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Media events and translation: The case of the Arab Spring

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the growing research on transnational and global media events by focusing on the role of translation in the process of mediated meaning-making of the so-called Arab Spring. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the role of traditional media channels (television) and questions conflation of the Arab Spring and the Arab world. Therefore, a database was created of the English television coverage on Egypt's and Syria's uprisings done by 'Russia Today' and 'Al Jazeera'. The coverage was analyzed using narrative and discourse analysis focusing on the role of media reports translation. This analysis included different translations and also considered the impact of these translations on the overall framing of the media event. It demonstrated how translation positioned the narrative structure of media events and their internal dynamic, how these dynamics were reconfigured through recontextualization, how participants were repositioned and how the competition impacted the further dynamics of the media event.

Keywords: media events, Arab Spring, meaning-making, translation, network, television

Introduction

A growing number of studies have considered the transnational and global dimension of media events (Couldry 2003; Dekavalla 2012; Hepp and Couldry 2010; Jiménez-Martínez 2014; Morgner and Molina 2019; Scannell 1995; Sonnevend 2018). While existing research has considered the role of technologies, global news agencies and social receptiveness of the audience, it has largely neglected the role of language as a mediator in the global dissemination and mediation of these events. For instance, the reporting and coverage of the same event in different countries have been treated as seemingly separate cases, which can thereby be compared to each other. However, this type of well-established comparative media analysis does not consider the role of translation in making news from one world region accessible to another and is, therefore, oblivious to the impact of translation on the transnational making of the media event. Therefore, this study investigated the role of translation in the process of media meaning-making by researching the media coverage of the Arab Spring in different language media ('Russia Today' [RT] and 'Al Jazeera' [AJE]) and in different countries in the Arab world (Egypt and Syria).

Much of the current literature has been inspired by Dayan and Katz's famous publication, 'Media Events' (1992). The authors based their analysis on a range of events from the 1960s to 1980s, including the funeral of John F. Kennedy, the royal wedding of Charles and Diana, the journeys of John Paul II to communist Europe and Anwar el-Sadat to Israel, the Watergate hearings in the US Congress and the Olympic Games. To explain the outstanding quality of these events, the authors used a theoretical vocabulary from anthropology; they described the media events as modern rituals. Rituals are understood as special occasions that are apart from everyday life. They have a ceremonial character, and they embody the values shared by their audience. As a consequence, this focus on the collective sharing and celebration of common values views media events mainly as national events or events of a national community. For instance, the funeral of John F. Kennedy, despite being a global news story, was only discussed by the authors in terms of a national and (in this case) American framework. The media event, as described by Dayan and Katz, relies on such a collective community that shares the same values, and Dayan and Katz restricted their analysis largely to national communities.

Other researchers who have been inspired by the work of Dayan and Katz may not have applied the idea of media rituals in such a strict sense, but they have continued to use the idea of media events and their relationship to values, with two methodological consequences. Firstly, transnational or global media events have been broken down by comparing global events in terms of their national coverage. These studies have often used a quantitative content analysis methodology that aims to work out national differences in the coverage of media events. Secondly, these studies have tended to analyze transitional and global media events through an assumed sharedness of collective values, and diverse countries are then unified under larger cultural labels (e.g., media events in the communist world, media events in the Arab world, media events in Latin-America, etc.). The separation of transitional media events, as well as the combination of diverse regions into a unified block, has caused the in-between nature, or the transformation of meaning through the act of crossing from one culture to another, to become somewhat neglected.

An assumption might exist that translation of news messages is a purely technical process, in which one word is simply rendered and replaced with the same word in the other language. However, this ignores the fact that translation is not simply such a transmission; rather, translation is an act of meaning-making (see Alexander 2004; Van

Doerslaer 2010; Aleshinskaya 2016). As Polizzotti (2018) suggested, to translate is to create a new work and not just transform a text from one language to another. Translation is the creative partner in meaning-making.

The focus in this paper is therefore twofold. First, the paper aims to illuminate the role of translation in the making of media events. Second, the paper proposes that a focus on translation will provide a better understanding on processes of intermediation in the transnational and global circulation of media messages. The research presented in this paper considered the role of translation in two different English-speaking language channels (RT and AJE) and in two different countries located in the Arab world (Egypt and Syria).

The Arab Spring as a media event: Traditional media and media translation

Mainstream research on the Arab Spring has highlighted the role of social media (Ali and Fahmy 2013; Elghamry 2015; Wolfsfeld et al. 2013; Chorev 2012; Halverson et al. 2013; Robertson 2013). According to Chorev (2012: 121), 'In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of people using the internet increased in the Middle East (1825 per cent) and Africa (2357 per cent)'; therefore, issues concerning coordinating the masses, reaching larger audiences, accessibility and challenging information monopolies have been investigated. Similarly, Burns et al. (2014: 110) added that 'the substantial level of Arabic tweets in the case of #Egypt certainly point[ed] to the fact that Twitter—and, by extension, other online media—did play a role in informing, organizing and reporting protest activities in the country'.

