida was targeted because its residents participated in a demonstration in Banias last week in which protesters shouted ‘The people want the overthrow of the regime’ – the rallying cry of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts”.

“A funeral was also due to be held on Saturday in the Damascus neighborhood of Midan for a person killed there during the protests. Members of that procession chanted “the people demand the overthrow of the regime”, a slogan that has been a common thread in popular protest against authoritarian government in the region”.

“The people we spoke to, including this imam, told us that they met the vice-president, they gave him their list of demands, some have to do with Daraa – like pulling out the heavy security

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139 Al-Jazeera, Deaths in Syria as protests continue (11-04-02)  
140 Al-Jazeera, Thousands demonstrate in Syrian cities (11-04-16)  
141 Al-Jazeera, Syrian president issues amnesty (11-05-31)  
142 Al-Jazeera, Syrian security forces attack village (11-04-13)  
143 Al-Jazeera, Nine killed at Syria funeral processions (11-04-23)
that’s stationed there, like lifting the state emergency law, giving them more political freedoms and to stop the heavy handedness of security forces in their daily lives”. 144

“The opposition also demanded that the status of those who are still missing after the protest were broken up by security forces be revealed, and that the families of those who were killed during protest in Daraa be provided a monthly salary” 145

The quotes shown above expresses how Al-Jazeera is representing a solution towards submitting Syria as a nation to the majority’s will, the will of abolishing the current regime and providing freedom for citizens. The use of force against peaceful activists is a clear behavior by a tyrant.

“The [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights] has emphasized to the Syrian authorities that the use of force against peaceful protestors has not quelled discontent, anywhere in the region and to take immediate actions to stop the excessive use of force, particularly the use of live ammunition against peaceful protestors,’ said Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner”. 146

“The package of sanctions, announced on Tuesday, is aimed at pressuring Assad to halt violence against anti-government demonstrations that broke out in March. It targets various heads of security and intelligence agencies in the country and includes assets freezes, travel bans, and an arm embargo. 147 . Maher al-Assad, the president’s brother, commands the Republican Gurad and is considered the second most powerful man in the country. The EU sanctions list describes him as the ‘principal overseer of violence against demonstrators’”. 148

Al-Jazeera highlights by using international organizations the importance of ending the violence against the ‘peaceful’ protesters, by imposing sanctions internationally against the Assad family would decrease the violence from his regime. The solution represented to be: a rectified democratic political system by eliminating the emergency law and an overthrow of the regime. International pressure from the international community should help accomplish these solutions.

144 Al-Jazeera, Security forces attack village (11-04-13)
145 Al-Jazeera, Security forces attack village (11-04-13)
146 Al-Jazeera, Security forces attack village (11-04-13)
147 Al-Jazeera, Assad’s brother tops Syrian sanction list (11-05-10)
148 Al-Jazeera, Assad’s brother tops Syrian sanction list (11-05-10)
“After Friday’s carnage, it is no longer enough to condemn the violence,” Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director for Human Rights Watch said.

“Faced with the Syrian authorities’ shoot-to-kill strategy, the international community needs to impose sanctions on those ordering the shooting of protesters.”

“Protesters are demanding political reform and for an end to Assad’s 11-year rule. The deaths come despite the lifting of decades-old emergency laws last week and human rights activist insist the state of emergency was only lifted on paper.”

“Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the escalation of violence in the country and called for detained activist and political prisoners to be released. ‘The first step now is to immediately halt the use of violence, then to conduct a full and independent investigation into the killings, including the alleged killing of military and security officers, and to bring the perpetrators to justice,’ she said in a statement.”

The quotes above are clear to understand what kind of solution Al Jazeera wants to represent by providing important organizations denouncing and what solutions according to Al Jazeera, the citizens are requiring. Political oppression and suffocation should be eliminated from Syria and instead establish democracy and freedom. This liberal-political discourse is highly valued in this conflicts representation.

“In the first joint statement since protest erupted five weeks ago, the Local Co-ordination Committees, representing provinces across Syrian, said ‘freedom and dignity slogans cannot be achieved except through peaceful democratic change’. ‘All prisoners of conscience must be freed. The existing security apparatus has to be dismantled and replaced by one with specific jurisdiction and which operates according to law,’ the joint statement said”.

“Not Sunni, not Alawite. Freedom is what we all want,’ the women chanted, according to a rights campaigner quoted by the news agency. The city and surrounding villages have many Alawite residents, belonging to the same religious minority as President Assad”.

“Protesters also marched in Daraa on Saturday, chanting ‘the people want to overthrow the regime’, according to Reuters.”

