

**THE VISUAL POLITICS OF
LEGITIMATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE:
THE CASES OF THE BRITISH ARMY AND
THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION**

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Abstract

In the discipline of International Relations, scholars have recently drawn attention to how political actors use narratives to claim legitimacy for themselves, their actions, and their use of force. Whilst such work provides welcome insights, there has been little attention given to how these narratives are often told through visual media on digital social media sites. In light of this, this thesis argues that visual media are central to how political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force in the digital age. Theoretically informed by work on aesthetics, narrative, and visual global politics, this thesis provides an analytical framework for studying the visual politics of legitimation. This is then explored through two case studies of the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. In each case study I draw upon multiple methods to analyse the narrative and visual content of each actor's official Facebook Page, as well as the contexts of media production and audience reception. This thesis contributes to studies of global politics by illustrating how each actor uses visual media to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and thereby provides the first empirical analysis of the visual politics of legitimation.

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Introduction

Who are we who write about the world in conflict? How dare we?

(Chan, 2010, p.179)

These questions have troubled me since I first read them as a third year undergraduate. Who am I - as a white, 'Western', and relatively well-off male - to be writing about war? How dare I? I have never heard the crack-thump of bullets landing nearby, and I have never lost friends or family to conflict. The closest I've been to a warzone is about 30,000 feet: flying over Iraq, en route to India for a two-week study trip during my Masters degree. For me, war has always taken place at a distance in countries far away, affecting people whose names, faces, and cultures I do not know. Despite this physical distance from conflict, the spectre of war has never been too far away. In my first year of high school I visited the British Army's Catterick garrison. I sat in a tank, held a rifle and flew down a zip wire; I learnt about the excitement of war. A year later I visited the battlefields of Belgium, laid a wreath in Ypres, and learnt about the horrors of war. In September of that year I saw a plane fly into the World Trade Centre live on television.

During the next decade I grew up watching the 'war on terror' in news reports on television, and increasingly as the decade went on, over the Internet. I watched television shows like *24* every week with my parents, I played computer games such as *Counter-Strike*, and I saw pictures of torture in Abu Gharib on the Internet. These experiences of war are, of course, in a different realm to those of wounded veterans, displaced peoples, or dead civilians. However, they are symptomatic of how many

people - fortunate to be distant from the physical realities of conflict - encounter war. In this sense, contemporary war and conflict are mediated as they cannot be understood 'unless one carefully accounts for the role of media in it' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.4). Indeed, it has been argued that visual media¹ are vital to the conduct of war (Virilio, 2002, 2009; Butler, 2010; Mirzoeff, 2011), and Judith Butler suggests that visual media 'do not merely reflect on the material conditions of war, but are essential to the perpetually crafted *animus* of that material reality' (Butler, 2010, p.26 emphasis in original). Ultimately, this suggests that visual media warrant attention from scholars of global politics because they are central to the practice of war.

In a more general sense, visual media are important in global politics because they provide a 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière, 2006, p.12) that delimits what is and is not possible. For Jacques Rancière, 'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière, 2006, p.13). Researchers working within the aesthetic turn in the discipline of International Relations share such sentiments, and have argued for further attention to the political significance of representation, aesthetics, and visual media (Bleiker, 2001, 2009; Moore and Shepherd, 2010). Echoing the thoughts of Rancière, Roland Bleiker has recently argued that visual media 'frame what can be seen, thought and said. In doing

¹ Others use the term 'pictures' (Mitchell, 2005a) or 'images' (Mitchell, 1984), and at times, I also use the term 'images' interchangeably with 'visual media'. When I speak of visual media or images, I am referring to media primarily 'designed to be looked at' (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.3) such as photographs and videos. W.J.T Mitchell (1984) discusses other types of images, including mental and verbal, and he also critiques the term 'visual media' (2002; 2005b). However, I use the term 'visual media' as it emphasises the visual element of certain media (such as photography), and this is important when making the argument that studies of legitimation need to account for *visual* politics.

so, they delineate what is and is not politically possible. Expressed in other words: how we visualise the political shapes the very nature of politics' (Bleiker, 2015, p.874). Visual media are therefore a fundamental aspect of global politics² and war.

Scholars have recently noted that 'international relations appear marked by a new visibility' (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.22) and in the context of a 'new media ecology' (Cottle, 2006; Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010) characterised by 'new interactive communication technologies and communicative possibilities' (Cottle, 2006, p.20), understanding the complex and multiple roles of visual media in global politics is of paramount concern. As James Der Derian has recently stated;

If images do, indeed, represent a great new power in world politics, then it is also true that they present a great responsibility... ..not only for how we study, but increasingly for how we must engage with the documentation of world politics through images (2015, p.227).

This lends a response to the questions invoked by Susan Sontag and posed by Stephen Chan at the start of this introduction. As people who encounter war in its visualised, mediated forms, we have a responsibility to understand how our viewing is implicated in the practice of war. Judith Butler suggests that 'if war is to be opposed, we have to understand how popular assent to war is cultivated and maintained' (2010, p.ix), and it is this that leads me to write about the world in conflict. I dare to do so in

² I use the term 'global politics' instead of 'international relations' throughout this thesis as the term global politics stands as 'a form of resistance... ..to the dominant paradigms of mainstream IR... ..it signals a movement beyond the focus on states and power politics to an agential and plural reading of epistemology' (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.309; see also Bleiker, 1997).

hope of a better understanding of war and an opposition to the way that war ‘is thought to be an inevitability, something good, or even a source of moral satisfaction’ (Butler, 2010, p.ix). Consequently, this thesis contributes to studies of global politics by conceptualising visual media as a fundamental site of importance for the legitimisation of war, before then exploring the visual politics of legitimisation in the context of the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (abbreviated to NSC for National Syrian Coalition). This introduction serves to frame the subsequent research project by discussing and setting out my research design. I begin by situating the study in the context of a research agenda that explores legitimisation and the role of visual media in global politics. I then provide an overview of the theoretical and methodological concerns of this thesis, exploring the puzzle and research questions that drive this project, as well as the research methods that have been used. I conclude by outlining the contributions of this thesis, alongside the central arguments and chapter structure of what follows.

The research agenda: Legitimation and visual global politics

Writing in 1919, Max Weber argued that legitimacy is a central - if not *the* central - defining characteristic of politics (Weber, 2008c, pp.156–157), and legitimacy has therefore long been an important concept in the social sciences (Weber, 2008b; Habermas, 1975). More recent scholarship suggests that legitimacy is of principal concern to the discipline of International Relations (Beetham, 1991; Hurd, 1999; Barker, 2001; Bukovansky, 2002; Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007). Indeed, Ian Hurd has recently noted that legitimacy plays an ‘essential role’ (2008, p.2) in global politics, and he suggests that despite the term being commonly used by scholars, ‘very little attention is given to what it means or how it works’ (2008, p.1).

In addressing this, scholars have suggested that legitimacy is an intersubjective social concept, and instead of attempting to assess the legitimacy of actions and actors in global politics, they have studied processes of legitimation (Beetham, 1991; Barker, 2001; Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007; Reus-Smit, 2007). Legitimation is a discursive process that involves actors making legitimacy claims, and research in this area analyses 'how actors go about rendering particular policies legitimate' (Goddard and Krebs, 2015a, pp.6–7). In these studies of legitimation, the overwhelming focus has been on written and spoken language (Reus-Smit, 2007; Bukovansky, 2007; Morris and Wheeler, 2007; Hurd, 2008; Goddard, 2009), and more recently, scholars have begun to focus specifically on the role of narrative in legitimation processes (Goddard and Krebs, 2015; Krebs, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Whilst providing welcome insights, there is more to communication than speech and written text, and this work does not account for the role of visual media in legitimation processes.

This lack of attention to visual media is prevalent across the discipline of International Relations as a whole (Weber, 2008a), and writing in 2007, David Campbell argued that 'the study of world politics has not properly grasped the significance of visual culture' (2007, p.358). Even so, several years on, there is now a burgeoning body of literature that adopts a critical approach to global politics and takes images and visual culture seriously. Scholars working within the tradition of an 'aesthetic turn in international political theory' (Bleiker, 2001) have provided the most insightful engagements with images and their role in global politics. The aesthetic turn has opened up a space for recognising insights gained from the study of art, film, television, literature, painting, photography, architecture, poetry, theatre, and popular

culture, as such aesthetic mediums are ‘an essential aspect of understanding world politics’ (Bleiker, 2009, p.1).

Scholars have contributed to this aesthetic turn by exploring the importance of images and visual cultures of war, conflict, and security. Researchers have studied the role of images in securitization (Williams, 2003; Vuori, 2010; Hansen, 2011; Heck and Schlag, 2013), they have discussed images as weapons of war (Gow and Michalski, 2008; O’Loughlin, 2011; Roger, 2013), and others have focused on images of suffering and their impact on global politics (Campbell, 2004, 2007; Dauphinée, 2007; Bleiker et al., 2013; Hutchison, 2014). Some have explored the critical potential of war (and peace) photography (Campbell, 2003; Möller, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013; Andersen and Möller, 2013), whilst other scholars have provided succinct overviews of how and why images of war and security are important, alongside guidance on how they can be researched (Vuori, 2012; Moore and Farrands, 2013; Andersen et al., 2015). Further engagement with this literature follows in subsequent chapters, and this brief discussion simply serves to highlight that there is a growing body of work that adopts a critical approach to security and places attention on images and visualities of war.

Currently, the literatures on legitimation and visual politics run parallel to each other. On the one hand there is a gap in studies of legitimation because scholars do not account for the role of visual media. On the other hand, the literature on ‘visual global politics’ (Bleiker, 2015) does not provide a satisfactory account of legitimacy or legitimation processes. This thesis addresses these gaps by arguing that legitimation is not just a process contingent on the politics of language and narrative, but it is also

reliant on visual politics. To support this argument I bring the literature on legitimation into conversation with the literature on visual global politics, and I contribute to studies of global politics by providing a theoretically robust account of the visual politics of legitimation. I then analyse this in the context of two case studies.

There are several further gaps in the literature that I also seek to address. Studies on legitimation have focused on the realms of ‘high politics’; in the speeches of statesmen and women, and in debates in the halls of international institutions (Reus-Smit, 2007; Morris and Wheeler, 2007; Bukovansky, 2007; Goddard and Krebs, 2015a). Comparably, studies on visual global politics have often centred around images in print media (Hansen, 2011; Heck and Schlag, 2013; Bleiker et al., 2013; Hutchison, 2014) or on cinema and television screens (Weber, 2008a; Shapiro, 2009; Carver, 2010; Munster and Sylvest, 2015). Neither the work on legitimation, nor on visual global politics has explored legitimation processes or images that appear on digital social media platforms.³ Therefore, I address this gap by studying legitimation processes and images at a site that has so far been underexplored by scholars.

Moreover, much of the work on visual global politics is concerned with sophisticated readings of images as representations, and there is little attention given to the contexts of image production, circulation, and audience interpretation. Consequently, much of the literature on visual global politics is guilty of what Gillian Rose calls a ‘focus on

³ Digital social media platforms are defined as Internet connected sites that enable, encourage and are in fact reliant upon the active participation of users (Mandiberg, 2012, p.1). Digital social media platforms facilitate user interaction through ‘new social and expressive practices for contemporary Internet users’ (Song, 2010, p.269), and include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat.

visibility rather than *visuality*' (Rose, 2014, p.32 emphasis in original). Scholars of visual global politics seem to be more concerned with 'working with what images show, than they are with unpacking the effects of contemporary visualities on the processes of *making* and *interpreting* visual materials' (Rose, 2014, p.31 emphasis added). For several decades now, scholars working within the tradition of cultural and media studies have deemed the sites of image production and interpretation to be as important as the content of visual media (Hall, 2005; Rose, 2012), yet despite this, investigations into all of these sites have been lacking in the visual global politics literature. I address this gap by providing an approach to the visual politics of legitimation that conceives of the contexts of production and reception as being of similar importance to the content of images. This project is informed by the approaches to legitimation and visual global politics discussed above, and I share several theoretical assumptions of this work. I now briefly discuss the research design of this project that contributes to the research agenda concerning legitimation and visual global politics.

Research design

Despite the brief recollection of my experiences in the start of this introduction, this thesis is not a work of autoethnography.⁴ It does, however, share a recognition with this literature that much academic work (in and beyond the discipline of International Relations) presents the researcher and writer 'as absent, as distant, and as indifferent to the writing and ideas' (Inayatullah, 2011b, p.5). This is 'a fictive distance' (Inayatullah, 2011b, p.5), and I acknowledge that 'the researcher plays a serious role

⁴ Although I recognise that recent work in International Relations has shown how autoethnography can be used as a source of insight into global politics (see Brigg and Bleiker, 2010; Dauphinee, 2010; Doty, 2010; Neumann, 2010; Inayatullah, 2011a).

in both the activity of investigation and the narration of results' (Salter, 2012b, p.20). As Steve Smith has aptly put it, 'There is no Archimedean point to pronounce on the "truths" of international relations' (2004, p.511), and this project is shaped by my personal position in the world.

Thus, I depart from, and reject the positivist, foundationalist, hypothesis-testing, and falsification based approaches to social science that have dominated the discipline of IR and security studies in the past (Bleiker, 2009; Jackson, 2010; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Rather than understanding the researcher as someone who can objectively stand outside of the phenomenon being researched, I adopt a critical, aesthetic, and interpretive approach to global politics that recognises the importance of the researcher in the design, conduct, and narration of the research.

All research involves a number of choices in regards to the theoretical assumptions, research questions, and methods chosen, as well as important decisions concerning data to be collected and the way that data is interpreted (Salter, 2012b, p.15). I now draw attention to the ways in which the theoretical underpinnings of this project have informed the practical design and implementation of this project. I begin by outlining how the core principles of interpretive research design shape the subsequent research questions, before discussing the selection of cases and sources, and finally, the research methods chosen in this project.

In contrast to positivist research design, this project is not concerned with hypothesis testing through determining the relationship between variables and then making generalizable observations (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.1). In the interpretive

tradition of researching the social world, research 'is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz cited in Yanow, 2014, p.6). At the heart of an interpretive approach is an understanding that the social world is messy, causality is emergent rather than linear, and that the role of the researcher inherently shapes research (Salter, 2012a, p.2). Therefore interpretive research needs to be clear in terms of research design and research questions, it needs to use appropriate research methods, and it needs to be reflexive in regards to the role of the researcher (Salter, 2012b, pp.15–18).