However, growing evidence has shown that this focus on social media, or the vision of an alternative public sphere fostered through social media that would stir the uprisings, likely overestimated the role of social media in shaping the meaning of the Arab Spring. Sakr (2012: 322–323) argued that, though much has been written on social media, how social media interacts with televised coverage has been largely ignored. For instance, how social media feeds are joined by other efforts in constructing or challenging narratives when allied with traditional media. Extensive research by Ali and Fahmy (2013: 62) showed that 'traditional media continue to maintain a strong hold on citizen journalists' comments', and though they are 'no longer the sole influence in setting the agenda', they 'were still the driving force for creating political blogs'. They concluded that, although social media provide a powerful source for news, their immediate effect is that they 'provided a valuable resource for traditional media that had the ability to pick and choose stories that fitted their organizations' routines' (ibid: 67). Likewise, Halverson et al. (2013: 316) agreed with this observation in their research on how narratives were reinforced, created or contested in social media during the Arab Spring, stating, 'The stories of Bouazizi Martyrdom took shape on a range of and by exchange between traditional and new media platforms'.

A further Egypt-specific limitation to approaching this subject from the social media perspective is that the Egyptian government disconnected the internet and mobile phone services "in order to contain and mitigate the uprisings" (OECD 2013: 36). Consequently, the feeds that continued to flood social media websites were communicated by people outside Egypt basing their interpretations of the uprising on mediated messages and narratives the traditional media constructed. This is not to say that social media played no role in the Arab Spring, but, as argued by Sabry (2013: 23), this research accounted for the 'symbiotic relationship between traditional and new media. The dominant choice of social media sources is traditional media, and most circulated entries are written by former or current traditional media journalists' (Ali and Fahmy 2013: 62). Therefore, this research aimed to

show how traditional media narratives shaped the meaning of the Arab Spring as a media event.

Through addressing this process of meaning-making, another issue often neglected in existing studies on the Arab Spring must also be addressed. A tendency exists to conflate the Arab Spring with the Arab world, as if the unified nature of this media event resulted from an underlying, unified cultural world (i.e., the 'Arab world'). However, in the case of transnational and global media events, processes of recontextualization are expected, as the name suggests. Like the Arab Spring, these events do not take place in a culturally homogenous space. The Arab world includes many nations, cultures and languages, but through the events and by establishing links and connections across borders, diverse 'Arab Springs' became the Arab Spring. As mentioned above, Dayan and Katz's model of media events addresses media events from a monocontextual perspective of a unified, underlying culture. However, this study opted to highlight the polycontextual structures of this media event. As a consequence, this research aimed to illuminate the role of translation as an intermediary in the making of transnational and global media events and in the making of Arab Springs into an Arab Spring.

Rather than approaching translation as a technical or linguistic act, this research argued that translation is concerned with the contextual dimension and re-embeddedness of meanings when a text is transferred across linguistic and cultural barriers. Translation, therefore, transforms and shapes meaning in the host language's socio-cultural and linguistic systems. Media translation and narratives of conflicts such as the Arab Spring highlight the advantages of such an approach; these narratives continuously evolve over relatively extended periods. In this case, the meaning of one text is impacted by a series of other texts circulating within the same discourse, and one text establishes a link with other discourse(s) and importing narratives. Therefore, the focus is on such linguistic networks and narratives 'in the sense that media messages [...] refer to other media messages' (Thompson 1995: 110).

Creating a connection with other discourses may come in the form of importing narratives through retelling past narratives or presenting external voices to restrict or redirect the interpretation of the currently unfolding event. The diversity of the events of the Arab Spring and the number of the voices narrating them, as well as the cultural and political diversity of the region and the fact that they were extensively covered in international news channels for global audiences, made this global media event an excellent opportunity to test, expand and revisit theories of modes of communication and translations. Mediating the Arab Spring events without translators would not have been possible, as these events were covered in English. Since participants narrated the story differently, legitimising their claims in the process, the conflict had multiple interpretations. Channels, on the other hand, captured an interpretation to be translated and transferred, leading to empowering one narrative that usually elaborated the perspective of a participant in the conflict, including the speakers of the translated speeches. Therefore, this research applied Morgner's (2016 2017) network theory of media events and addressed how media texts refer to other media texts from the perspective of media translation and narratives in meaning-making.

Case selection and methodology

Selection of countries

The focus on the Arab Spring of 2011, inaugurated in Tunisia on 14 January 2011 by the ousting of the Ben Ali regime, in general and the uprisings in Syria and Egypt in particular was motivated by the following reasons. The Arab Spring events occurred in 19 out of 22 League of Arab States members (the Arab League) and motivated unrest ranging from protests to militant actions in Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa (Gerbaudo 2013: 87). The most notable uprisings took place in the Arab countries because they brought about major political and social changes; this allowed for testing the study hypotheses in relationship to reconfiguring the narrative's dynamics. Of the most notable outcomes of the Arab Spring are the civil wars in two countries (Libya and Syria) and the government being overthrown in four countries (Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia), in two of which the governments were overthrown twice (Egypt and Yemen). Consequently, the selection of countries was narrowed down to a country where a civil war erupted and a country where the government was overthrown multiple times.

Egypt is the biggest Arab country in terms of population, with 97,041,072 people (CIA 2017a), over twice as many as the second most-populated Arab country, Algeria, which has 40,969,443 people (CIA 2017b). Egypt's population counts for almost one-quarter of the combined population of the 22 countries in the Arab League. It is also the most politically influential country in the Arab world. It founded the Arab League and has been hosting the league's headquarters since its formation in Cairo on 22 March 1945. Since its formation, the Arab League has had eight secretary generals, seven of whom have been Egyptians. The uprising in Egypt received significant international attention in the media. Guzman (2016: 81) noted, 'The event received more coverage in the United States than any other international news story from 2007 to early 2011'.