149 Al Jazeera, Protesters killed in Syrian shooting (11-04-24)
150 Al Jazeera, Protesters killed in Syrian shooting (11-04-24)
151 Al Jazeera, Syria sendes tanks onto streets (11-04-25)
152 Al Jazeera, Nine killed’ at Syrian funeral processions
153 Al Jazeera, Syria to lift emergency law (11-04-16)
154 Al Jazeera, Syria to lift emergency law (11-04-16)
“We want freedom and democracy for all of Syria, We want to stop the killings in Daraa, Lattakia, Dumma and Homs,’ said Ibrahim, one of the student who drafted the statement”. 155

“We want freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, for political parties to be allowed and a free media. We are university students, but we are also Syrians: We feel and see what is going on in the country”. 156

“Protesters also marched in Daraa on Saturday, chanting ‘the people want to overthrow the regime’, according to Reuters”. 157

“Syria announced that it would “study” ending emergency rule – in place since 1963 – and look into legalizing political parties, a presidential adviser has said, after a week of deadly protest in the country’s south”. 158

“Maleh who has spent many years in jail and was released two weeks ago under an amnesty for elderly prisoners, said Syria needed to curb its pervasive security apparatus, develop the rule of law, free thousands of political prisoners, allow freedom of expression, and reveal the fate of tens of thousands dissenters who disappeared in the 1980s”. 159

The evidence above clearly confirms how Al-Jazeera represents a solution of freedom, the liberation of political prisoners that have been imprisoned for decades, and an eliminated emergency law that oppresses citizens of political expression. The solution concerns all Syrians despite religion and ethnicity, sectarianism is once again not a threat towards freedom and democracy in Syria. Surprisingly Al-Jazeera does not emphasize any economic solutions in their articles, even though the cause of the conflict was to some extent economic. We argue for our claim since the majority of the articles only emphasize domestic political concerns of ending tyranny and establishing democracy and freedom. The quotes are quite hard to misinterpret and rather clear and obvious of what kind of representation this conflict is made to be.

155 Al-Jazeera, The Syrian revolution on campus (11-04-21)
156 Al-Jazeera, The Syrian revolution on campus (11-04-21)
157 Al-Jazeera, Syria to lift emergency law (11-04-16)
158 Al-Jazeera, Syrian security forces 'fire on protesters' (11-03-25)
159 Al-Jazeera, Syria deploys troops after protests (11-03-23)
Analysis of evidence: Other possible ways for Al-Jazeera to represent the conflict

The collected data provided clear results. There is a clear linkage between the answers to all three research questions. The representation of the conflict by *Al-Jazeera* is represented as an oppressed-domestic political problem. *Al-Jazeera* chooses to represent the conflict as a mainly domestic political problem, cause and solution. Political representation could be interpreted differently, however *Al-Jazeera* constructs their political representation into issues of domestic oppression by a tyrant regime. The interesting question concerns why we acquired these particular results and not others?

The quotes published by *Al-Jazeera*, emphasizes the lack of liberal democracy since the Syrians have been oppressed by an emergency law for 48 years that prevents freedom, liberty and democracy in the Syrian society. The analytical framework provides four different possible representations of the conflict, surprisingly *Al-Jazeera* did not represent the conflict as quite economic although they indicate in multiple articles the desperate need for an improved economy.

*Al-Jazeera* could have represented this conflict due to macro-economic complications since the news agency highlights how corrupt and unsustainable their economy is. The data did not emphasize any considerations of economic solutions to the conflict, only political and those solutions consisted of domestic changes through international interventions. As noted in the literature chapter, Nisbet and Meyers (2011) and Aday et.al (2005) state that *Al-Jazeera* usually points out religious and nationalistic representations to shape a certain opinion on the Arab audience. Surprisingly, the representation of the Syrian conflict was not represented as religious or nationalistic/ethnic. The results had no religious or nationalistic/ethnic representation in the Syrian conflict, which could be interesting to distinguish. Religion and nationalism were not the answer to *Al-Jazeera’s* representation of the Syrian conflict, Sectarianism could have been the core behind the representation by implying how religious groups are disagreeing on the Al-Assad regime.

The literature chapter also discusses how *Al-Jazeera* has for the last decades developed an anti-American sentiment during multiple conflicts and events\(^\text{160}\), however our study of *Al-

\(^{160}\) Aday et.al (2005):6-7,12,17 Nisbet and Myers(2011):6-7
Al-Jazeera’s representation of the Syrian conflict gave pro-American sentiments and values. Western political values such as democracy, freedom, peace and human rights have been used to construct a particular discourse of the conflict. Western values, norms and ideas were on the other hand reinforced in this representation. Al-Jazeera uses a discourse of peaceful Western liberal language of achieving democracy and freedom which gives Al-Jazeera a hegemony of peaceful and modern opinions among their audience. Could it be that Al-Jazeera has turned their anti-American opinions towards pro-American sentiments to develop modernization in the Middle East?

Representation theory confirms the idea of causing further constructions by representations. Al-Jazeera represents the Syrian conflict and allows their audience to further create constructions of that representation. The main construction of the conflict is domestically political, facing a lack of Western political values such as democracy and liberation. Laclau and Mouffes argue that discourse theory constructs the social world in meaning, this particular meaning can never be bond on the basis of an unstable language. Securing the language allows different discourses to interpret the social world that helps further on achieve hegemony. Hegemony is defined in this sense as a determined opinion of domination. The brief difference between the different visions of discourse analysis, regards the discourse particular role in the constitute world and the analytical focus. “It considers what people mean by what they say, how they work out what people mean, and the way language presents different views of the world and different understandings”.