Whilst being concerned with clarity, interpretive research challenges the notion that research is a clean, linear process. Instead it recognises that there is a 'continuous reflexive wandering between the different moments and dimensions of research' (Guillaume, 2012, p.31). Thus, in this project research design has been 'an on-going and flexible process' (Squire, 2012, p.40) where theory, research questions, methods and empirical analysis have evolved as the project has developed. This project is concerned with the visual politics of legitimation and it began with a general puzzle as to how I knew about any of the issues I studied at university, such as war and terrorism. This broad puzzle intuitively led to an exploration of the role of images in global politics where I came to agree with Susan Sontag that 'the understanding of war among people who have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images' (Sontag, 2004, p.19). Such a reflection led to the utilisation of the aesthetic turn as a theoretical platform for research, because this approach is best suited to making sense of visual media and their significance for global politics.

Informed by the aesthetic turn (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 1), I began to formulate questions that would guide the project, and settled on the following question:

- How do political actors use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force?

This question is broad and open, and allowed me to focus the research ‘without closing off new avenues to emerge through the research process’ (Squire, 2012, p.39).

Soon, however, I realised that the guiding question is focused on the content of legitimisation claims. Following Stuart Hall’s argument that the encoding (production) and decoding (interpretation) of media content should also be investigated by researchers (Hall, 2005), I realised my research question needed to be accompanied by two other questions that interrogate the contexts of production and interpretation.

These questions are:

- How do political actors produce and encode images to claim legitimacy for the use of force?
- How do audiences interpret and decode the legitimisation claims made by political actors?

Following the interpretive tradition, such questions do not have a generalizable answer and instead have to be analysed in regards to specific contexts. This led to the selection of two cases. Making sense of how all political actors use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force would be practically impossible and beyond the scope of this research. Instead, I provide an original insight into the visual politics of

legitimation by addressing two case studies of how two different actors - the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (NSC) - use images on the same digital social media platform. Even though some scholars have argued that interpretive research should avoid the language of case selection as it 'fails to recognize the significant ways in which access may be contingent on the identity of the researcher, as if *any* researcher, in *any* circumstance, possess the ability to select *any* case at will' (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.70, emphasis in original), I think a discussion of case selection is warranted as the issues of selection and access are not mutually exclusive.

The cases herein have been selected in accordance with George and Bennett's method of structured and focused comparison (George and Bennett, 2005). They are instances of 'only one phenomenon' (George and Bennett, 2005, p.69) as they are two cases of political actors using images on social media sites to claim legitimacy for their use of force. The development of digital social media, in what some have called 'the new digital age' (Schmidt and Cohen, 2013), has led to a proliferation of images of conflict and a notable shift in the way conflict is represented and experienced by public audiences (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010; Bleiker, 2015). The use of two specific case studies enables this thesis to answer the research question in relation to two culturally, politically and historically specific contexts. Context is central to interpretive research and despite these being instances of one phenomenon, the different contexts offer insights into two different practices that are impacting on contemporary war and conflict.

These cases have been selected for various reasons. First, in order to make this project doable and manageable only two case studies are being researched. The British Army case study relates to ‘military media management’ (Maltby, 2012) and stems from an interest, and sense of confusion, in the military use of digital social media sites. The British Army have been chosen as they have an extensive online presence and are exemplary of a ‘Western’ military using digital social media to disseminate images in order to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The second case relates to what is referred to as citizen journalism (Allan, 2006) or eyewitness media (Wardle et al., 2014), and arises from an interest in how contemporary conflicts are increasingly documented by ‘amateurs’ whose photographs and videos are circulated on digital social media platforms. The NSC has been chosen because they are a prominent example of a political actor that has drawn upon these types of media to claim legitimacy for the use of force. Whilst both cases are exemplary of these phenomena, I make no suggestion that what we see in each case can be generalizable across cases. Rather, they both serve as case studies to explore the visual politics of legitimation within a specific context.

Second, it is important to take into account access and the related issues of ‘the relative power of individuals and groups, the possible kinds and degrees of participation, and positionality’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.71). These cases have partly been selected due to their accessibility. The British Army has been chosen because it is - for myself as a British researcher based in Britain - the most accessible military to research. Similarly, the NSC has been chosen because it is the internationally recognised political arm of the Syrian opposition that is managed by

diaspora spread across the world. In short, both cases are accessible to me as a researcher.

Third, both case studies have been selected because there is currently little or no research into them. Despite this, both cases are important. The British Army has been prominent in recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and what it does affects the lives of people across the globe. Further to this, it is considered one of the world's most professional armed forces serving one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Therefore understanding how it uses images to claim legitimacy for its *modus operandi* – the use of armed force – is of concern to scholars of global politics. The second case study is equally important, as the Syrian conflict has been marked by devastation and humanitarian crisis, as well as the unprecedented use of visual media by those involved in and affected by the conflict (Lynch et al., 2014). The NSC is a non-state actor engaged in an armed revolution against an authoritarian regime. As such it is reliant on using images to communicate with people across the world, and understanding how they do so to claim legitimacy for the use of force is therefore an important area of research.

Research methods

In International Relations and critical security studies there has been a recent shift away from viewing methods as neutral tools for researching the world, and instead scholars have suggested that methods are both devices that enact social and political worlds, as well as acts that can disrupt said worlds (Aradau and Huysmans, 2014, p.599). As devices, methods 'have effects; they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover' (Law and Urry, 2004,

p.393). As acts, methods can serve to disrupt the realities and the hierarchical power structures they enact, although not all methods will, or do (Aradau and Huysmans, 2014). Understanding methods in this way ‘brings out the political stakes that methods carry and thus the struggles over the worlds that methods enact’ (Aradau and Huysmans, 2014, p.614). It also recognises that the use of methods is ‘often a more experimental move of to and fro, of improvisation’ (Aradau et al., 2015, p.7) which is an inherently messy and non-linear assemblage that contrasts sharply with traditional approaches to social science and ‘the architectural idea of building a coherent and stable knowledge mansion’ (Aradau et al., 2015, p.7).

In this regard, Roland Bleiker has highlighted how such an understanding of methods is suited to the study of visual global politics. He argues that ‘the complex political role of images cannot be understood by one method alone or even by one methodological standpoint. Only a combination of heterogeneous methods can hope to capture how images intersect across their construction, content and impact’ (Bleiker, 2015, p.885). There are therefore a variety of methods that can be used to research images, and although there is no space to discuss all of them here (for that see Rose, 2012; van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2000), I now highlight what methods have been chosen and how they have been used in this research project. I begin by discussing the context of production, before moving on to set out how narratives and images were analysed, and I end with a discussion of the context of interpretation.

Context of encoding and production: Semi structured interviews

In order to research the context of production I have addressed three main sources of data in each case study. The first source consists of publically available documents

about how each political actor produces and uses visual media. The political actors publish these documents themselves, and they are an appropriate source because they reflect the world-view of the actors in question. Whilst they do not provide ‘fortune cookie predictions’ (Feaver quoted in Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.48) of how each actor does and will always act, they do provide authoritative statements of the principles that guide the political actors in question when they produce legitimisation claims. In the case study of the British Army, the documents consisted of the Ministry of Defence’s Joint Doctrine Publications and material from the websites of the MoD and the British Army. In the case study of the NSC, documents and press releases relating to the principles of the opposition were downloaded from the coalitions website. Further to these, the second source of interest has been news articles relating to each case study where members of each political actor have spoken to the media, or where the press has covered the media activities of each actor.

The main method used to understand the context of production was semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was not to find out how each political actor ‘really’ produces legitimisation claims, or to uncover some presumed ‘truthful’ intention. Rather, interviews were used in order to ‘understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.1). Each interviewee was contacted via email, and then interviews were conducted either at locations that suited them, over the phone, or online via Skype. Interviews were semi-structured where I had prepared questions beforehand, but with deviations and further questions where relevant (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.10).

In the case of the British Army, I interviewed thirteen people who were serving soldiers, former soldiers, or civilians working for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and were responsible for the production and distribution of media content. I spoke to most interviewees in person at a variety of locations ranging from radio production booths at Army HQ, to pavements outside of London pubs. One interview was conducted over the phone, one was conducted over Skype, and one interview was conducted over email. Most interviewees for this case study have chosen to remain anonymous. In the second case study of the NSC I interviewed twelve people; three who still work for the NSC, two who previously worked for the NSC, and several others who have been involved in producing media content for the Syrian opposition more broadly. All interviews were conducted on Skype. Eleven interviews were conducted in English, and one interview was conducted with the help of a previous interviewee who facilitated an interview with a colleague by translating Arabic.

In both case studies, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed. They were manually coded using Nvivo software where the main themes were highlighted, and the transcripts were then analysed as aspects of discourse. Understood as ‘structures of significations which construct social realities’ (Milliken, 1999, p.229), I explored how the interview data served to construct the ‘reality’ of each political actors media production. Doing so, illuminated how this construction allowed various possibilities of practice to emerge (Doty, 1993, p.304). This provided an insight into the production of each political actors legitimisation claims by helping ‘to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects’ own perspectives’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.27).

Legitimation claims: Discourse analysis of narratives and images

Each political actor in question uses a variety of media to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and although an analysis of multi-modal media at various locations is clearly important in understanding legitimacy (see for example Gillespie et al., 2010a; Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010), to analyse all the digital social media sites used by both actors would be too time-consuming and unaffordable within the constraints of this research project. In light of this, I chose to focus on the digital social media platform of Facebook. I chose digital social media rather than print or broadcast media because those working on visual global politics have practically ignored digital social media, and digital sources present several dilemmas and opportunities for scholars of global politics (see Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010).

I chose Facebook specifically as it allows for linguistic and visual data to be published, and it is the most popular social media platform in the world. For each case study I began collecting data from the date that each political actor created an official Facebook Page. I went back to the start of each Page and collected the content of each post that the Page had ever made during a time frame of three years. I collated this data in Excel and coded each post for its main narrative theme (see Boyatzis, 1998), and if posts included images I collected information regarding who was in the image, what was being depicted, and where the image was taken. I collected approximately 1500 Facebook posts by each political actor, and in each case study this amount of data presents a larger number of data and images than is present in most studies of visual global politics. Therefore it is sufficient and allows me to build upon the aesthetic turn in International Relations by looking at a larger body of images than has previously been studied.

The examination of the data began with a content analysis that allowed me to identify frequent themes within the data. Believing that; a) content analysis of words and images is not sufficient on its own, and b) that content analysis is not incompatible with discourse analysis, but can provide a building block for doing discourse analysis (see Fierke, 2004; Rose, 2012; Bleiker, 2015), I then used discourse analysis to make sense of the political effects of the data. This analysis focused on aspects that were informed by my understanding of narrative (see Miskimmon et al., 2013; Burke, 1969; Ricoeur, 1984), and following Roxanne Doty I explored how these discursive elements functioned through presupposition, predication, and subject positioning (1993, 1996). Presupposition serves to make that which is depicted appear natural, ‘it constructs a particular kind of world in which certain things are recognised as true’ (Doty, 1993, p.306). Predication, labels the content of discourse and ‘affirms a quality, attribute, or property of a person or thing’ (Doty, 1993, p.306). Together these two aspects serve to position subjects of discourse, often in terms of Self and Other (Doty, 1993). Paying attention to these things allowed me to analyse how the use of narratives and images create a ‘reality’ in which actors construct their use of force as legitimate.

The context of decoding and interpretation: Analysing online comments

The final aspect of analysis was the online comments made by Facebook users on the legitimisation claims published by the political actors. Such comments present an opportunity for beginning to understand how people think and feel about the narratives and images presented to them (Kozinets, 2009; Pink, 2012; Ampofo et al, 2013). Moreover, as legitimacy is reliant upon consent from the public, it is necessary to understand how people respond to legitimisation claims. Due to the sheer volume of

online comments, only comments made on images of conflict were analysed in each case study, and this still left me with between 280 and 600 comments in each case. These comments were collected and coded in Nvivo, where I collated comments depending on the major theme (Boyatzis, 1998) and whether they consented to or challenged the legitimation claims made by the political actor. As with the other two sites of interest, comments were discursively analysed in order to understand how they constructed the 'reality' of the politics of legitimation and what political possibilities they served to make possible (Bleiker, 2015, p.874). This research had the ethical approval of the University of Birmingham ethics committee, and in line with their requirements, the content of online comments have been edited to protect the identities and privacy of those who made them.

These methods are all compatible with an aesthetic, interpretive approach to the study of global politics, and are informed by Stuart Hall's understanding of encoding/decoding (2005) where the use of different and diverse methods are required in order to make sense of different sites of research. As Marie Gillespie and her colleagues suggest: 'it makes no sense whatsoever to make claims about power and security based on the study of *either* media, or security policy, or the everyday life of audiences-cum-citizens' (Gillespie et al., 2010b, p.273 emphasis in original) and scholars therefore require mixed methods in their research of media and global politics (see also Bleiker, 2015). The visual politics of legitimation are complex, and operate at various levels. Focusing on the context of production, legitimation claims themselves, and the context of interpretation using the methods outlined above allows us to gain a deeper insight into the issues at hand.

Contribution

The thesis makes several contributions to the discipline of International Relations. Primarily, I provide a theoretical framework for analysing the visual politics of legitimation. The literature on legitimation has had a limited engagement with images, and the visual global politics literature has had a limited engagement with legitimation. I therefore contribute to both of these literatures by providing an innovative framework for understanding how images are involved in processes of legitimation.

In making this theoretical contribution, I also provide the first detailed empirical analysis of how the visual politics of legitimation is important in two case studies. I ground the theoretical argument in the case studies of the British Army and the NSC, and I provide an original insight into how both actors have used the digital social media platform of Facebook. These cases speak to broader discussions surrounding military media management (Maltby, 2012) and citizen journalism (Allan, 2013; Mortensen, 2014), and I provide empirical insights into how the visual politics of legitimation is important in these contexts.

In choosing digital social media as the site of analysis, I also contribute by analysing a site that has been ignored by studies of legitimation and visual global politics. Digital social media warrant attention as they are having a fundamental impact on global communication, and understanding their impact on global politics is of pressing concern (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Schmidt and Cohen, 2013). To this end, each case study also draws upon interviews with individuals involved in producing or circulating the content analysed in the first chapters of each case study.

These interviews illuminate the underlying dynamics that shape how each actor produces their legitimacy claims. Further to this, each case study analyses Facebook comments as a way of exploring how audiences interpret the legitimisation claims made by each actor. Not only do both of these factors provide an original contribution in offering an analysis of previously unstudied source material, they also contribute by providing a broader approach to images than has been articulated by most scholars of visual global politics.

The structure and argument

Chapter 1 begins by outlining the theoretical assumptions that underpin this project. I draw upon the aesthetic turn and argue that images matter for global politics because of how they are a central aspect of contemporary communication, they seemingly naturalise what they show as being the truth, and they have political effects by shaping the conditions of possibility for global politics. I then critique the aesthetic turn by drawing upon the field of visual culture to suggest that, first, the contexts of image production and reception are as important as the content of images themselves. Second, there is a need to look beyond iconic images and to account for images that are not iconic and published in places other than print media. Third, in the digital age we need to account for visual multimedia, rather than studying still or moving images separately.