Additionally, research on the Arab Spring media representation must consider the Muslim Brotherhood as an influential participant. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928, six years after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Although the brotherhood is banned in most Arab countries, including Egypt, it played a major role in the uprising and managed to seize power in Egypt following the fall of Mubarak's government. However, it did not remain in power for long, as the Egyptian military overthrew Mohamed Morsi in a coup on 3 July 2013. This military intervention adds to the significance of the Egyptian uprising in comparison to other Arab Spring uprisings (Al-Zo'by and Başkan 2015).

Although the Muslim Brotherhood appeared in representations of other uprisings, such as those in Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, it was absent from the Syrian uprising. It has been banned in Syria since 1980. In 1982, the Hama Massacre killed an estimated 5,000 to 25,000 people (Kahf 2001: 229), effectively removing the Muslim Brotherhood from Syria. In addition to the difference stemming from the absence of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian conflict was chosen for this study because it suffered the highest casualties, with 470,000 killed as of February 2016. Additionally, 6.1 million people have been internally displaced, and 4.8 million have been externally displaced (see <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria>). The events of the Syrian conflict were also based on the use of chemical weapons against civilians, which if true, constituted a war crime. Unlike Egypt's uprising, of which the impact on other countries was relatively limited, the uprising in Syria had a global impact, which resulted in raising the level of Need for Orientation (NFO) for global audiences. NFO is a key factor in empowering disciplinary narratives and the

emergence of metanarratives. This mainly came in three forms: the numerous calls for UN intervention, which if not taken, would encourage other dictators around the world to engage in similar hostile activities; the refugee crisis; and the rise of the terrorist organisation ISIS, which has been carrying out attacks around the world. The Syrian uprising also showed political conflict and proxy war between the regional powers of Iran and Saudi Arabia, who supported the government and the opposition, respectively (Berti and Guzansky 2014: 26–27). For narratives, this meant the injection of foreign voices narrating the events from their perspectives.

Selection of media channels

This research selected two prime television channels, the Qatari state-funded AJE and the Russian state-owned RT. Existing research on these two channels has shown that AJE has been relatively more investigated, particularly by scholars researching frames in comparison to other channels covering the Arab Spring. This trend remained the same before and during the unfolding events of the uprisings. AJE ‘was founded in 1996 under the auspices of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa’ (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 53), but it gained wider international audience in 2001 ‘with its exclusive coverage of the war in Afghanistan’ (ibid. 54). According to Johnson and Fahmy (2010), AJE holds an extremely high ranking for credibility, surpassing that of CNN and BBC. Similar observations were made by Arab viewers before and during the events. According to Miles (2005: 277), ‘an Arab survey covering several countries carried out by the UAE’s University of Sharjah, found Al-Jazeera the most credible out of all the Arab news channels during the [second Gulf War]’. During the Arab Spring, AJE continued to be seen by Arab audiences as the most credible source of information, and it enjoyed the highest rates of viewers (Bosio 2013: 335). In June 2013, AJE published results from the research agencies of IPSOS and SIGMA, who stated that AJE was ‘the most-watched news channel across the Middle East and North Africa’ and that it ‘has more viewership than all other pan-Arab news channels combined’ (Al Jazeera 2013). RT’s official website (2019) also cites IPSOS’ latest survey which states that its audience is now 100 million weekly. The actively growing demand for RT could be attributed to its alternative narrative that is often anti-Western (Yablokov 2015).

RT and AJE were chosen not only because they are the most viewed channels in the Middle East, but also because their broadcasts show the most distinction from each other. RT stated that it ‘acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events’ (see <https://www.rt.com/about-us/>). On the other hand, AJE provides a ‘voice for the voiceless’ (Seib 2012: 1).

Data collection and sampling

Access to the broadcasts could be obtained via the Sounds and Moving Images Archive at the British Library. The database is accessible for registered readers inside the rare collection section, whereas taking stills, transcripts and videos is not permitted due to copyright restrictions. In using the British Library databases, the research focused on the period of 25 January to 11 February 2011 for RT’s and AJE’s coverage of the Egyptian uprising, sometimes referred to as the January 25 Revolution, which marked the beginning of the uprising. The uprising ended with the stepdown of the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, on 11 February 2011. The research also focused on the period of 21 August to 10 September 2013 of the Syrian uprising to investigate the coverage of the alleged chemical attack, which became a global media event resulting in numerous UN calls for sanctions. The Sounds and

Moving Images Archive hosted at the British Library offers the recorded coverages of major news channels, including AJE and RT.

The recorded broadcasts varied in length and times, sometimes two or three 3 to 8 hour broadcasts per day. There was an apparent difference between RT and AJE (approximately 83 hours for twenty days for AJE on Syria's uprising coverage compared to 51 hours for RT), and they averaged about four hours, fifteen minutes and about three hours, respectively. The sampling process not only focused on what is usually considered to be prime audience viewing time; it considered all that was recorded by the British Library during the periods on which this research focused. This was to understand how the meanings were made, how messages were translated and how this impacted the evolution of media meaning over time. As in the nature of such events, the unfolding events could have relatively sudden shifts that were aired accordingly. However, the reports' purposes varied; some reports aimed to reinterpret the events, while others aimed to redefine the participants and some aimed to identify with the audience.