Al-Jazeera has used a certain discursive production of language to represent the conflict, the agency seeks to provide undemocratic understandings and oppression in Syria by using liberal values and ideas to justify their particular discourse in their articles. In this research the gathered material consists of only texts and therefore allows a limited discourse to the topic. The representation is analyzed during the first three months of the conflict, however Al-Jazeera’s representation could be reformed as time passes by, when further incidents take action in the conflict. Bacchi and Eveline (2010) contend that representation of problems

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161 Hall (1997):28
162 Jorgensen (2000):13
164 Paltridge (2006):20
becomes important depending on their particular understandings. *Al-Jazeera* represents the problem behind the Syrian conflict according to their meaningful ideas and values.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{165} Bacchi and Eveline (2010)
VII. Conclusion

The representation of the Syrian conflict by *Al-Jazeera* has granted results in this research to conclude it as domestically political. The results to all three research questions are political in the sense that the news agency emphasizes the problematic conditions Syria is struggling with: oppressed political opinions, lack of democracy and human rights. Syria is according to *Al-Jazeera* suffering from achieving democracy and freedom by pro-government forces using violence to oppress pro-democratic activists. The emergency law in Syria has according to *Al-Jazeera* been the main reason for this political oppression, regulations of political expressions and opinions suffocating the denotation of citizenship. The Syrian population is demanding a new democratic reform, the release of political prisoners and an end to corruption as a solution to this conflict. This is briefly the general representation *Al-Jazeera* has provided during the period of 15th of March 2011 to 31 May 2011.

The analytical framework in this research suggests four kinds of representations the news agency are likely to provide. Economic factors were represented in the material as a second cause of the uprising in Syria. *Al-Jazeera* highlights in the majority of their articles that low economic growth, unemployment, corruption and poverty pushed citizens to the edge which gave the population more than just political reasons to strike out. Religious and ethnic/nationalistic factors were represented in a specific way in this case. *Al-Jazeera* emphasizes in their articles how religious and ethnic groups are striving for change towards democracy and freedom together, and they also highlight the focus on understanding how secularized Syria is as a country. This conflict is not represented from conservative point of views with religious and ethnic values and ideas, *Al-Jazeera* represents the conflict from a liberal point of view underlining the problem, cause and solution of the conflict as a society oppressed by a tyrant facing no democracy or freedom.

Earlier literature done about *Al-Jazeera*’s representations during conflicts and events has shown that *Al-Jazeera* highlights provocative presentations of international events and conflicts. According to some scholars *Al-Jazeera* represents information from an Arab or Muslim perspective to form a certain opinion among their audience.\(^{166}\) The representation of

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\(^{166}\) Nisbet and Myers(2011):5,8 Aday et al (2005):6-7,12,17
the Syrian conflict was neither Islamic nor ethnic, although the period analyzed by scholars is close to the period we have analyzed. During the Iraq war scholars concluded that Al-Jazeera had strong intent to shape an anti-American sentiment by exposing civilian casualties facing violence from the United States.\(^{167}\) However, in the case of Syria, Al-Jazeera has in their articles highlighted American pro-democracy opinions concerning the Syrian conflict. The Iraq war was justified by spreading democratization and eliminating weapons of mass destruction to hinder terrorism in the Middle East.\(^{168}\) The Syrian conflict is according to Al-Jazeera also aimed towards establishing democracy in the country. The question is why Al-Jazeera represented the Iraq war of 2001 with Anti-American principles however represented Pro-American values in the Syrian conflict, although the purpose was to establish democracy in both conflicts. Anti-American persuasions were not available in the representation of the Syrian conflict whatsoever. Could it be that Al-Jazeera is aiming towards modernization in the Middle East especially after the Arab Spring? Or is this democratization-representation in the Syrian case only aimed towards modernizing Syria due to the immense secularization it withholds? This is a question further scholars should study to understand and compare different political representations by Al-Jazeera.

Representations of problems are important to study since they give different meaningful effects in the social and political life.\(^{169}\) The representation of the Syrian conflict is important to study in order to understand what meanings Al-Jazeera wishes to provide in the Arab world, to create a construction of the conflict. The liberal meaning Al-Jazeera creates affects the current policies in the Middle East. The theories used in this research are related to the research questions answered in this thesis, the results are valid and replicable. We have filled a lack of existing knowledge regarding the representation of the Syrian conflict by Al-Jazeera, and future research that needs to be done is research comparing different representations Al-Jazeera has provided, a comparison between the representation of the Iraq war and the Syrian conflict could be a case.

\(^{167}\) Nisbet and Myers(2011):6-7 Aday et al (2005):6-7,12,17
\(^{168}\) Dalacoura (2005):965
\(^{169}\) Bacchi and Eveline (2010):111
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