Chapter 2 conceptualises legitimacy, and I argue that it is an intersubjective and social quality that is reliant upon processes of legitimisation where political actors make claims to be legitimate, and audiences then accept or reject them. I engage with recent literature on legitimisation, and on narrative in global politics, and discuss the narrative

politics of legitimation. I suggest that a focus on narrative provides for a useful way of making sense of legitimation processes, however, I then argue that scholars have yet to convincingly account for *how* narratives of legitimation are projected in the new media ecology where visual media are prominent.

Chapter 3 builds upon this by arguing that the politics of legitimation are reliant on visual media, and I provide a framework for analysing the visual politics of legitimation. Such an approach is required because visual media work in different ways to language, and these specificities need to be explored if we want to gain a thorough understanding of how actors claim legitimacy for the use of force. The framework presented in Chapter 3 places attention on the content of legitimation claims, but I also argue that the contexts of production and reception need to be accounted for when studying the visual politics of legitimation.

The theoretical arguments are then explored through two case studies. The first case study - which spans Chapters 4 and 5 - focuses on the British Army, and in Chapter 4 I explore the visual politics of legitimation on the British Army's official Facebook Page. I analyse the content of 1570 posts published there, and I argue that the British Army claims legitimacy for the use of force by representing warfare as 'clean', where the use of force is rarely made visible. Chapter 5 builds upon this, and explores how the British Army produce their legitimation claims by drawing upon data from interviews with thirteen British Army/MoD personnel. I also look at how audiences interpret the British Army's legitimation claims by analysing 286 Facebook comments. In doing so I argue that several factors are important in shaping the British

Army's legitimization claims, and that these claims are consented to by an audience of Facebook users.

The second case study explores how the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces has used images to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and this is the focus of Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapter 6 I analyse the content of 1174 Facebook posts and I argue that the NSC claims legitimacy for the use of force by making the violence and suffering of war highly visible. Chapter 7 builds upon this by analysing how the NSC's legitimization claims are produced and interpreted. Here, I explore the factors that shape the NSC's legitimization claims as well as arguing that the majority of people who comment on the NSC's Facebook Page consent to their claims to be using force legitimately. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the overall arguments and original contributions outlined in earlier chapters. Here, I discuss the findings across the cases and I also reflect on future directions for research on the visual politics of legitimization.

Chapter 1

The Aesthetic Turn in Global Politics

On November 14 2013, the French newspaper *Libération* was published without any photographs. In their place were blank, white boxes: ‘a series of empty frames that create a space of silence, quite uncomfortable’ (Ollier, 2013). Accompanying these visual voids were the captions of images that had been selected by the editors but remained unpublished and thus unseen by the reader. By reducing a whole issue of their daily newspaper to written text, the editors of *Libération* aimed to demonstrate the value and power of photography whilst also highlighting how the ‘language of images is essential to understanding’ (Ollier, 2013). Over the past two decades, scholars working in the tradition of critical approaches to International Relations (IR) and security have articulated similar points and have begun to draw attention to the importance of images in global politics (See for example Bleiker, 2001; Williams, 2003; Campbell and Shapiro, 2007; Hansen, 2011).

Despite there being enough disciplinary ‘turns’ within International Relations to make you feel dizzy,⁵ there is sufficient work that focuses on the importance of images to speak of a ‘visual turn’ (Callahan, 2015, p.900). This visual turn is itself located within a broader ‘aesthetic turn’ (Bleiker, 2001), the contours of which have largely been shaped by the influence of poststructural/postmodern writers who themselves constituted ‘the postmodern turn’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.521). With this veritable spaghetti

⁵ For example see Mark Salter’s (2012) overview of the ethnographic, practice, discursive, corporeal, and material turns, as well as Heck and Schlag’s (2013) brief discussion of the constructivist, linguistic, practice, and aesthetic turns.

junction of theoretical twists and turns in mind, this chapter sets out the theoretical assumptions that inform this research project. To begin, I introduce the aesthetic turn in global politics and I highlight how this provides the broad foundational assumptions of this project that pertain to a constructivist ontology, an interpretivist epistemology and an attention to everyday sites of global politics. I then discuss ongoing debates within the aesthetic turn, before highlighting how this project is inspired by, and contributes to, work in the aesthetic turn that goes beyond simply analysing the content of representations, and instead also explores the context of production, circulation and interpretation. I then argue that images are important matters for scholars of global politics and security for three reasons. First, images are a central aspect of contemporary communication. Second, they make a certain type of knowledge claim about the world, and finally, they have political effects. Therefore, if the discipline of IR ignores images, then much like the aforementioned issue of *Liberation*, it appears with empty frames and silences; quite uncomfortable indeed. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the gaps that remain in IR's visual turn, before highlighting how this project addresses them.

1.1 The philosophical foundations of the aesthetic turn

International Relations is a theoretically diverse and pluralistic discipline,⁶ and there are a wide variety of perspectives on both what and how questions should be asked, as well as how questions should be answered through the conduct of inquiry and research (Hansen, 2006, p.17; See also Jackson, 2010; Dunne et al., 2013). In this regard, all research is underpinned by assumptions – or ‘wagers’ in the terminology of

⁶ Indeed, such a high level of theoretical pluralism has led to recent reflections about the end of International Relations theory (Dunne et al., 2013).

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2010) – that ‘constitute worlds, in that they quite literally set the stage for the kinds of empirical and theoretical puzzles and challenges that a scholar takes to be meaningful and important’ (Jackson, 2010, p.34). Rather than obscuring the assumptions that underpin this research, this section elucidates the philosophical foundations that form a basis for this project. The following discussion engages with the broad methodology of this project, understood as ‘applied philosophy’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.4) that relates to ontology and epistemology.

There are three central methodological assumptions that underpin this research. First is the recognition that representation, discourse, meaning and interpretation are an unavoidable and important aspect of global politics. As such, I understand the reality of global politics to be ontologically socially constructed. Second, is a rejection of positivist empiricism and a desire to open up the discipline of International Relations beyond such narrow confines. Therefore an interpretivist epistemology that recognises that the reality of global politics can only be known through interpretation underpins this project. Third, is the assumption that global politics takes place at everyday sites, and that these sites are important for the discipline of IR. These assumptions have an impact on what and how global politics can be studied, and they shape how I approach the study of legitimation in this project. As I am concerned with how political actors use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force, it makes sense to draw upon the theoretical underpinning of the ‘aesthetic turn’ (Bleiker, 2001) as this approach has paid the most attention to the role of images in global politics and thereby provides suitable foundations and tools for analysing the issue at hand.

1.1.1 Ontology: The importance of representation

Writing in 2001, Roland Bleiker referred to an aesthetic turn in international political theory (Bleiker, 2001). According to Bleiker, the aesthetic turn stems from ‘two inter-related shifts in the production of knowledge about world politics’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.510), the first of which is the development of poststructural/postmodern⁷ approaches that begun to challenge the dominance of positivist and rationalist approaches to IR during the 1980’s (Bleiker, 2001, p.510). The second shift follows from the first and involves the exploration of other forms of insight into world politics that arise from art and popular culture (Bleiker, 2001, p.510).

During the 1980s and 1990s, scholars such as Richard Ashley (1984), Michael Shapiro (1988), James Der Derian (1989), R. B. J. Walker (1993), Roxanne Doty (1993, 1996), Michael Dillon (1996), David Campbell (1998) and Jenny Edkins (1999), were inspired by, and drew upon the works of, poststructural philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In doing so they challenged the assumptions and dominance of theorists such as Kenneth Waltz (1959; 1979), Robert Keohane, and Joseph Nye (1977), and their associated neorealist and neoliberal theories of world politics. Whilst I aim not to produce misleading binaries that plague IR, it is briefly worth setting out the core tenets of neorealism and neoliberalism in order to demonstrate how this thesis diverges from

⁷ In International Relations, poststructuralism and postmodernism are used somewhat interchangeably, despite being different. Following David Campbell (2007b, pp.211–212), I understand ‘postmodernism’ as referring to cultural, economic, social and political conditions that follow from the technological and aesthetic developments and changing space-time relations of the era known as ‘modernity’ (1890s-the Second World War). In contrast, poststructuralism refers to a philosophical perspective that builds upon the structuralist philosophical movement associated with the likes of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Because I am concerned with poststructuralism as a theoretical position, and not postmodernism as a cultural condition, the term poststructuralism shall be used herein.

such approaches. For neorealists such as Waltz, the international system is characterised by anarchy that makes war inevitable as

each state pursues its own interests, however defined, in ways that it judges best. Force is a means of achieving the external ends of states because there exists no consistent, reliable process of reconciling the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise among similar units in a condition of anarchy (Waltz, 1959, p.238).

Such an understanding has been influential in shaping other defensive realist positions (Walt, 1991) and offensive realist positions (Mearshimer, 2001). The problem with all of these neorealist approaches is that they assume the primacy of states as the only social institution that matters for scholars of IR. In doing so they assume that states are rational and that their interests can be taken as given, and that we, as scholars can access them through positivist methodologies. In assuming that anarchy is a fact they also serve to legitimise states who wish to pursue hegemony through the use of force (Gilpin 1983; Mearshimer, 2001) or through a balance of power that leads to arms races and security dilemmas (Wheeler and Booth, 2007). As others have already pointed out these ontological positions narrow the focus of the discipline and have a morally dubious impact on what political actors can do in world politics by suggesting that war is inevitable (Ashley, 1984).

Similarly to neorealists, neoliberals also share similar assumptions. So much so that Robert Keohane has noted that 'Neoliberal institutional theory is a half-sibling of Neorealism' (Keohane and Martin, 1995, p.3). Neoliberals also take the Westphalian

system as a given and they assume that actors in world politics are rational, with objective, material interests. Contrary to neorealists, however, they believe that we can overcome international anarchy through cooperation and international institutions (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Keohane, 1984). Despite this difference, neoliberalism is still wedded to a positivist account of social science that believes that researchers can be objective and value-free (See Keohane, King and Verba, 1994). And whilst it may offer a more optimistic outlook compared to neorealism's pessimism, neoliberalism serves to enhance economic inequalities through the 'Western', state-centric institutions that they often uncritically focus on. It also briefly worth mentioning here that constructivism expands upon these approaches by arguing that in addition to material factors, ideational factors also shape human interaction and determine identities and interests in global politics (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Ruggie 1998; Wendt, 1999). Nonetheless, constructivists are wedded to an "epistemic realism" whereby the world comprises objects independent of ideas and beliefs about them' (Campbell, 1998, p.221), and they also believe that states have essential characteristics (Krasner, 1999, p.51; Wendt, 1999, p.113).

Poststructuralism stands in stark difference to these approaches. Rather than being a unified theory it is heterogeneous, and in IR a diverse selection of scholars have drawn upon an already diverse selection of philosophers in order to provide insights into global politics (see Moore and Farrands, 2010a; Edkins and Vaughan-Williams, 2009). Despite this diversity, there are several core issues that weave a common thread through these approaches and provide several basic assumptions that guide poststructuralist research. Importantly, poststructuralism challenges and rejects many of the theoretical assumptions of orthodox International Relations. It challenges the

state centric, rationalist, positivist, and supposedly objective, universalist approaches of neorealism and neoliberalism (Ashley, 1984, pp.237–261). Poststructuralists also reject the notion that the material world is separate from the realm of discourse (Aradau et al, 2015, p.61). Instead, poststructuralists have an interest in representation and discourse, and how these constitute reality by giving meaning to the world and shaping identities that then make certain political practices possible.⁸

In writing about the development of the aesthetic turn, Bleiker identifies a distinction between mimetic and aesthetic approaches to the study of global politics. The former include traditional approaches such as neorealism and neoliberalism, which are mimetic as they ‘seek to represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible, aiming to capture world politics as-it-really-is’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.510). Instead, aesthetic approaches (influenced by, and including, poststructuralism) assume that

there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith. Rather than ignoring or seeking to narrow this gap... ..aesthetic insight recognises that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics (Bleiker, 2001, p.510).

⁸ This implies causality. However, causality here is not understood to be linear and direct. It is perhaps better described as constitutive, or emergent, where representations and discourse shape the conditions of possibility for what can be done in global politics (Bleiker, 2001, 2015; Hansen, 2006, 2011). As Mila Kurki notes, “‘constitutive’ relations are intimately tied up to causal relations’ (Kurki, 2006, p.215) and poststructuralists are still concerned with ‘emergent causality’ (Kurki, 2008, p.290).

In this sense, aesthetic approaches recognise that political reality does not exist prior to representation, but in fact only comes into being 'through the process of representation' (Bleiker, 2009, p.21). This is not to deny the existence of a 'real world' but rather to recognise that 'a political event cannot determine from what perspective and in what context it is seen' (Bleiker, 2009, p.21). As Laclau and Mouffe suggest:

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field (2001, p.108).

Therefore an aesthetic approach, informed by poststructuralism, contributes to understandings of global politics as the emergence, meaning and importance of a political event can only be appreciated once the representational practices that constitute the event itself have been scrutinised (Bleiker, 2001, p.519).

As such, aesthetic approaches are concerned with exploring how representations produce meanings 'that create certain possibilities and preclude others' (Doty, 1996, p.5). The social construction of reality arises through representational practices – or what we might call discourse. Defined as 'structures of signification that construct social realities' (Milliken, 1999, p.229), discourses are political as they 'determine the limits of what can be thought, talked, and written of in a normal and rational way' (Bleiker, 1997, p.63). Focusing on discourse enables researchers to 'examine how the

processes that produce "truth" and "knowledge" work and how they are articulated with the exercise of political, military, and economic power' (Doty, 1996, pp.5–6). Hence, the attention to representation and discourse leads to an exploration of power, as representations are always political and subjective, and when we research discourses we aim not to find out whether they are true or not, rather we aim to see how 'truth' and knowledge 'are mobilized and meted out' (Epstein, 2005, p.13).