Critical discourse analysis and translation

According to Schäffner (2008), whose research dedicated much focus on translation and politics, whereby politics is usually mediated and disseminated by mass media,

The mass media play a fundamental role in mediating between politicians and the public; nevertheless, media translation of political communication is rarely explicit; it remains invisible, filtering, transforming and reformulating speech without acknowledging the process involved. (Schäffner 2008: 3)

Similarly, Baker (2013: 23) added that translation 'does not mediate cultural encounters that exist outside the act of translation but rather participates in producing these encounters'. In this sense, translation and media coverage share similarities. Baker (ibid. 24) noted that translation 'does not reproduce texts but constructs realities, and it does so by intervening in the process of narration and renarration that constitute all encounters, and that essentially construct the world for us'.

From a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, the general understanding of meaning is that meanings are the creation of social systems and, since social systems are interpretable, meanings are changeable (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). This creates the possibility to reconfigure the dynamics of the narrative through repositioning the participants regarding their relationship to each other and the events. For Fairclough (1991: 164), discourses from this sense 'are semiotic ways of constructing aspects of the world (physical, social, mental) which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors'. Adopting this take on how media represents these elements and links them to the protests' causes contributes to examining both 'hegemony' and 'antagonism', where hegemony is understood to refer to 'situations where particular discourses obtain social dominance' (Carpentier 2017: 345) and to efforts taken to maintain such dominance, such as promoting the narratives of the status quo. On the other hand, antagonism refers to efforts to challenge existing narratives' dynamics that sustained the status quo preceding the inception of the uprisings. Antagonisms 'attempt to destabilise the "other" identity but desperately need that very "other" as a constitutive outside to stabilise the proper identity' (ibid. 346). Therefore, such approaches aid analysis of processes of meaning-making. Since narratives, as explained above, argue that the meanings are not created in separate texts, they reject the idea that meanings are limited to the use of

language; otherwise, the meanings would be confined within one text and would have relatively fewer interpretations that rarely differ to the extent of conflicts.

Furthermore, Fairclough (2001, p.118) observed that hearers/readers bring to the interpretation their own background and preconceived understandings. The translators themselves are hearers/readers and the way they interpret events impacts how they translate them. In the same manner, how this assumption applies to the translator-reader, it applies to the media coverage and audiences particularly events that were covered in a different language like the case in this study. Journalists, like translators, might bring to their interpretations their preconceived assumptions and dispositions. The audiences bring the same to their interpretations of the broadcasts as the case in reading translated texts. Based on this, a question rises of how the events were framed, narrated, and translated (mediated) to influence the outcomes of their interpretations.

This framework is applied within a context of CDA. Coffin (2001: 99) defined CDA as 'an approach to language analysis which concerns itself with issues of language, power and ideology'. As a result, language, from this perspective, is understood as a form of social practice rather than an abstract system of linguistic material (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Coffin 2001; Van Dijk 2001). As Mason (2009: 86) argued, discourse, from this view, holds close ties to the terms 'ideology' and 'personal narrative' when the latter is defined as 'the set of beliefs and values which inform an individual's or institution's view of the world and assist their interpretations of events, facts and other aspects of experience'. This research accepted the assumptions this approach offers; however, the approach's focus was altered in this research to investigate how the meanings were created rather than assess the enactment of ideologies in given texts. In other words, this study aimed to apply the above-mentioned notions on networked media narrative construction in the pursuit of how meanings are made in media coverage that would render speech acts as perceived differently, regardless of how they were translated. These are notions that can be further investigated in light of CDA, for the episodes including the translations were impacted by other episodes.

Findings

Translation and meaning-making

In this section, the findings will be presented with two particular examples that consider the role of translation in the meaning-making of this event. The first example considers the role of translation within the Arab world and focuses on the speeches of famous figures during the Arab Spring. The contextualization of certain statements in the speeches that might alter the meaning originally intended by the speaker was considered within this constructed political discourse. This is further highlighted from the perspective of narrative evolution. It has been argued that 'news stories about political conflicts are a form of social construction, in which some frames are more likely than others to serve as the underlying theme of news stories' (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013: 54). From viewing translation as a mediation, Cronin (2006: 63) argued that 'the complexity of translation does not lie only in the process of translating the message but in the situation in which, in late modernity, translators as mediators can find themselves'. Thus, the question is directing the stories to establish links to intended discourses in a variety of discourses that can lend further meanings to the discourse.

The second example considers the impact of external narratives from events outside of the Arab world and considers the cases of international organisations and other media channels. The focus is on the translation and integration of these external events in shaping the internal dynamic of the Arab Spring, particularly how these translations were used to strengthen notions of 'us versus them'. Furthermore, both RT and AJE expanded the political meaning of the uprising to include foreign countries, which in turn, added voices and created audiences.

Mohamed ElBaradei: Representation of RT and AJE in Egypt

The following example uses the representation of Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian law scholar and diplomat who was a vocal speaker during the Arab Spring and later served as Vice-President of Egypt on an interim, in RT and AJE coverages in Egypt to provide an empirical example how translation plays a crucial role in framing different conflict parties. The case of ElBaradei is used here, because his representation sheds light on the narrative assessment of the same person, but from different translational perspective and media agenda. ElBaradei's case is chosen, because for the purpose of analysis the narrative logic, it can be shown how the representations in AJE and RT engage in a longer series of counterarguments through which the networked structure of the media event unfolds.

The first to make mention of ElBaradei was AJE. RT's representation, therefore, may have opted to engage a counter-argument to maintain the credibility of its sources, since ElBaradei was represented positively and extensively by AJE. Baker (2010: 29) stated that 'a narrative can be tested with respect to the "facts" it might downplay or ignore, the counter-arguments it chooses not to engage with, and so forth'. RT opted to discredit ElBaradei, because according to AJE, he gave legitimacy to the uprising. The introduction of a seemingly credible voice to a different narrative would indirectly weaken the narrative RT intended to maintain; otherwise, they would not have chosen to mention ElBaradei since he was, in RT's view, unknown. These could be the reasons why RT opted to engage this counter-argument, which exemplified the feature of particularity. Engaging with this counter-argument was vital for the meanings RT intended to construct, because they could not promote a particular interpretation contested by a set of narratives before discrediting the conflicting voices.

RT's and AJE's different representations of ElBaradei ranged from different points of emphasis to contradictions. This was expected because, unlike RT, ElBaradei was in favour of the uprising. In the first week, both channels attempted to represent him in light of what other protesters thought of him. When ElBaradei made his first appearance at Tahrir Square, where the majority of protesters were amassed, RT said, 'Very few Egyptians know ElBaradei' (RT 31/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5207>), while AJE reported that 'the vast majority welcomed him' (AJE 30/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>). However, RT represented him in a political frame. This was important; the framing of speeches translated in the sections below was influenced by this aspect. Without a mediator, it was unlikely the stories would establish links to the political discourses represented by RT.

AJE identified ElBaradei on the first day of the uprising as a 'leading opposition figure in Egypt who previously predicted what he called an explosion in Egypt' (AJE 25/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5056>). AJE also reported that he based his prediction on the fact that the government was repressing an entire nation, maintaining martial law for the past 29 years, rigging elections, suffering a poor economy and facing social fragmentation (AJE 25/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5056>). This was in line with the narrative AJE intended to construct, including calling protesters pro-democracy because they implied that Mubarak had rigged the elections. In the first and second days of the unfolding events, the meaning AJE intended to create was one of legitimacy, to portray the protesters' actions as justified, in which case the police crackdown was not. This may have motivated a positive representation of ElBaradei, because adding his voice would be valuable to the constructing narrative, unlike for RT. AJE added, 'The vast majority welcomed him not only because it gives them more credibility and legitimacy, but also some sort of protection' (AJE 30/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>).

AJE also reported that ElBaradei 'knows everyone supports him, and he is seen as a national figure. Egyptians are proud of him, and he was welcomed by thousands' (AJE 30/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>). AJE provided a brief history of ElBaradei, mentioning he was a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2005 (AJE 30/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>), supported by Amr Khaled, who saw him as respectful and sincere, with the ability to lead the uprising (AJE 30/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>). This, in turn, articulated the narrativity feature of normativeness, in the sense that it delivered currency to this particular narrative through presenting a public figure who added his voice in favour. This voice was deemed less favourable by RT and therefore was omitted, which illustrated the feature of selective appropriation.

These actions can also be seen from frames in narratives perspective, or, more specifically, frames of ambiguity and space. Since this participant was unfavourable to their narrative, RT intended to reduce the level of NFO to ElBaradei, in which case stories identifying with him or seeing the events from his perspective were not favourable. This came in an attempt to construct the meaning that he was backed by the US, which, for RT, amounted to a form of American interference in Egypt's sovereignty. Frames of space showed how ElBaradei was restricted to a position that did not allow him to represent the protesters, since for them he was unknown and unwelcome to the Egyptians, as the following paragraph illustrates.

AJE intended to create the opposite meaning. In his investigation of BBC, CNN and AJE, Barkho (2010: 103–104) observed similar actions and arguments from the social implications perspective: 'The presence of what is ostensibly viewed as background information particularly in BBC and CNN stories gives way to pass evaluative comments by publicly

embracing one side of the conflict and vilifying the other'. Though AJE's background on ElBaradei did not go so far as to vilify the opposed participant, at least not explicitly, it did seem to side with him; this enabled AJE to evaluate ElBaradei positively by saying he was a respectful and sincere Nobel Peace Prize winner (AJE 30-01-2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5187>). It could be argued that identifying one party in the conflict as sincere and respectful might imply the other is not, for a sincere person would not be in favour of an illegitimate uprising. Such evaluation is expected to impact the overall meaning and the classification of who the protesters are. By presenting ElBaradei as the leader of the protests, AJE refuted arguments that the protesters were uneducated, violent looters whose interests served instability.

Unlike AJE's representation, which seemed to be more related to the social aspect of the uprising, RT's representation of ElBaradei was themed with political considerations. RT reported, 'ElBaradei is a secular man, and he will be a choice that very much will be supported by the US and other Western powers' (RT 31/01/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5207>). RT also added the following day that 'he is a figure who earned his reputation on the international stage. But in Egypt, people say he has the backing of US and Western powers, and this does not present him in a particularly good light because they [Egyptians] say he has been painted with the same brush that paints Mubarak' (RT 01/02/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5232>). A meaning that could be derived from this representation is that nothing would change.