To be clear, this thesis is informed by an ontological foundation that understands reality to be socially constructed through discourse. However a deeper discussion of ontology is warranted here for several reasons. First this is because, as we shall see in the discussion of narrative in Chapter 3, I draw upon a variety of authors who adopt different ontological understandings of narrative. Second, there have been recent discussions surrounding the ontology of narratives (see Shepherd, 2015; Miskimmon et al, 2015) that are worth engaging with here in order to situate this thesis within the broader literature. In their seminal work *Strategic Narratives*, Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle draw upon Brent Steel's theory of IR and communication (2010) to outline four approaches to the study of strategic narratives. At one end of the spectrum are rationalist approaches that see communication as signalling intentions where 'persuasion is secondary to material inducement' (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p.14). At the other end are poststructural accounts that believe that a political actor 'projects a discourse that features subject positions that others fill, giving them a clear identity from which they then speak and act' (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p.15). Such a view reflects the work of other poststructuralists (Campbell, 1998; Hansen, 2006), however Miskimmon et al argue that 'once you get to the thick [poststructural] end, rational action kicks back in'

(Miskimmon et al, 2013, p.16) as political actors will rationally, and intentionally attempt to change the discursive environment. From a poststructural perspective this is problematic because, as Laura Shepherd argues,

assuming rationality and intentionality requires engaging with the possibility of an extra-discursive or pre-discursive reality, as it assumes that we can tell, as analysts, what policy makers and political elites are *really* thinking or doing outside of discourse (Shepherd, 2015, p.335, emphasis in original).

This means that whilst actors may believe they are acting rationally, and whilst political actors no doubt act with intentions, we can never know the truth of these outside of discourse. Whilst I agree with Miskimmon et al that ‘we cannot know why, but we can talk to policymakers or activists’ (2015, p.343), I maintain a commitment to a poststructural ontological position that focuses on interview data and Facebook comments as aspects of discourse. When analysing these in later chapters I am not attempting to uncover rationality, or objective interests, or true intentions. Rather, I am attempting to uncover how these conversations and comments serve as aspects of discourses that give meaning to the world whilst also constituting the identities and subject positions of those speaking (Epstein, 2008, p.6).

To reiterate, this project is informed by the aesthetic turn and is based on an ontology where reality is understood as being socially constructed through discourses that have political effects. In later chapters, where I draw upon a diverse range of scholars who work on legitimation, narrative, and images, some of whom have a diverse understanding of ontology and what ‘really’ exists, it must be noted that my

ontological position is clear and focused on discourse. In this sense, whilst I recognise the plurality of ontological positions in International Relations (Jackson, 2010, p.32), I have an ‘ontologically specific’ (Wight, 2006, p.259) foundation in studying narrative and visual media, interview data, and Facebook comments as aspects of discourse that give meaning to the world by shaping identities.

1.1.2 Epistemology: Beyond positivist empiricism, towards interpretivism

In understanding that there is ‘no way of representing the world in a neutral way’ (Bleiker, 2009, p.4), an aesthetic approach recognises that representation ‘is inevitably a process of interpretation and abstraction’ (Bleiker, 2009, p.46). This in turn leads to a more reflexive approach to global politics that goes beyond the orthodoxy of theories that adopt a ‘relatively narrow, positivist and exclusive understanding of social science’ (Bleiker, 2009, p.27). Traditional approaches to International Relations have been committed to a methodology that is underpinned by a belief in the existence of an objective, ‘real’ world external to the researcher, who can gain knowledge of said world from a neutral observation point (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.4). Even ‘mainstream’ constructivists still remain committed to this epistemology of scientific realism where the socially constructed world is wedded to, but distinct from the physical material world (see Wendt, 1992, 1999; Adler, 1997; Guzzini, 2000). In contrast, aesthetic approaches are epistemologically interpretivist, and recognise that interpretation is inevitable in any account of the ‘reality’ of the social and political world. Indeed, as researchers we are inseparable from the worlds we research, and we cannot talk about worlds existing outside of our activities that make sense of them (Jackson, 2010, pp.34–36; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). Therefore, the point of aesthetic approaches is not to generate objective ‘truths’ about

global politics from an 'external' viewpoint, rather it is to 'examine how certain representations underlie the production of knowledge and identities and how these representations make various courses of action possible' (Doty, 1996, p.5).

Despite decades of traditional scholarship, 'violence remains the modus operandi of world politics' (Bleiker, 2009, p.18), and International Relations - disguised as a value-free, objective, 'truth' discovering social science - has enforced many of the problems it has sought to solve (Bleiker, 1997, 2001; Smith, 2004). By focusing on states, survival and self-help, traditional IR scholarship 'has played, and continues to play, a significant role in recreating the world of the powerful, which it sees as the "natural" focus for explanation' (Smith, 2004, p.507). This disciplinary disciplining has not only shaped the conditions of what is and isn't conceivable, speakable and doable in world politics (Walker, 1993, p.21). It has also led to the relatively unquestioned legitimisation and naturalisation of 'the most powerful structures of violence the world has ever known' (Walker, 1997, p.74).

Traditional theories and their methodological commitment to positivism and empiricism have resulted in 'a very restricted range of permissible ontological claims' (Smith, 1996, p.17) and the impact of this orthodoxy has been a limited range of 'what the discipline could talk about' (Smith, 1996, p.37). In response to this, the aesthetic turn challenges such a narrow and exclusive understanding of global politics (Bleiker, 2001; Sylvester, 2001, 2013). This normative commitment aims to provide 'innovative solutions to entrenched conflicts and difficult political challenges' (Bleiker, 2009, p.1) by going beyond the positivist empiricist understanding of knowledge production that is prevalent in traditional approaches to IR. This is

because the problems that plague global politics ‘are far too serious not to employ the full register of human intelligence to understand and deal with them’ (Bleiker, 2009, p.19). By taking representation, discourse, meaning, interpretation and abstraction seriously, it is hoped that we can better understand ‘the dilemmas of world politics’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.524).

1.1.3 Everyday sites of global politics

This attention to representation and discourse, alongside a commitment to go beyond positivist forms of knowledge creation has led to scholars exploring ‘different forms of insight into world politics, including those that emerge from images, narratives and sounds, such as literature, visual art, music, cinema and other sources that extend beyond “high art” into popular culture’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.510). Crucial here is the recognition that ‘the international operates in spheres other than the heroic domains of state action and high politics prescribed by existing scholarly conventions’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.524). These other domains - often ignored by traditional approaches - play an important role in shaping how global politics and security are understood, experienced and practiced. Reflecting arguments made by feminist researchers, an aesthetic approach understands that the personal is political and that global politics takes place in mundane, everyday places (see Enloe, 2000, 2011). Writing about popular culture as a significant source of insight for studies of global politics, Christina Rowley notes that:

The ways in which people make sense of world politics is, in large part, via the knowledge and understanding created through interactions with the world

in the realm of the popular, the mundane and the everyday: the workplace, holidays, TV shows, advertisements (2010, p.311).

These places are therefore legitimate sites of inquiry and they move scholarship beyond studying statistical data, political speeches, international treaties and diplomatic documents sat on dusty archive shelves.⁹ Instead, sources such as novels, Hollywood films, television programs, computer games, photographs in magazines, popular music, comic books, and the content of digital social media sites can reveal as much about global politics as the aforementioned, more traditional sources.

These three foundational concerns; an attention to representation, discourse, meaning and interpretation, a desire to open up the discipline of International Relations beyond positivist empiricism, and a focus on everyday sites of global politics thus make an aesthetic approach an appropriate platform for researching processes of legitimation. This is because the legitimation of war is aesthetic. As we shall see in Chapter 2, legitimation relies upon representation, interpretation, narratives, and images, and it takes place in vernacular ways at sites beyond the traditional concerns and sources of inquiry such as politician's speeches, state archives and UN resolutions.

1.2 The aesthetic turn today

I now discuss recent theoretical concerns and debates inside the aesthetic turn in order to frame the specific theoretical approach to the aesthetics of global politics that I take in this project. This is important because the aesthetic turn is a broad church in the

⁹ Of course, all of these sources of insight can tell us *a lot* about global politics. However, the point of the aesthetic turn is that they are not the *only* sources of interest that reveal something important about global politics.

sense that it houses a variety of approaches under one roof, and there is no singular aesthetic approach to global politics (although I outline a specific critical visual methodology for the analysis of the visual politics of legitimation in Chapter 3). Gerard Holden has noted that there are several, overlapping tendencies of the approaches subsumed under the aesthetic turn. These include; a critical ethos, an idea of aesthetics as a solution to global political problems (most notable in the work of Roland Bleiker and Michael Shapiro), and an attention to ‘intertextuality and mutual constitution between aesthetic treatments and the stuff of world politics’ (Holden, 2006, p.801). Holden also notes that in the aesthetic turn there have been detailed analysis of single works/authors, broader accounts of cultural and literary history, and an attention to feminist and postcolonial insights (Holden, 2006, pp.800–802).

Despite these shared concerns, Holden notes that there is a need for scholars of the aesthetic turn ‘to take more notice of each others’ contributions’ (2006, p.802). Sharing this sentiment, Cerwyn Moore and Laura Shepherd have argued that ‘there has been relatively limited engagement between various bodies of literature that could be seen to constitute this [aesthetic] turn’ (2010, p.299). In light of this, Moore and Shepherd map out ‘three ways in which critical or alternative approaches concerned with visual, cultural and affective politics relate to their objects of study: the text’ (2010, p.301).

Moore and Shepherd’s first concern is with poststructural approaches to global politics that are concerned with literature and focus on the text (often understood to be linguistic written or spoken texts) as the most important aspect of analysis. This position is indebted to the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and is most

explicitly seen in the work of Michael Shapiro, but also in most British poststructural approaches to global politics (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.301; see also Moore and Farrands, 2010b). This approach is centrally concerned with the text and its structure, form and content, and as such it ignores the role of authors, interpretation and context. This is problematic as ‘the text is a key vehicle which captures meaning, [but] this is also produced through interpretation, through text and context’ (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.303). Their second engagement is with recent work on art and politics that ‘conceives of text as art/iconic image’ (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.303). This work, notably that of Alex Danchev (2009; Danchev and Lisle, 2009), is critiqued due to how it is more concerned with the history of art than with global politics (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.304). Moreover, it fails to engage with prior works that have already explored the nexus of art and politics (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.305).

Gerard Holden also takes issue with these approaches to aesthetics and global politics, and he argues that ‘the interest in art and aesthetics of the last 10-15 years does indeed stretch “IR” almost to breaking point’ (Holden, 2010, p.400). Taking up a critique with the work on art/politics specifically, Holden is troubled by ‘a continuation of the liberal-humanist tradition that sees art as a source of civilising values’ (Holden, 2010, p.399) where art and aesthetics are understood as having a capacity to be a ‘force for good’ (Holden, 2010, p.399). Although this intervention may be warranted, it speaks past this project, because I am not concerned with how art and aesthetics can be used to provide alternatives to contemporary global politics. Instead, I am concerned with how political actors use aesthetics - specifically visual media - to claim legitimacy for the use of force. David Campbell and Michael Shapiro (2007) have also recognised

that aesthetics and images do not simply serve as a force for good in the world. They note that

there is a new contested terrain of the image broadly understood as a social relation, with some aspects of visual culture aiding and abetting securitization and militarization and some serving as a domain of critical practice and counter-memory for the issues, perspectives and people occluded by securitization and militarization. Thus, visual culture is implicated in new military strategies, at the same time as it enables critical practices contesting those military strategies (2007, pp.132–133).

This not only suggests that there is a need to explore aesthetics in the contexts of which they are produced, circulated and interpreted, but it also challenges the notion that aesthetics and global politics are separable fields as Holden argues (2010, p.400).

The claim that issues of aesthetics stretch the discipline of IR to breaking point is redundant when one considers the importance that is now placed on aesthetics by actors within the realm of global politics who are often the subject of study. Take just two examples connected to this project's case studies: the British Army having editorial control over cinema productions that they provide equipment to (Clark and Clapton, 2013) and the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad having an account with over 37000 followers on the image sharing social media platform Instagram (@syrianpresidency, 2015). Both examples show that even the actors who constitute much of the focus of the discipline - states and militaries - appreciate the value of aesthetics. Therefore when we adopt an aesthetic approach we are not stretching the

discipline 'almost to breaking point' (Holden, 2010, p.400), but providing insights into contemporary issues that cannot fully be investigated without an aesthetic approach. Taking this into account, and recognising that the puzzles of global politics and security need to be 'unwrapped and understood from the viewpoints of the actors involved' (Smith, 2004, p.51), I argue that an aesthetic approach is warranted and in fact much needed in order to understand contemporary practices of security; specifically in relation to how war and conflict are legitimated.

If the first approach to aesthetics and global politics is limited due to its focus on the text in and of itself, and the second approach is limited by both an ignorance of prior work and a normative emphasis on art as a force for good, then how should the aesthetics of global politics be approached? Moore and Shepherd suggest that those approaches that 'view text as a vehicle for the analysis of various political representations and dynamics but also in part constituted through those representations and dynamics' (2010, p.305) provide for the most promising aesthetic approach to global politics. This is because it is concerned with everyday (popular) culture as a central site 'at which international political life is produced and contested' (Philpott et al cited in Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.305).

This third approach 'assists in the reclamation and re-invigoration of the framing of IR' (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.306) for two reasons. Firstly, although much work on popular culture and IR has resulted 'in a (limited and limiting) acceptance of work on text, conceived of as a surface to be analysed' (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.306), there is potential 'for encouraging further strategies that problematise the definitional boundaries of the discipline' (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.306). Secondly, this work

conceptualises global politics ‘as everyday practice’ (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.307) and recognises that popular culture is ‘a terrain, a site of struggles over meaning which involves taking account of both texts (representations) and practices (their active consumption and interpretation)’ (Rowley, 2010, p.313). Thus it is not only representations that matter, but also how and why they are produced, circulated, interpreted and used by people. Therefore ‘this third treatment of text offers the most comprehensive analyses of power in popular culture and, as such, represents a vital and energetic contribution to an aesthetic approach’ (Moore and Shepherd, 2010, p.308). As we shall see in Chapter 3, such an approach is concurrent with Stuart Hall’s notion of encoding/decoding (2005), whereby sites of production, representation, and sites of interpretation are all important in making sense of media and its political significance.

The above discussion has served to draw attention to several key aspects of the aesthetic turn as a broad approach to global politics. Notably, the aesthetic turn pays attention to representation, discourse, meaning and interpretation. It challenges the positivist, empiricist assumptions of traditional theories and thereby opens up the discipline of IR and takes into account new sources of insight such as those found in the realm of popular culture. Furthermore, the aesthetic turn is broad and contains a diverse set of literatures. Of these, work that concerns the production, circulation and interpretation of representations, alongside their content, provides for the most insightful approach to the nexus of global politics, aesthetics and popular culture. I now turn to a discussion of the visual turn in IR that posits three further central claims about the importance of visual media. In doing so I then reflect on the limitations of this literature and highlight the gaps that this project then addresses.

1.3 Visual global politics

There is now a burgeoning body of literature in the field of critical approaches to security that is taking images and visual culture seriously. This is perhaps best highlighted by the fact that three recent edited collections on the theories, methodologies, and methods of critical approaches to security have included chapters on ‘pictorial texts’ (Vuori, 2012), ‘visual analysis’ (Moore and Farrands, 2013), and ‘visualities’ (Andersen et al., 2015). This, alongside articles and special issues of IR journals on the topics of aesthetics, images and visual culture (see Campbell and Shapiro, 2007; Danchev and Lisle, 2009; Moore and Shepherd, 2010), suggests that images are now no longer entirely peripheral in the study of global politics and security.