RT also added, 'He appealed to the Muslim Brotherhood, and they have given him their backing' (RT 01/02/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5232>). The significance of emphasizing the relationship between ElBaradei and the Muslim Brotherhood was more evident when considering RT's representation of the Brotherhood, summarized in the following section as an organisation banned for its extreme views. RT then added, 'ElBaradei's belated attempt to getting on the opposition might be too late', and 'he is part of the international crisis group with close ties to Western interests' (RT 01/02/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5232>). RT concluded, 'The US allegiance is divided between the current president and the would-be challenger', for that is the reason 'the American media has built up ElBaradei' (RT 01/02/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5232>). RT then hypothesized that 'Egyptians do not like him; they only support him because they hate Mubarak' (RT 01/02/2011, <http://videosever.bl.uk/5232>).

Overall, the narratives remained public at this stage, for they were concerned with the (il)legitimacy of the uprising. However, attempts to evolve distinct narratives were noted from both channels. For RT, these attempts came in the form of discrediting potentially influential voices who were unfavourable to their narrative. AJE further attempted to support the meaning that the uprising was legitimate by presenting two influential figures and positively representing them. Political and social frames were observed due to the points the channels (RT and AJE) attempted to emphasize.

Since RT attempted to identify ElBaradei with the Muslim Brotherhood, the representations of this organisation by RT and AJE must be addressed. AJE made no mention of ElBaradei's backing by the Muslim Brotherhood at that stage in the media coverage. This could be explained through the narrativity feature of temporality, which means that 'the elements of a narrative are always placed in *some* sequence, and that order in which they are placed carries meaning' (Baker 2006: 50–51, emphasis in original). Unlike RT, AJE opted not to mention the relationship between the Brotherhood and ElBaradei until after RT challenged

the existing narrative of the Muslim Brotherhood as an organisation banned for its extreme views.

Translations of ‘us versus them’ in the Syrian conflict

Another important part in the unfolding of this media event concerns meaning-making through the import of external narratives. The import of ‘the others’ (Kostarella 2007: 23) is a key narrative strategy in the emergence of narratives. This is because a narrative ‘is based on a specific system of values’ (Kostarella 2007: 25). This follows that the different values utilised in the constructed narrative would usher the different contexts in which events come to be situated. In this instance, the features of narrativity and assessment correlate with each other and must be addressed as such. Since they will be promoted in a different context, mediating stories must consider reframing on both a story and narrative level; frames are expected to have different impacts in different contexts, perhaps resulting in further conflict.

For example, RT added a new meaning to the conflict with their daily broadcast following Walid Al Mualem’s¹ speech delivered on August 27. The shift in meaning-making was motivated by UN’s report of finding traces of chemical weapons. On August 28, RT reported that ‘evidence of chemical weapons attack is found, but no evidence the government had used it’. They were critical of the results of this investigation, saying, ‘Fog of war: legacy of lies clouds Western push to bomb Damascus’, adding that Western powers used ‘lies in Iraq before’, ‘supplied the opposition with chemical weapons’, and ‘fabricated lies to invade, while the purpose is for economic and strategic decisions’ (RT 28-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35667>). These statements signalled significant shifts in meanings and frames.

The emphasis was shifted to the global economy through RT’s reporting on potential ‘global financial damage’, stating that oil prices ascended to their highest level since 2011, threatening global reserves (RT 28-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35667>). If they rose to USD \$150 per barrel, RT threatened, such a level could have a ‘disastrous impact on the already challenged global economy’ (RT 28-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35667>). Furthermore, ‘Turkey’s economy took a beating’; ‘investors are pulling their cash from the markets’, and ‘most worryingly, this all happened before the attack even began’ (RT 28-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35667>). RT concluded its August 28 broadcast, ‘So most likely, more bad news if it indeed goes ahead’ (RT 28-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35667>). This was followed by a brief report on the continuing rise in numbers of victims in the sectarian conflict in Iraq over the previous four years, which, as RT portrayed it, was the result of the US-led military intervention.

This shift in emphasis showed efforts to relate different audiences to the conflict. In doing so, RT imported external narratives and recontextualised the translations in economic and political frames, with humanitarian consequences. For AJE, the narrative needed to be situated in humanitarian frames with consequences of an economic and political nature (Table 1).

Table 1. RT report, 28 August 2013

Killed	4109	4147	4575	4903 (so far)
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013

¹ Deputy Prime Minister of Syria and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In response to Al Mualem's speech on 27 August 2013, in which he stressed that the way to solve the conflict was through the UN security council, AJE reported that the UN's efforts would be futile because the council was 'high-jacked' by Russia and China, who would use their powers of veto (AJE 27-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35642>). Thus, AJE restricted the interpretation of the narrative to humanitarian frames rather than political frames. Additionally, Al Mualem also stressed the fact that the UN inspection team did not finish their investigations, and thus far, there was no evidence that chemical weapons were used. If they were, then the opposition forces were to blame. AJE tried to divert the emphasis in their broadcast on the same day to say that the question was not whether the weapons were used or whether the regime was to blame. Instead, the question was what the appropriate response should be. On the other hand, RT created a different meaning by reporting that 'intervention without UN mandate is a very grave violation of international law' and an intervention 'risks repeating past mistakes'. RT raised the question, 'Who is the world police? The US? NATO? It should be the UNSC' (RT 27-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35620>).