Within IR, the visual turn has seen several scholars exploring the role of images in processes of securitization – where images such as photographs or cartoons frame and define certain issues as exceptional security issues (Williams, 2003; Vuori, 2010; Hansen, 2011; Heck and Schlag, 2013). In a similar vein, scholars have theorised images as international icons that serve to define and shape foreign policy (Hansen, 2014; Friis, 2015) and others have discussed images as weapons of war (Gow and Michalski, 2008; Roger, 2013; O’Loughlin, 2011). Further to this, scholars have focused on images of suffering, their relation with emotions and their impact on global politics (Campbell, 2003, 2004, 2007a; Dauphinée, 2007; Bleiker et al., 2013; Shim, 2013; Hutchison, 2014). Whilst exploring events (such as 9/11 and humanitarian crises) the visual turn has often focused on the medium of photography (Kennedy, 2003; Edkins, 2013), however, other visual mediums such as cinema (Weber, 2008; Shapiro, 2009; Carver, 2010; Steans, 2010; Holden, 2010; Löfflmann,

2013), documentary films (Munster and Sylvest, 2015), cartoons (Dodds, 2007; Hansen, 2011), videogames (Power, 2007; Robinson, 2015), and even military uniforms (Guillaume et al., 2015) have all been explored.

Certain scholars have also investigated the critical potential of art (Bleiker, 2001; Jabri, 2006; Shapiro, 2013), and others have specifically focused on the critical potential of war (and peace) photography (Campbell, 2003; Möller, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013; Andersen and Möller, 2013). Beyond this, scholars have even made their own documentary films in order to challenge and critique certain practices in global politics (Der Derian, 2010; Weber, 2013; Callahan, 2015). In a more general sense, scholars have provided succinct overviews of how and why images are important for global politics and security studies, alongside guidance on how they can be researched (Vuori, 2012; Moore and Farrands, 2013; Andersen et al., 2015; Bleiker, 2015).

A discussion of the many nuances in this visual turn would require more space than can be afforded here, however my discussion of the above literature suggests that images matter for global politics for three fundamental reasons. Firstly, images are a central aspect of contemporary communication as they are ‘one of the principal ways in which news from distant places is brought home’ (Campbell, 2007a, p.358). They therefore play an important role in the global circulation of information in the 21st century. Images matter for global politics and security because ‘how people come to know, think about and respond to developments in the world is deeply entangled with how these developments are made visible to them’ (Shim, 2013, p.23). Moreover, images are banal, vernacular and almost ubiquitous; they are hung up in homes, plastered on billboards, printed in newspapers, broadcast on television, shown in

cinemas, and circulated through digital social media platforms such as YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest and Snapchat. And regardless as to whether they should be prioritised in our accounts of the world or not (O’Loughlin, 2011), to ignore the role of the visual is to ignore a large part of contemporary communication.

Related to this is the second reason why images matter for global politics, and this concerns how visual media operate as a different system of signification (Barthes, 1977); they make certain types of knowledge claims about the world and need to be theorised and studied in different ways to written and spoken language. Visual media such as photographs and video footage seemingly depict ‘the scene itself, a literal reality’ (Barthes, 1977, p.15), and they appear to provide an unbiased, objective rendering of the real world. Vision has a tendency to be related with scientific knowledge (Campbell, 2007a, p.360) and images such as photographs are often used as undeniable proof that the event depicted took place (Sturken and Cartwright, 2000, p.17). Visual media such as photographs imply that ‘the scene *is there*’ (Barthes, 1977, p.44 emphasis in original), and are often considered as ‘perfect, transparent media through which reality may be represented’ (Mitchell, 1984, p.503). They thus have ‘a tremendous naturalizing force in the political constitution of the “truth”’ (Andersen et al., 2015, p.98). Vision, seeing and showing are often presumed to equate to objectivity, truth and knowing. In essence, seeing is believing, and this type of visual knowledge claim can have drastic implications for global politics because images help to make threats and antagonism possible (Shapiro, 1988) and they shape the conditions of possibility in global politics (Rancière, 2006; Bleiker, 2015).

Needless to say, this common notion of images being equated with truth is misguided. All visual media actually present ‘an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representations’ (Mitchell, 1984, p.504). They are in fact always representations of what they depict – shaped by subjective decisions and processes – and as we know, this gap between representation and the represented is always inevitable (Bleiker, 2001, p.510). Therefore the point of studying images is not to attempt to analyse how truthful they are, because abstraction and interpretation are always inevitable: images ‘always have *another* possible meaning, *another* story to tell’ (Moore and Farrands, 2013, p.231). Rather, the point of analysing them is to ‘explore how representative practices themselves have come to constitute and shape political practices’ (Bleiker, 2001, p.510). Images are never entirely objective, value free depictions of reality, and we must take into account issues of meaning, abstraction and interpretation whilst recognising that their production and circulation is bound up with creating knowledge about the reality that they depict.

Third, images have political effects. They are central in the constitution of identities as they ‘create boundaries and differences which, in turn, affect who “we” and “they” are’ (Shim, 2013, p.26). Images visualise social categories, they include or exclude, they make roles available, they are produced and distributed for certain reasons and they naturalise hierarchies and differences (Fyfe and Law, 1988, p.1). These differences do not have linear, causal effects. Rather, they

work more indirectly, by performing the political, by setting the "conditions of possibility" for politics... ..They shape what can and cannot be seen, and thus

also what can and cannot be thought, said and done in politics (Bleiker, 2014, p.81).

In regards to this, James Der Derian has highlighted how images are central to the scourge of global politics that is often the focus of the discipline: war. He notes that:

More than a rational calculation of interests takes us to war. People go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others; that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representation (Der Derian, 2009, p.238).

Furthermore, images have an intimate relationship with affect and emotions; 'If seeing, is in fact, believing, then seeing is also feeling' (Andersen et al., 2015, p.101). If it is through images that people come to know about the world, then it is through images that they also come to experience emotions for things in that world. Recent literature has shown that emotions and affect are important in global politics (Crawford, 2000; Edkins, 2002; Saurette, 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Solomon 2014), and images invoke emotions from the viewer, thereby serving to mobilize certain responses that impact and shape security practices (Andersen et al., 2015, p.104). Images therefore matter because they are central to the ways that we find out about, and construct knowledge of, the world around us. They shape the conditions of possibility for political action through the constitution of identities and emotions, and these have important implications for global politics and security.

1.4 Taking the visual turn forward: Critiques, gaps and new pathways

Even though the above tenets of the aesthetic turn underpin this project, I now critique and draw attention to the gaps that currently exist within this body of research. I do so because the visual turn is far from complete and in addressing the following critiques and gaps, this project contributes to an on going conversation about the importance of images in global politics.

1.4.1 From the content of images, towards the contexts of images

Just as much poststructural work in IR focuses on texts as surfaces to be analysed, much work within the visual turn also places its attention on the content of images (for example see Hansen, 2011; Heck and Schlag, 2013). Of course, if we want to understand the importance of images we need to analyse their content, however we also need to pay attention to the contexts of image production and interpretation. In regards to this, the visual theorist Gillian Rose has suggested that much scholarly research on images often focuses ‘on *visibility* rather than *visuality*’ (Rose, 2014, p.32 emphasis in original). Like most analyses that use visual research methods, work on visual global politics is more concerned with the content of images, rather than the production and interpretation of these images (Rose, 2014, p.31).

For example, in recent discussions surrounding visual securitization, Lene Hansen states that ‘the image does not speak security by itself, but is dependent upon someone or somebody – a securitizing actor – who holds that the image demonstrates a threat-defense urgency’ (Hansen, 2011, p.55). However, an analysis of the intentions and motivations of producers, or an exploration of how the processes of image production and circulation are central to the security practices of certain actors

is absent from Hansen's theorisation of visual securitization. Similarly, Axel Heck and Gabi Schlag argue that 'an understanding of the political usage of images [is] all the more necessary' (2013, p.901), however their reliance upon a methodology of iconography places the emphasis on the content of images as opposed to the contexts of their production.

Alongside this, visual securitization - and work on visual global politics more broadly - provides an unsatisfactory engagement with the role of audiences. Both Hansen, and Heck and Schlag, point towards the importance of audience interpretation yet fail to fully account for it in their theory or analysis. Both remain focused on telling us how the images can be interpreted, how they have been discussed and interpreted by audiences in general (Hansen, 2011, p.66-68) or how they have been interpreted by several media commentators (Heck and Schlag, 2013, p.900-901). This is problematic if we are to understand the importance of visual media in global politics, because we need to pay attention to the 'complex relation between specific images and the underlying beliefs, narratives and ideologies held to by particular audiences' (O'Loughlin, 2011, p.74). Therefore, the visual turn is currently limited by its failure to analyse the contexts of production, circulation and interpretation of visual media. In order to address this gap I present a critical visual methodology for the study of the visual politics of legitimation in Chapter 3, and in doing so I draw attention to how the contexts of production, circulation and interpretation warrant as much attention as the content of images themselves, whilst also articulating a framework for how they can be researched.

1.4.2 From the iconic to the vernacular

Further to the visual turn's focus on the content of images, is a singular focus on iconic images. Undoubtedly, iconic images matter for global politics (see Hariman and Lucaites, 2007; Hansen, 2014), however an appreciation of visual culture and its importance for global politics and security, requires an attention to 'vernacular visuality or everyday seeing' (Mitchell, 2002, p.178). In 2015 there will be over a trillion photographs taken by people across the globe and by 2017, 80% of all photographs will be produced on mobile phones (Worthington, 2014). This is a vast amount of images that may at times be relevant to global politics and security. However, literature on visual global politics often focuses on fewer than one hundred images (Bleiker et al., 2013), or on a handful of images (Hansen, 2011, 2014), or even just on one image on its own (Heck and Schlag, 2013). Further to this, the focus of these authors, and others (for example Shim and Nabers, 2013; Hutchison, 2014), is on images that appear in the realm of print media and were produced by professional image makers.

Moreover, the visual turn has often focused on images where security is depicted as exceptional. To return to the visual securitization literature, we see an acceptance - or at least a failure to acknowledge - securitization theory's problematic notion that there is such a thing as 'normal' politics, rather than a reflection that this is something that is in fact contested (Ciută, 2009, p.313). In regards to this, scholars working within the Paris school approach to securitization, such as Didier Bigo (2002) and Jef Huysmans (2011), have critiqued securitization theory's focus on exception, and they have instead shown that securitization occurs not through the articulation of exceptional speech acts made by political elites, but through mundane, everyday

processes performed by non-elite actors. Huysmans, for example, argues for a need to move ‘from speech acts of security to concepts and methodologies that facilitate studying practices and processes of dispersed associating’ (2011, p.376). Instead of exploring the notion of exceptional, securitizing ruptures in speech acts, he suggests that attention needs to be given to the ‘unspectacular, unexceptional, continuous and repetitive... ..the securitizing “work” of a multiplicity of little security nothings’ (Huysmans, 2011, p.376).

The point here for visual securitization and for visual global politics more broadly, is that we should be wary of suggesting that a singular image, or individual group of iconic images, serves as an exceptional moment of rupture that ‘speaks’ security. Rather, it suggests that everyday ways of seeing and showing security, as opposed to exceptionalising images ‘do the immense work of making and circulating insecurities’ (Huysmans, 2011, p.380). The visual turn has so far explored small sets of iconic images that clearly frame issues as exceptional, and we see this in the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad (Hansen, 2011), the cover of TIME magazine featuring Aisha, the Afghan girl who’s nose and ears were cut off by the Taliban (Heck and Schlag, 2013), and in images of humanitarian disasters (Campbell, 2007a; Bleiker et al., 2013; Hutchison, 2014). The visual turn has, however, not yet attempted to make sense of the incredible number of images that are not iconic, not produced by professionals, and appear in places other than print media. As such, questions remain as to how those studying visual global politics can make sense of non-iconic, vernacular and digital images. In Chapter 3 I articulate a framework for beginning to address these questions.

1.4.3 From still or moving images, to multimedia

Related to the above critique is the visual turn's focus on individual types of visual media. As noted above, the visual turn has, to date, provided insights into cartoons, photographs, cinema, and documentary films. What we see here are insights into still images (such as photography) *or* moving images (such as cinema), and the visual turn has yet to convincingly account for the rise of digital media - digitized content that is transmitted over the Internet - that are collapsing the differences between the two types of images (see Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.20-26). The visual turn has not considered how contemporary media technologies lead to multimedia practices which involve 'a combination of images, sound, graphics, and text to generate a story... [that] appears in multiple forms' (Campbell, 2013, p.7). Due to the sheer volume of visual material on the Internet - where over 350 million images are uploaded to Facebook every day (Kotenko, 2013) - the visual turn needs to take into account online visual multimedia in its many forms beyond that of either the still image or the moving image.

Of course the processes of both making, and viewing a photograph or a film, as well as the mediums themselves have traditionally been very different. According to Peter Wollen, still and moving images are as different as fire and ice. Film 'is all light and shadow, incessant motion, transience, flicker... ..like the flames in the grate' (2003 [1984], p.78) whereas 'photography is motionless and frozen' (2003 [1984], p.78). Christian Metz goes even further and suggests that the two forms of image differ in three regards; firstly in the way in that a video has a fixed duration whereas photographs are viewed for as long or as little as the viewer likes (Metz, 1985, p.81). Secondly, Metz argues that video is used for entertainment and art, whereas

photography is concerned with 'the domain of the presumed real' (Metz, 1985, p.82). The final difference concerns 'physical nature' (Metz, 1985, p.83). Photography is silent and still. Video contains photography, yet is enlarged by movement, plurality, phonic sound (words), nonphonic sounds (sound effects) and music (Metz, 1985, p.83).

Although these points may have been applicable to the differences between photography and film during the time Wollen and Metz were writing, various developments in recent years suggest that such clear-cut differences have collapsed. Most notably, there is no longer a distinction between the technological equipment involved in making, circulating and viewing photographs and videos. Digital cameras and smart phones, the professional and everyday tools of image making, are capable of producing and instantly sharing both forms of image. Digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat allow for both types of image to be uploaded and shared, and this has led to the boundaries between still and moving images becoming increasingly blurred. Video may still be enlarged with the addition of other aspects, and indeed these additional factors need to be given more attention during analysis, but we do not need to theorise still and moving images differently when exploring content on social media sites. Instead, we have to pay attention to the additional content and context that comes with moving images and video.

The late photographer and documentary filmmaker, Tim Hetherington is worth quoting here. When asked about his work in Afghanistan he responded;

I am interested in visually representing something in as many ways as possible, exploiting as many different forms as possible, to reach as many people as possible... ...Working across all these editorial spectrums; not saying, “I am a photographer” or “I am a filmmaker,” just saying: “I am a person who goes out into the world and makes these images. And I want to reach as many different audiences as possible.” To do that, I have to reach into different forms (Hetherington quoted in Kamber, 2010).

This succinctly articulates the point that scholars need to appreciate the varied multimedia forms of visual media, because both still and moving images are used interchangeably in the contemporary era.

In summary, the visual turn is currently hampered by a focus on the content of images, an emphasis on iconic images, applied to still *or* moving images, and these are three gaps that I address in this project. First, following recent calls to approach images with pluralistic methods in order to understand the full complexities of the visual realm (Bleiker, 2015), I explore the contexts of image production, circulation and interpretation as well as the content of images themselves. To date there has been little research in International Relations that does this empirically (an exception being Gillespie et al 201a; 2010b). Secondly, this project looks at and analyses images on Facebook. This involves looking at non-iconic images that have so far seemingly been invisible to the visual turn in IR. Looking at Facebook images leads to a third contribution that pays attention to multimedia images as opposed to still images on the one hand or moving images on the other.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has laid bare the theoretical assumptions of this research project. I have drawn attention to the poststructuralist ontology and interpretivist epistemology that informs my understanding of both what's important in global politics and how we can research that. Further to this I have drawn attention to how everyday sites of popular culture are important for global politics. These assumptions are drawn from the poststructural foundations of the aesthetic turn. I acknowledged that this aesthetic turn is broad and heterogeneous, and that in aiming to build upon it I go beyond looking at representations as surfaces to be analysed and instead I also explore the contexts of production, circulation and interpretation.

I then drew attention to the visual turn in global politics – another wide body of literature – and suggested that there are three key reasons why images matter for global politics. Images are central to the how information about the world is communicated, images have a special relationship with 'truth' and 'knowledge', and images have political effects through the construction of identities and the invocation of affect and emotions. Further to this, I engaged with the visual turn in IR and suggested three ways in which this project addresses current gaps in the visual turn. By paying attention to the contexts of images, looking at non-iconic images, and appreciating multimedia images rather than still or moving images, I contribute to an ongoing discussion surrounding visual global politics.

With these foundational assumptions in mind I now turn to a discussion of legitimacy in global politics. I do so in order to draw attention to how studies of legitimacy and legitimation have ignored visual media. In light of this, in Chapter 3 I then

demonstrate how images are an important feature of the legitimization of war in the digital age. In suggesting that the visual politics of legitimization are a fundamental aspect of contemporary war, I draw upon work within the field of visual culture to provide a suitable analytical framework for the following empirical case studies of the British Army in Chapters 4 and 5, and the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 2

Conceptualising Legitimation

On Thursday 29 August 2013, British Prime Minister David Cameron took to the floor of the House of Commons to propose a motion for military intervention in Syria after reports that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons against civilians. He asked the chamber to recall ‘the importance of upholding the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons under international law’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013), before asking them to agree ‘that a strong humanitarian response is required from the international community and that this may, if necessary, require military action’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). Whilst Cameron didn’t utter the word ‘legitimacy’ in the above excerpts (during the whole debate he only said the word three times), such statements are inherently about legitimacy. This is because these statements are attempts to legitimate both a political response - in this case military intervention - and a political actor (the British government) as the appropriate agent to respond to the conflict in Syria.

As we now know, Cameron’s attempts to legitimate military intervention failed as the House of Commons voted against the Prime Minister’s motion (BBC, 2013), but they do serve to highlight how legitimacy permeates, and is of great importance to contemporary global politics. Max Weber argued in 1919 that legitimacy is *the* central defining characteristic of politics (2008b, pp.156–157), because legitimacy is omnipresent (at varying degrees) and productive of political possibilities. Legitimacy has therefore long been an important concept in the social sciences (Weber, 2008a;

Habermas, 1975), and recent scholarship suggests that legitimacy is of principal concern to the discipline of International Relations (Hurd, 1999, 2008; Steffek, 2003; Clark, 2005, 2007; Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007). In light of this, this chapter surveys the nascent literature on legitimacy, and in doing so I argue that focusing on legitimation as *a narrative process* - one that involves political actors producing and circulating narratives about themselves and their actions to audiences who then consent, acquiesce, or reject them - provides for a fruitful approach to understanding legitimacy in global politics.

This chapter builds upon the previous chapter by exploring how a fundamental aspect of politics - legitimation - has been conceptualised by scholars of global politics. Although scholars writing about visual global politics have often made reference to legitimacy and legitimation, rarely have they provided a detailed account of what exactly legitimacy is or how legitimation takes place. These concerns have, however, been at the heart of research outside of the aesthetic turn (as I discussed in Chapter 1), and by engaging with this literature on legitimacy I provide a theoretically grounded approach to the role of visual media in processes of legitimation.

I begin by conceptualising legitimacy as an intersubjective, social quality that is reliant upon processes of legitimation where actors make legitimacy claims and other actors and audiences accept or reject them. I then show how recent work in IR has explored legitimation as a linguistic process, and has begun to draw attention to the importance of narrative. This leads to a broader discussion of narrative and global politics, where I draw together insights from the legitimation literature with that of narrative global politics, and I provide a framework for researching the narrative

politics of legitimation. Here, I contribute to recent work on legitimacy as I demonstrate how processes of legitimation are reliant on narratives, and my framework enables us to clearly make sense of the constituent aspects of narrative that are important in processes of legitimation. The chapter concludes by arguing that both the literature on legitimation, and on narrative in global politics, fail to reflect on the importance of *how* narratives are communicated in global politics. This foregrounds the next chapter where I demonstrate how legitimation is often reliant on visual media, and I suggest that we therefore not only need to pay attention to the narrative politics of legitimation, but we also need to explore the visual politics of legitimation.

2.1 Conceptualising legitimacy and legitimation

The language of legitimacy is something that permeates many everyday social situations. We describe a wide variety of things as legitimate, from scholarly understandings, religious insight and family values, through to the use of armed force, violence and war (Barker, 1990, p.20). When something is described as legitimate, we infer that something is ‘desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’ (Suchman, 1995, p.574). Legitimacy is therefore a quality that is socially bestowed ‘to an actor’s identity, interests, or practices, or to an institution’s norms, rules, and principles’ (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159). Many things can thus be described as being legitimate; however, legitimacy is used herein to refer to the concept of political legitimacy. In this sense, legitimacy implies a relationship between some form of political authority (i.e. government) and a public (Barker, 1990, p.20) where political authority has ‘an entitlement to control, which generally means an entitlement to issue authoritative

commands that require compliance from those subject to them' (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159).

Legitimacy has been described as 'an opaque and elusive concept on the border between empirical and normative social science' (Steffek, 2003, p.251), and traditional work on political legitimacy often involves an assessment of legitimacy as a normative quality of government, where scholars attempt to evaluate the legitimacy of political actors and institutions (Hurrelmann et al., 2007, p.3). I am not concerned with making a normative assessment on the legitimacy of the relevant political actors within this project's case studies. Instead I contribute to a body of work that explores processes of legitimation. Recent scholarship focuses on 'the *process* of legitimation rather than the *attribute* of legitimacy' (Hurrelmann et al., 2007, p.8 emphasis in original) and Rodney Barker makes the argument for this shift by suggesting that legitimacy 'does not exist as a feasible subject of empirical or historical enquiry, in the same sense that God does not exist as a possible subject for social scientific study' (Barker, 2001, p.26). Rather, he suggests that 'all that can be empirically observed are acts of legitimation or delegitimation (or, for that matter, acts of worship), and their interpretation requires that they be carefully situated within their specific contexts' (Hurrelmann et al., 2007, p.9).

Political actors seek legitimacy for themselves and their preferred institutions by engaging in 'practices of legitimation' (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159) where they attempt to justify their own 'identities, interests, practices, or institutional designs' (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159) through the articulation of 'legitimacy claims' (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159). According to Christian Reus-Smit 'actors making legitimacy claims is the

lifeblood of the politics of legitimation, and such politics is essential to the cultivation and maintenance of an actor's or institution's legitimacy' (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.159). Despite constituting 'the lifeblood' of legitimacy, the process of legitimation and the articulation of legitimacy claims, have often been ignored in the scholarly analysis of legitimacy (Barker, 2001; Reus-Smit, 2007).

I provide a twofold contribution to these discussions by developing a theory of legitimation. First, I argue that legitimation is reliant upon narratives, and whilst this is implicit in much of the legitimation literature, I argue that by drawing upon work in IR's 'narrative turn' - and wider work on narrative from outside of the discipline - we are provided with a more structured and focused way of looking at how legitimation takes place. This point is developed towards the end of this chapter, where I provide a framework for researching the narrative politics of legitimation. Doing so builds upon the previous chapter and demonstrates how an aesthetic approach is appropriate for studying legitimation because issues of representation and interpretation in everyday contexts are vital to the legitimation of war, and as we saw in Chapter 1, aesthetic approaches are best suited to the study of such matters.

Second, I argue that visual media are an increasingly important way of communicating narratives, and they constitute legitimation claims as they are used to represent an actor's identities, interests and practices in certain ways in order to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Images are therefore important when we study legitimation. In the next chapter I develop this point and provide a framework for analysing the visual politics of legitimation. Doing so contributes towards a broader understanding of legitimation processes that have traditionally focused on language

(Steffek, 2003; Barker, 2007; Mulligan, 2007; Hurrelmann et al., 2007; Hurd, 2008; Goddard and Krebs, 2015), and have yet to explore the role of images in legitimation processes. My intervention builds upon the previous chapter by drawing upon insights from the aesthetic turn and applying them to the study of legitimation in Chapter 3.

Despite being concerned with legitimation, it is worth briefly discussing political legitimacy in order to illuminate several important factors when analysing processes of legitimation. Political legitimacy involves the recognition of a right to govern where power and obedience are simultaneously justified (Coicaud, 2002, p.10). This notion of recognition suggests that the consent of the governed is a necessary condition for establishing the legitimacy of political authority, and consent can only arise through shared norms and values (Beetham, 1991, p.12; Coicaud, 2002, p.14). In turn these establish notions of rights and duties, and ‘such values prompt individuals to action and to mutual understanding on the basis of a society’s identity’ (Coicaud, 2002, p.18). These norms and values thereby frame law as a foundation to govern (Coicaud, 2002, p.18).

In this regard, legality has often been equated with legitimacy to the extent that law has traditionally been perceived to be an objective signifier of legitimacy; one that is devoid of any attachment to values (Coicaud, 2002, pp.20–21). This is problematic as for laws to be perceived as legitimate they have to be ‘in agreement with the constitutive values of the identity of society’ (Coicaud, 2002, p.23) and they also have to ‘contribute in a credible way to the achievement of society’s values’ (Coicaud, 2002, p.23). Essentially, legal validity is reliant upon the ability to be justified in relation to shared values and norms (Beetham, 1991, p.17). It follows that legality

does not simply equal legitimacy (Beetham, 1991, p.17; Coicaud, 2002, p.22). This point is perhaps best demonstrated by the Independent International Commission on Kosovo's conclusion that NATO's military intervention in 1999 was 'illegal but legitimate' (2000, p.4). Thus, legality, rather than simply equating to legitimacy, plays a part alongside individual consent and societal norms in providing the conditions for political legitimacy (Coicaud, 2002, p.25).

Both David Beetham and Jean-Marc Coicaud reach similar conclusions in summarising that political legitimacy has these three dimensions. Firstly, political legitimacy involves a legal aspect of conformity to legal rules (Beetham, 1991, p.16; Coicaud, 2002, p.25). Secondly, it requires justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values or norms (Beetham, 1991, p.17; Coicaud, 2002, p.14). Finally, it requires the expression of consent (Beetham, 1991, p.18; Coicaud, 2002, p.10). These three aspects provide a useful guide for thinking about processes of legitimation. The first dimension suggests that legitimation takes place through representations that invoke conformity with legal rules. The second dimension implies that representations used for legitimation purposes will involve justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms. The final dimension suggests that during the process of legitimation, the producers of legitimacy claims will seek consent for - and audiences will in turn express consent for - representations that are used to claim legitimacy. With this in mind I now outline what exactly the process of legitimation involves.

2.2 The Process of Legitimation

With the core aspects of political legitimacy highlighted above, this section serves to provide more insight into the process of legitimation. In doing so I demonstrate that

there has been an overwhelming focus on written and spoken language at sites of 'high politics' in studies of legitimation processes. As we saw in Chapter 1, visual media and everyday sites are important in global politics, and consequently there is a need to account for the role of these in legitimation processes. In making this critique, this project builds upon the legitimation literature in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 3.

A growing body of literature argues for a shift towards understanding processes of legitimation rather than legitimacy as an abstract concept (Barker, 2001, 2007; Abromeit and Stoiber, 2007; Mulligan, 2007; Schneider et al., 2007) and Rodney Barker's engagement with legitimation begins with the argument that political theorists and social scientists have been studying legitimacy in an inappropriate way. According to Barker this is due to a misinterpretation of Max Weber's work on legitimacy, and he suggests that Weber was not dealing with an abstract quality but 'an observable activity in which governments characteristically engage, the making of claims' (Barker, 2000, p.9). At its core, legitimation begins with 'the making of claims to authority' (Barker, 2001, p.13), and this activity is 'one of the defining characteristics of all government' (Barker, 2001, p.13).

Legitimation is therefore an intersubjective social process, 'dependent upon social recognition, which is grounded in social norms and values, and mobilized through communication, argument, and symbolic interaction' (Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007, p.154). Legitimation is inherently reliant on representation and abstraction, and it is also 'ultimately an exercise in interpretation' (Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007, p.155). Therefore any attempts to approach legitimacy as an objective, even numerically

quantifiable variable (for an attempt to do so see Weatherford, 1992) are problematic. Instead, legitimation must be approached with an interpretive sensibility that places attention on cases in context (Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007, p.155) and focuses on ‘how actors go about rendering particular policies legitimate’ (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, pp.6–7).

This shift to legitimation as a process and empirically observable activity draws our attention to how actors express legitimacy claims and how audiences interpret them. Legitimation thereby begins when political actors make claims for themselves or their actions to be legitimate (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.163), and in turn, other political actors and audiences ‘contest or endorse these representations through similar rhetorical processes’ (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.163). Essentially:

Establishing and maintaining legitimacy is thus a discursive phenomenon... [dependent] upon the prevailing architecture of social norms, upon the cultural mores that govern appropriate forms of rhetoric, argument, and justification, and upon available technologies of communication (Reus-Smit, 2007, p.163).