Another meaning that AJE tried to construct was the government's responsibility (i.e., that the government was to blame, even if the opposition forces were the ones who launched the rockets). AJE constructed this meaning by providing the following argument: whether the government or the opposition forces used the weapons, the outcome remained the same for the people who were killed. If, in fact, the government launched an attack, then it was a war crime. If the opposition was to blame, then the government was incapable of protecting its citizens. Possibly, this was to divert attention from who committed this war crime to what should be done about it. Or, its purpose may have been addressing the counter-argument that portrayed the opposition as responsible. Rather, AJE attempted to restrict the narrative that stated the opposition was responsible, as well as the political frames of the public narrative. Instead, the disciplinary and metanarratives were based on humanitarian frames situated at the centre of the constructing narrative.

However, this narrative could also be seen as an attempt to discredit Al Mualem's speech. If chemical weapons were used, according to him, then the opposition forces were to blame. AJE focused on whether to launch a military airstrike without UN consent because, as AJE portrayed, UN efforts were futile due to the Russian and Chinese veto. These messages signalled efforts to discredit participants and voices that were not in line with the narrative the channel intended to construct, and these different translations determined how participants in the conflict were presented, thus impacting the unfolding of the media event. Both RT and AJE implemented this strategy as a tool to present opposing voices in a different capacity.

In his speech, Al Mualem was critical of John Kerry and the US, stating that the US accused the Syrian regime despite a lack of evidence. As a popular political figure, John Kerry posed a challenge for RT's narrative. Therefore, RT supported Al Mualem by attempting to discredit Kerry as a leading voice of the counter-argument. RT reported that John Kerry was a Vietnam veteran and that 'five decades ago, America used Agent Orange and uranium shell-shock' and 'twenty million gallons of chemical weapons', which had affected 'three million people spanning three generations' RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35700>). RT then reported this as the double standard of the US, saying, 'It is quick to blame others for things it does itself, the moral and political hypocrisy of Washington' (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35700>). Moreover, RT discussed 'America's own murky past', claiming it used uranium in Iraq. In their second broadcast of the same day, RT added, 'Many

children [were] born with mutilations, without eyes or without limbs’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). This was in line with the previously discussed political frame with humanitarian consequences (Figure 2).

In some cases, a channel might choose not to engage counter-arguments, instead undergoing selective appropriation and material coherence from narrative assessments. However, RT seems to have chosen to engage the counter-argument for two reasons: to discredit main opposing voices and to extend their narrative to include meanings of political conflict. Additionally, engaging the counter-argument allowed RT to recall past metanarratives. This, in turn, was a step toward evolving local narratives by importing external political narratives empowered with humanitarian frames, thus widening the scope of audiences in the process.

RT used a form of media memory to support this newly constructed meaning that was based on their speculations. RT looked ‘back at previous military interventions that followed that route’ such as the ‘NATO bombing of former Yugoslavia’, portraying it as a ‘possible blueprint for the intervention in Syria’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). It touted this report as a ‘bleak record of US intervention posing a gruesome fate for Syrians’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). RT claimed that none of the participating NATO states offered a legal justification for their actions. It also said that their intervention was labelled ‘humanitarian intervention’, and with the help of a ‘very one-sided’ media campaign, it was ‘engraved in the public memory, especially in the West, as a success story’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). According to that report, ‘little has been reported that the humanitarian intervention turned into a humanitarian catastrophe on the ground’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). In fact, RT stated that what some called a success was ‘two months of bombings. Thousands of people are dead as a result, both Serbs and Kosovo Albanians; after 78 days of NATO bombings, Serb forces withdrew from Kosovo. There was an ethnic cleansing of nearly a quarter of a million Serbs and other minorities from Kosovo’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). RT also claimed that ‘allied forces used cluster bombs and attacked civilian infrastructure, including power plants, bridges, factories, the HQ of Serb radio and television and even the Chinese embassy, and yet, despite all the destruction and casualties, Washington saw it as a victory’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>). Possibly, RT did not emphasize the phrase ‘humanitarian intervention’, not only to discredit the US, but also as a response to its rival channel, AJE. AJE argued that, without a UN mandate, the US did not have a legal right to attack another country unless it was for humanitarian intervention. RT argued that previous American-led humanitarian interventions had become ‘humanitarian catastrophe[s]’ (RT 29-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35706>).

Undermining participants included labelling and classifying them as terrorists. AJE’s undermining of Russia included messages saying Russians used their veto to protect a nation accused of committing war crimes. RT undermined the US, including messages related to bleak records of the US-led military interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Vietnam. As summarised in the following table (see Table 2).

Table 2. AJE and RT’s attempts to undermine participants (Syria)

(N = 298)	AJE		RT		Total		Chi-square (p-value)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Government	86	60.99	0	0	86	28.86	86

							($p < 0.001$)
Opposition	0	0	53	33.76	53	17.79	50.15 ($p < 0.001$)
Russia	21	14.89	0	0	21	7.05	23.38 ($p < 0.001$)
US and allies	0	0	55	35.03	55	18.46	52.04 ($p < 0.001$)
US and Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
US and government	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
US and opposition	0	0	43	27.39	43	14.43	40.69 ($p < 0.001$)
Russia and government	30	21.28	0	0	30	10.07	33.40 ($p < 0.001$)
Russia and opposition	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
Undetermined	4	2.84	6	3.82	10	3.36	0.84 (0.64312273)
Total	141	100.0	157	100.0	298	100.0	

$\chi^2 = 286.5245$; $df = 9$; $\chi^2/df = 31.8360556$; Cramer's $V = 0.326852262028488$

While RT attempted to discredit the US, the primary voice of its counter-argument, AJE attempted to discredit Russia, the leading voice for its counter-argument. AJE reported that Russia was shielding a government accused of war crimes. They also added that, though Russia urged the opposition forces to give access to the UN inspectors, 'the Syrian government still refuses access to UN inspectors' (AJE 24-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35593>). AJE also portrayed Russia as unwilling to accept any evidence, regardless of the circumstances (i.e., Russia ignored the evidence). This interpretation suggested that there was no need for the investigations, and this allowed AJE to divert attention back to aspects of the events that best served AJE's narratives. These narratives reported that Russia and China 'are going to protect the Assad regime no matter what it does, no matter what evidence is produced, they are going to say it is inconclusive, action is not justified' (AJE 27-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35642>). AJE portrayed Russia as ignoring facts, stating, 'The US has access to satellite photography, human resources, samples from the areas that were attacked' (AJE 27-08-2013, <http://videosever.bl.uk/record/35642>). Possibly, this came as a response to RT's coverage, which used a form of media memory to show how the US invaded Iraq, which shares borders with Syria, based on intelligence reports that later turned out to be false.

Conclusion and Discussion

Research on transnational and global media events has ignored the role of translation as a possible field of media research for too long (Bassnett 2014: 134). The importance of translation in media studies is considerable, due to 'the demand for international news and the existence of large international news agencies and media companies' (ibid. 134). Following the cultural turn in translation studies, translation approaches shifted from word-for-word translations to sense-for-sense translations, viewing text as a unit. However, the

approaches did not advance beyond this (Munday 2012: 192). Translation studies did not have a definition for sense-for-sense translation, and this may have inhibited translation studies investigating interlinked, important fields (Melby and Foster 2010).

Narrative theory proposes context-for-context translation to overcome one-sided use of textual analysis in examining separated instances and single pictures (i.e., the question of intertextuality and context in meaning-making). The present study aimed to address this issue by elucidating how participants were (re)positioned and events were (re)situated in different contexts through the translation of media events' networked narratives. Fairclough's approach in combination with CDA proved to be a useful methodology for such a case. The research used the case of Mohamed ElBaradei to demonstrate such narrative repositionings. Future research in this area could look at a number of other key individuals and the translation and narrative network in relation to their speeches, like Muhammad Mubarak or Mohamed Morsi.

Translation studies would benefit from further research on the impact of intertextuality on translations. One of the main curiosities this study found was that the abstract meanings that were made dynamic were utilized in reshaping and transforming the narratives. These meanings were crucial for constructing, contesting or maintaining narratives on higher or more broadly shared levels. Through translation, they were reordered and disseminated in the socio-cultural system of the Translation Studies, highlighting the role of translation in enculturation and acculturation (Pym 2012: 97). Since they played a role in enculturation and acculturation, the produced translations interacted with existing ontological narratives, highlighting the role of intertextuality. However, some aspects utilized particular interpretations existing in the TL during the mediation process. Drawing on existing narratives in the TL might have contested the ontological narratives and would therefore be rejected or degraded; this calls instead for context-for-context translation.

Negating the aspects of reality of ontological narratives impacted the communication process and the interlinked translations, and approaching translation as intercultural mediation and communication enriches the understanding of the Arab world and Arab Spring. Such an approach prompted revisiting the translations of the Beirut39 project organized by the Hay Festival (Büchler and Guthrie 2011: 27). The Beirut39 project brought together '39 of the most interesting writers of the Arab heritage under 39 years of age in an anthology' (ibid. 41). The writers, who were from eighteen different countries and were speakers of the same language, communicated different interpretations and prioritized different aspects of reality, which were elaborated explicitly or implicitly. Situating them in the same Arab narrative negated the individuality of the texts; instead, these texts were translated as one coherent narrative. Similarly, the Arab world includes many nations, cultures and languages, but through the events and by establishing links and connections across borders, diverse Arab Springs became the Arab Spring. Translation studies would benefit from such observations for context-for-context translation and translation as re-narration.

The study showed how narratives that utilized values and beliefs could be contested by surfacing inconsistencies or establishing links to other discourses that would lend meanings sufficient either to reinforce or break down the established interpretations and to facilitate seeking alternatives. Therefore, events were resituated in different contexts rather than by contesting the values and beliefs, and these contexts differed from Egypt to Syria. The difference in the disciplinary and metanarratives was traced back to ontological narratives, while its impact reached disciplinary and metanarratives. The metanarratives

invoked reinterpretations guided by different frames and patterns that resulted in reevaluating reality and, by extension, impacted the translations.

The study also showed that television should not be ignored as an influential medium. Although social media will have played a role in the Arab Spring, television was in many cases are sources debated and contested in such alternative forums. Furthermore, this process opens up a framework to discuss the role of Arab speaking satellite TV with a view to responding to events and news in Arab speaking diasporas around the world (see Miladi et al. 2017, Roald 2017, Ouassini 2020). While the such for such channels is made in Arabic, it is made for an audience that tends to be minority group in an otherwise different cultural setting. Thus, in a similar way the question of translation arises. How to these channels, of which not all are actually owned by people from the Arab world, cater for their audience. How they ensure that events from afar are repositioned and presented in narrative to which they can related? Responding to such questions would add to the complexity of the global networking of such events, but also raise questions on the process of meaning-making via global satellite television. This remains to be a project for future research.

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