There is a consensus across this literature that language is fundamental to global politics, and Stacie E. Goddard and Robert R. Krebs suggest that ‘legitimation is a war of words’ (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, p.26). This understanding permeates the literature which often focuses on the importance of written and spoken language in legitimation processes (Schneider et al., 2007).

Goddard and Krebs define legitimation as ‘how political actors publicly justify their policy stances before concrete audiences’ (2015, p.6) and they focus on ‘what is said (the content of legitimation), how it is said (technique), and the context in which it is said’ (2015, p.8). Articles in their special issue explore the role of written and spoken language in a variety of cases related to grand strategy. They explore the language of legitimation by looking at; the rhetoric of post war realists such as Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur Schlesinger (Tjalve and Williams, 2015); what was said in state forums at the concert of Europe (Mitzen, 2015); what was written by the British government and press in response to Nazi Germany between 1936-1939 (Goddard, 2015); what was said by Franklin D Roosevelt in attempts to overcome isolationism (Krebs, 2015b); and what was said by Woodrow Wilson in his attempts to make the US a signatory of the League of Nations (Snyder, 2015). Similarly, a special issue edited by Ian Clark and Christian Reus-Smit (2007) has explored legitimation in the context of crises of legitimacy, where scholars have looked at sources such as what is said in institutions such as the United Nations Security Council (Morris and Wheeler, 2007), the United Nations more broadly (Keal, 2007), the IMF (Seabrooke, 2007), and what is said by ‘Western’ governments such as those of the USA and Britain (Bukovansky, 2007; Dunne, 2007; Eckersley, 2007; Price, 2007).

Scholars have also looked at the role of language in the legitimation of the use of force. In the introduction to their special issue of *Review of International Studies*, David Armstrong and Theo Farrell argue that:

War is invariably accompanied by debate, if not controversy, over the legitimacy of using force. Whilst formal declarations of war have gone out of fashion, governments (both democratic and dictatorial alike) still justify their military action to home and foreign audiences (2005, p.3).

This again draws attention to the importance of language and debate in legitimisation processes, and subsequent articles in this special issue explore the language of the Bush administration and coalition leaders in the War on Terror (Sherry, 2005; Kinsella, 2005; Freedman, 2005), debates between the US and European leaders (Finnemore, 2005), statements of the Russian government (Hopf, 2005), and statements made by the UN (Gray, 2005).

Despite such a broad and insightful exploration of the role of language in legitimisation processes, there are several shortcomings in this literature. First, there is often a commitment to the middle ground of constructivism, and a limited engagement with, or a rejection of, poststructural accounts of language in global politics. Apparent in the above literature is an understanding of language as a tool and a political resource that affects rational decision making (see also Hurd, 2008, p.12), where there is a linear understanding of cause and effect (Goddard, 2009, pp.40–43; Goddard and Krebs, 2015, p.7). This literature attempts to speak to more orthodox theories of International Relations that often treat legitimisation and language as ‘window-dressing for interests and power’ (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, p.6), whilst also building upon constructivist approaches that have ‘shown more interest in how already legitimate norms and ideas drive and constrain foreign policy than in how actors go about rendering particular policies legitimate’ (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, pp.6–7). Even

though such a project should be commended, on the whole it often fails to engage with the work done by feminists (Cohn, 1987; Elshtain, 1987; Zalewski, 1995; Enloe, 2000), critical constructivists (Fierke, 1998; Weldes, 1999), or poststructuralists (Shapiro, 1988; Derian and Shapiro, 1989; Campbell, 1998c) who have – for quite some time now – explored the role of language in global politics .

How then, does the account of legitimation herein differ from the constructivist accounts explored above? First, due to the theoretical influence of poststructuralism, I understand language and discourse as productive of power, not simply as a tool or a resource of power that actors choose to wield for strategic purposes. Goddard and Krebs also see discourse as ‘a product, and productive of power’ (2015, p.17), however this understanding of power is different to that of other constructivists who often conceive of power in structural, or instrumental terms (Barnett and Duvall, 2005, pp.54–55; Wendt, 1999, p.257). Therefore it is worth making it explicitly clear that the approach to legitimation in this thesis recognises that language produces and constitutes identities, meanings, and boundaries in global politics, and therefore the language of legitimation is never simply just a tool of a strategic, rational actors interested in material gains and inducement. The language of legitimation, as with all language in the world, constitutes the identities, interests, and subject positions of actors in global politics, and as such is already implicated in power relations (Doty, 1996, pp.165–166).

Second, I am not concerned with defining linear causes, instead I am concerned with exploring how discourses shape the conditions of possibility in politics (Doty, 1996; Bleiker, 1997, 2015). In this sense, poststructuralists do not seek to explain the ‘real

causes' of legitimation, rather they 'embrace a logic of interpretation that acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the "real causes," and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another' (Campbell, 1998c, p.4). Such an approach shifts away from asking 'why' questions (as we see in much of the legitimation literature) towards asking 'how' questions, where we explore 'how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects and objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions that create certain possibilities and preclude others' (Doty, 1996, p.4).

Third, there are inherent ethical issues in studying legitimation, especially when concerning the legitimation of the use of force. Goddard and Krebs aim to contribute to discussions of legitimacy by understanding what makes legitimation successful (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, pp.26–30). I am wary of making such arguments, not only because a poststructural approach refutes the ability to determine the success of legitimation in terms of cause and effect, but also because knowledge about how to successfully legitimate war and the use of force is a dangerous thing. James Der Derian's critique of constructivism is relevant here; making reference to the 1950's sci-fi film *The Blob*, Der Derian argues that mainstream constructivism is an all consuming, de-historicised and de-politicised, seemingly value free, blob-like entity (Der Derian, 2000, pp.780–783). As it has been theorised thus far, understandings of legitimation share a similar, unreflexive quality, and there is a need to recognise and discuss the ethics of knowledge creation surrounding legitimation, as with other issues in global politics (Salter, 2012; Sylvester, 2013; Aradau et al., 2015). An interpretative approach to legitimation, informed by poststructuralism's inherent ethos

of critique, thus provides a starting point that is reflexive and cautious of making claims that may serve to provide a framework for legitimating the use of force.

Fourth, whilst the constructivist literature on legitimation may pay attention to language, so far it pays attention to a very specific type of language; that that takes place in the realm of high politics. The literature discussed above studies the language of legitimation, but only when it appears in official policy documents, newspaper articles, or when important men and women in states or international institutions speak it. As such it seems that current research on legitimation eschews the ‘low data’ of popular culture that recent interventions into everyday global politics have begun to explore (Bleiker, 2001; Rowley, 2010; Moore and Shepherd, 2010; Weldes, 2014). Chapter 1 demonstrated the importance of everyday sites of global politics, and the legitimation literature’s focus on high politics is problematic because, as Jutta Weldes aptly puts it, ‘state policy and international politics have a fundamentally cultural basis, and state and other international actions are made commonsensical through everyday cultural meanings, including those circulating in popular culture’ (2014, p.230). Thus, there is a need to look at everyday sites of legitimation.

Fifth, is the recognition that legitimation doesn’t just take place through language. According to Goddard and Krebs, it matters ‘what is said (the content of legitimation), how it is said (technique), and the context in which it is said’ (2015, p.8), and I argue that claims to legitimacy are not just said, but *shown* through visual media. As such, the content and techniques of legitimation processes are often visual in nature; especially in the context of an increasingly visual media ecology. Legitimation isn’t just spoken through the language of leaders and policy documents,

it is shown and seen in visual representations on television, in newspapers, in magazines, in films, on the Internet and on social media. To understand legitimation, we need to account for these visual media, because legitimation involves more than written and spoken language. However, little research in International Relations has, to date, explored the visual politics of legitimation, and the next chapter thereby elaborates on this point and sets out a framework for understanding the role of visual media in legitimation processes.

Before setting out this framework, I now discuss how legitimation - whether it takes place through words or images - is reliant upon narratives. I explore how narrative is fundamental in global politics by drawing upon broader work within International Relations and arguing that; 1) we make sense of global politics through narratives; 2) narratives shape the identities of actors and the conditions of possibility in global politics; and 3) actors use narratives in strategic ways, one of which is to claim legitimacy for the use of force.

2.3 Narrating global politics

Scholars examining legitimation analyse the role of language, and some have recently begun to specifically focus on narrative (Goddard and Krebs, 2015; Krebs, 2015a). This attention to narrative is reflective of a broader 'narrative turn' in International Relations, and whilst it is commonplace to talk of a singular 'narrative turn', there are several differing traditions of scholarship that pay attention to narrative in global politics. There are narrative approaches that are concerned with the subjective

experiences of scholars and the writing of autoethnography and/or narrative fiction¹⁰ (Doty, 2004; Brigg and Bleiker, 2010; Dauphinee, 2010, 2013; Inayatullah, 2011; Jackson, 2014; Park-Kang, 2015). Other approaches explore the function of narratives in and of global politics (Ringmar, 1996; Suganami, 1997b, 1997a; Campbell, 1998a; Moore, 2010; Wibben, 2010) where scholarship recognises that ‘narratives are essential because they are a primary way by which we make sense of the world around us, produce meanings, articulate intentions, and legitimize actions’ (Wibben, 2010, p.2). Further to these approaches, another strand of work draws attention to strategic narratives (Freedman, 2006b; Miskimmon et al., 2013; Roselle et al., 2014; Graaf et al., 2015), and focuses on how political actors ‘try to use narratives *strategically* to sway target audiences’ (Roselle et al., 2014, p.74, emphasis in original). This attention to narrative from scholars of International Relations is perhaps unsurprising seeing as though narrative, and the telling of stories, is central to human experience (Barthes, 1975; White, 1980; Ricoeur, 1984; Bruner, 1991; Somers, 1994), with humanity recently being described as ‘the storytelling animal’ (Gottschall, 2012, p.xiv).

In IR, the turn to narrative was again made possible, and led by the poststructuralists of the late 1980’s and 1990’s (Derian and Shapiro, 1989; Walker, 1993; Campbell, 1998c). These authors often focused on discourse and language rather than narrative *per se*, however some scholars have focused on narrative explicitly by building upon the works of authors such as Hayden White (1980) and Paul Ricoeur (1984).

¹⁰ This type of narrative approach is often mislabelled as *the* narrative approach. Whilst such work undoubtedly provides important interventions into the discipline, the notion that narrative approaches to global politics consist wholly of autoethnography, fiction, or personal stories – approaches that use ‘narrative as method’ (Naumes, 2015, p.821) – is reductive, and fails to account for the other ways that narrative has been appreciated by scholars of global politics.

Following Hayden White's argument that the world, and the events that take place in it, do not present themselves 'in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning' (1980, p.27), critical scholars in IR have drawn attention to the important ways that narrative functions to give meaning to the world.

For example, Hidemi Suganami has built upon the work of Hayden White and Vladimir Propp to argue that 'there are no such things as "origins of a war", existing independently of the stories we tell about them' (Suganami, 1997b, p.402). Suganami argues that 'war origins are necessarily narratives, and as narratives they are artefacts constructed retrospectively for the sake of communicating arguments and ideas' (Suganami, 1997b, p.402). Such an argument not only places attention on narratives in global politics, but also serves to challenge neorealist approaches that see war and conflict as inevitable due to the anarchic international system (Suganami, 1997b, pp.417–418). Similar arguments have also been made by Erik Ringmar whose narrative theory of action critiques traditional International Relations theory by replacing 'the modern myths regarding the autonomy of desire and transcendental nature of the self, with desires and selves that are socially constructed – constructed through stories that speakers tell before audiences' (Ringmar, 1996, p.189). Ringmar's argument is demonstrated through a case study of Sweden's intervention in the Thirty Years War, and his central claim is that people go to war, not because of rational utility maximisation but because of the stories that shape their identities and those of others (1996).

Iver B. Neumann has also explored the role of narratives in the construction of identities of Self and Other in regards to nation states (Neumann, 1996, 1999), as has David Campbell, who investigated the role of narrative and identity in US foreign policy (1998c) and in the Bosnian war (1998b). Campbell's work on narrative explores how the employment of supposedly objective facts about events and ethnicity in the Bosnian war are reliant upon interpretation and representation; where narratives have been 'complicit in the constitution of realities they merely claim to describe' (1998a, p.263). Consequently Campbell argues that 'the narrativisation of events into stories with moral purposes partake in the constitution of realities that have political effects, even as those narratives claim the status of dispassionate and descriptive observer' (1999, pp.320–321).

Whilst sympathetic to these points, Stephen Chan has drawn upon the work of Paul Ricoeur in order to critique the work of White, Suganami and Campbell (2003). In doing so he suggests, at the most basic level, not only looking at the political function (or telos) of narratives, but also at their composition and narration (Chan, 2003, p.386). Chan concludes by suggesting that those who want to take narrative seriously need to focus on 'the subject, the speaking subject, and the process of speaking, before finally entering the realm of what is spoken, and how the word relates to the recognition of an object' (2003, p.411). Cerwyn Moore has built upon these authors, and in a similar way to Chan he has used the work of Paul Ricoeur to focus on narrative and identity in conflicts in Kosovo and Chechnya (2006, 2010). Moore follows Ricoeur and recognises that the identities of actors in global politics are not fixed or immutable, rather they are that 'of a recounted story' (Ricoeur cited in Moore, 2010, p.20). Moore demonstrates that such stories 'were used to help

construct the image of an enemy' (2010, p.102) and were also entwined with emotions such as humiliation and guilt that 'helped to codify the descent to war' (2010, p.140).

Feminist scholars have also pointed towards the importance of language and discourse in global politics and conflict (Cohn, 1987; Elshtain, 1987; Tickner, 1988; Enloe, 2000; Zalewski, 1995; Hansen, 2006; Shepherd, 2008, 2012; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; Åhäll, 2012), and Annick Wibben's *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (2010) places narrative at the heart of feminist approaches to security. Wibben suggests that 'stories matter. They do things. They have political and material consequences' (2010, p.106), and she argues that narratives of security serve to locate threats and danger, construct a referent to be secured, suggest which agents can provide security, whilst also signifying the means to contain threats in order to supposedly provide security (2010, pp.65–85). Traditional forms of security narratives serve to solidify historically developed 'violent practices that insist on the imposition of meaning that privilege state-centred, military forms of security' (Wibben, 2010, p.44). In doing so, these narratives marginalise and silence other ways of thinking and doing security (Wibben, 2010, p.64).

Together, this critical scholarship deems narrative to be important to global politics, as it is through narrative that we make sense of the world around us. Narratives are therefore fundamental to the constitution of identities and emotions in global politics, and they play an important role in war and conflict. Outside of the critical camps of International Relations, there is a growing literature on the concept of strategic narratives, where scholars have explored how actors engaged in war and conflict have

used narratives for their own purposes (Freedman, 2006a; Miskimmon et al., 2013; Graaf et al., 2015). Writing in 2006, Lawrence Freedman defined strategic narratives as:

Compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn... ..They are strategic because they do not arise spontaneously but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current (2006b, p.22).

Freedman notes that the study of strategic narratives in war are of utmost importance, and he argues that morale, propaganda, information, battles for hearts and minds, psychological operations, and public affairs are all reliant on narratives (2006b, p.24). More recent work on strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2012, 2013) provides for a deeper, and more theoretically robust engagement with the concept of strategic narratives than is present in Freedman's short article, and is worth discussing here due to the intersections with the critical literature on narrative.

Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle argue that strategic narratives are central to contemporary international affairs and three central points underpin their argument. In a similar vein to the scholars discussed above, Miskimmon et al begin from the notion that 'narratives are central to human relations; They shape our world and constrain behaviour' (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.1). Secondly, they suggest that narratives are used strategically by political actors (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.1). And finally, they argue that 'our communication environment affects how narratives

are communicated and flow, and with what effects' (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.1).

Miskimmon et al define strategic narratives as:

Representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool to which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives. Critically, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals – they articulate end states and suggest how to get there (2013, p.5).

They then go on to suggest that the study of strategic narratives can take place across a broad spectrum of theoretical perspectives, ranging from rationalist approaches on one end, to poststructural approaches on the other (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp.14–15). Their primary contribution is to 'explain how narratives are used strategically' (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.21) and in the conclusion to their book, Miskimmon et al provide a succinct summary of why narrative is important in global politics. They note:

Human beings think in narratives, and tell stories to make sense of the world around them. Narratives stitch events together into a past, a present, and possible futures. Narratives set out actors and their character, create expectations about the roles they might play, give meaning to the context and setting, and organize events into a plot while sidelining or silencing other ways of seeing events. Narratives are central to the identity and behaviour of actors in the international system, the structure of the system itself, and how ideas, issues, and policies are contested (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.176).

This is relevant in the context of legitimation, as narratives are at the heart of legitimation processes. Political actors strategically use narratives to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and these narratives are then interpreted and accepted or contested by other actors and audiences. The above discussion of narrative approaches to global politics demonstrates that an interest in narrative comes from a broad variety of theoretical and methodological positions that approach narrative with different ontological and epistemological foundations. Such diversity requires that those working on narrative be explicit about the assumptions that underpin their research.

In Chapter 1 I outlined these assumptions as being attentive to representation and interpretation at everyday sites of global politics, and I also suggested how the aesthetic turn could be built upon by; 1) paying more attention to the contexts of production and reception as opposed to representations themselves; 2) by analysing vernacular sites and representations of global politics; and 3) by exploring multimedia. The study of narrative and legitimation has generally focused on the content of narratives, but it is important to explore how they are produced and how they are interpreted. Studies of narrative and legitimation have also focused on the realm of high politics, but as is exemplified by the use of social media by actors engaged in war, actors are increasingly using non-traditional means to articulate narratives and claim legitimacy for the use of force. Because of this, approaches to narrative and legitimation need to explore the role of visual multimedia in such processes. With these broad points in mind, I now explicitly outline how the politics of legitimation is reliant on narrative.

2.4 The narrative politics of legitimation

The above traverse over the contours of IR's 'narrative turn' highlighted that there are assorted understandings of narrative at work in the study of global politics. Thus, for the purposes of clarity I now define narrative before exploring several important points regarding the study of legitimation in global politics. My reading of narrative follows the literature in International Relations, and is also influenced by the work of Kenneth Burke (1969), Seymour Chatman (1975), Roland Barthes (1975), W.J.T Mitchell (1981), Hayden White (1984), Paul Ricoeur (1984), Donald Polkinghorne (1988) and Margaret Somers (1994).¹¹ Such a reading suggests that narratives are meaningful, temporally structured, frameworks of representations. The work of Kenneth Burke has been drawn upon by scholars working in International Relations (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Roselle et al., 2014), and Burke proposes that all narratives contain elements pertaining to 'what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)' (1969, p.xv). These aspects of narrative are connected through emplotment; where the plot of the narrative functions to grasp together 'into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events' (Ricoeur, 1984, p.x).

Consequently, narratives configure their constituent parts into one temporally ordered meaningful whole; a whole that is reducible to a theme (Ricoeur, 1984, p.67).

Margaret Somers suggests that

¹¹ Of course many other scholars working in the fields of literature and cultural studies have provided thorough accounts of narrative. In particular Aristotle, Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, and Mieke Bal, have all written important works on narrative, however I choose not to engage with their work in much detail due to their focus on narratology and the structure of stories, as opposed to the centrality of narrative in making sense of history, politics, and identity.

the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by *connecting* (however unstably) *parts* to a constructed *configuration* or a *social network* of relationships (however incoherent or unrealizable) composed of symbolic, institutional, and material practices (Somers, 1994, p.616 emphasis in original).

This unifying of unique parts into a plot is what makes narrative unique, and in this way narrative differs from discourse. Essentially, narratives are a form of structured discourse (Barthes, 1975, p.240; Chatman, 1975, p.295). Following Seymour Chatman I recognise that narratives consist of both story *and* discourse where ‘story is the *what* that is depicted: discourse is the *how*’ (Chatman, 1975, p.295 emphasis in original). Thus, story refers to the events (acts) and existents (actors, agency, purpose, scene) and discourse refers to how these things are expressed (verbally, visually, in literature, in cinema, and so on) (Chatman, 1975, p.300). This understanding of discourse is compatible with the poststructuralist understanding of discourse as systems of signification. Here, discourse is understood as the raw ‘social fabric’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.xiii) where ‘meaning is constantly renegotiated’ (Torring, 1999, p.85).

Importantly, narrative structures discourse through emplotment. This emplotment provides temporality and a sense of causality or movement. However, narratives are also structured by discourse as narratives can only be crafted out of discourses that are available to actors (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.7). Such a relationship is not tautological because discourses and meaning are in flux, never perfectly fixed and malleable (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp.105–114). An example may serve to

elucidate the relationship between discourse and narrative as understood here. For instance, a narrative joins the statements ‘The Islamic State terror group’, ‘bomb blast’ and ‘at least 80 people in a Shia neighbourhood’ into a singular ‘The Islamic State terror group has claimed responsibility for a bomb blast that killed at least 80 people in a Shia neighbourhood of Baghdad in the deadliest attack in the Iraqi capital this year’ (Chulov, 2015). Each statement pertains to various discourses (perhaps terrorism, conflict, and religious community) but it is through narrative that these discourses become related, and it is through narrative that the events and actors become configured in a relationship that is understandable. Thus, an approach that takes narrative into account must pay attention to discourse, but must also look at how these discourses are structured and related through the configuration apparent in a narrative’s plot.

This reading of narrative suggests several points for studying legitimation in global politics. Such an understanding places narrative at the centre of human experience where it follows that narrative is inherently central to legitimation (Goddard and Krebs, 2015; Krebs, 2015b). It is through narratives that we make sense of an inherently complex and messy world, and the actors and events that are in it. As Roland Barthes has aptly put it, narratives are ‘simply there like life itself’ (1975, p.237) and they are central to how we understand the world and our place in it. As Margaret Somers argues; ‘it is through narratives that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities’ (Somers, 1994, p.606). Therefore narrative matters for global politics as it shapes identities and in turn enables certain political possibilities whilst constraining others. Because narratives are central to human behaviour,

narratives are the primary way through which legitimation takes place. As Ronald R. Krebs argues, narratives ‘set the boundaries of legitimation and structure political debate’ (2015b, p.168), and I contribute to recent studies of legitimation by developing an understanding of how the politics of legitimation rely upon narratives told through visual media.

Further to this, several wagers can be made regarding what is important when we study the narrative politics of legitimation. These wagers relate to two areas: one regarding the contexts of narrative production and interpretation, and the other regarding the content of narratives themselves. The following section of this chapter presents six wagers concerning narrative that relate to these two areas, and I discuss the implications that such an understanding of narrative has for the study of legitimation in global politics. In the area of context I argue that; 1) narratives require a narrator; 2) narratives require an audience. Regarding the content of narratives, I argue that; 3) narratives feature acts, scenes, agents, agency and purpose; 4) narratives are always partial and selective in their representation of actors and events; 5) emplotment structures the relationship between a narrative’s constituent parts; and 6) emplotment often implies causality in relating actors and events. These points inform the understanding of the visual politics of legitimation that follows in the next chapter and they therefore shape the contours of analysis in each case study.

First, narratives require a narrator. Narratives do not come from nowhere, because ‘the world is not given to us in the form of well made stories’ (Mink, 1981, p.239); narratives are constructed by human actors. For Barbara Herrnstein Smith this means that ‘no narrative can be independent of a particular teller and occasion of telling,

therefore... ..every narrative version has been constructed in accord with some set of purposes or interests' (1981, p.215). Sharing this sentiment, Stephen Chan has suggested that we should begin our analysis of narratives in global politics by focusing on those who narrate and construct narratives (2003). Miskimmon et al have also suggested a need to begin our study of narratives with actors and how they 'are narrated, narrate, and are affected by the intersection of power and social interaction' (2013, p.54). This means that when exploring legitimation we need to pay attention to the context of narrative production.

In this regard, Miskimmon et al suggest a need to pay attention to contextual factors such as the political goals of the narrative producer, the role of domestic politics, constraints on an actors historical narratives, events, and conceptions of order (2013, p.85). In doing so we need to ask questions such as; who is telling the narrative? Why are they telling this narrative? What contextual factors are shaping the production of this narrative? How does the narrative construct identities of both those speaking and those being spoken of? And what are the political effects of such identity construction? Such questions do not necessarily imply 'true' intentions and motivations, rather they suggest that the practice of narrating, constructing a narrative and projecting it, undoubtedly shapes the narrative and it is thus important in understanding legitimation.

Second, for any narrative to be meaningful, it must be told to an audience who has – at some basic level – an interest in reading the narrative (Herrnstein Smith, 1981, p.229). Whilst often overlooked, the role of the audience is vital in global politics. Cerwyn Moore highlights that political actors 'draw on histories – fact and fiction –

and then project identity claims through the prism of narrative onto audiences; the reaction of the audience then leads to recognition, legitimacy and, in some cases the endorsement of authority' (Moore, 2010, p.88). Thus, it is not only important to look at the production and strategic use of narrative, it is also necessary to explore how audiences engage with narratives because this has implications for global politics.

This requires an attention to contextual factors such as the credibility of narratives for audiences, the effects of competing narratives, different types of reception (support, acquiescence, protest, appropriation), and contingent factors affecting reception (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.87). Research in regards to audience engagement with narratives remains one of the most underdeveloped areas in the literature (Goddard and Krebs, 2015, p.29), and addressing this lacuna is of upmost importance for this project and future research. Therefore, when studying narratives we need to ask questions such as; who are the intended and actual audiences of this narrative? How is the audience's subject position and identity shaped by the narrative? How do the audience respond to the narrative? And what contextual factors shape how the audience respond? These questions are concurrent with the position outlined in Chapter 1, that recognises that interpretation and audience engagement is an important, and often overlooked, aspect of communication in global politics.

Whilst researching narratives, it is obviously important to pay attention to their content, and this is the third point of interest. When studying narratives we need to ask several questions relating to each aspect of Burke's narrative 'pentad' (1969, p.xv). Such questions include:

Act – What is being done in the narrative?

Scene – When and where is the narrative taking place?

Characters – Who are the agents, or characters, in this narrative?

Agency – How did the characters act?

Purpose – Why did the characters act this way?

In considering narratives of legitimation, we need to explore how these narrative aspects pertain to the three dimensions of legitimacy suggested by the likes of Beetham (1991) and Coicaud (2002). As discussed earlier, these dimensions include; 1) a conformity with legal rules; 2) justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms; and 3) seeking consent from/consent being expressed by others. Hence, we want to question how the acts, scenes, characters, and the ways and purposes of acting in narratives relate to these three dimensions.

Fourth, narratives are always partial and selective in their telling of events (White, 1984, p.14). Therefore we need to reflect on the content of narratives and not only ask what is included in them, but also question what events are excluded from, marginalised or silenced by the narrative? Fifth, narratives structure events in a coherent temporal order through emplotment, where 'by means of a plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action' (Ricoeur, 1984, p.ix). Sixth, through emplotment narratives often imply causality where later events don't just happen after earlier events, but are caused by them (Ricoeur, 1984). Taking these two points seriously suggests that we need to pay attention to several factors as well as the characters and the events in the narrative. We also need to ask, how are these characters and events emplotted? What

are the major relationships between actors and events? What causes does the narrative attribute to the events that take place? And what are the main themes of the narrative?

By returning to the example discussed at the start of this chapter we can demonstrate the utility of this framework in order to make sense of the narrative politics of legitimisation. Beginning with the context of narrative production, we can see that the narrator is Prime Minister David Cameron, acting on behalf of the British government, and he is strategically using a narrative to claim legitimacy for military intervention in Syria in ‘response to a war crime’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). As such the narrative constructs the identity of the narrator as legitimate in wanting to uphold ‘the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013) through military force that ‘is legal, proportionate and focused on saving lives’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). Such an identity is juxtaposed with that of the Assad regime which is deemed to be illegitimate as it has used chemical weapons, broken international law and ‘caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries of Syrian civilians’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). In terms of audience, the speech is addressed at fellow Members of Parliament who are collectively positioned as identifying with Cameron through statements such as ‘this house... ..deplores... ..agrees...’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). However, in an age when the goings-on of Parliament are broadcast live on television, we can presume that the audience of Cameron’s speech was also the general public. In terms of audience response, we can see that Cameron’s narrative was rejected by the audience as MP’s voted against the motion (BBC, 2013).

Focusing on content, we can see most of the constituent narrative parts we might expect. The act was the killing of civilians; this act took place in Syria, and was done

by the Assad regime who used chemical weapons (why they did so is not made clear by Cameron). This narrative, in turn requires another act; military intervention, again in Syria, but to be done by the British military with the support of the United Nations, in order to fulfil the purpose of ‘preventing and deterring further use of Syria’s chemical weapons’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013). The narrative suggests that the Assad regime is illegitimate because they do not conform with legal rules, their acts were not justifiable in terms of the shared beliefs, values and norms of the international community, and it is clear that Cameron does not express consent for them. It also suggests that British military intervention would conform with legal rules, would be justifiable in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms, and by passing the motion in parliament we can see that Cameron is indeed seeking consent from others.

Furthermore, this narrative is partial and selective, for example, as noted above it fails to explore why Assad used chemical weapons, and it doesn’t detail the countless other atrocities committed by the Assad regime using ordinary munitions. In regards to emplotment, Cameron’s narrative temporally links various events and attributes causality to characters in the narrative. For example he states that ‘the use of chemical weapons in Syria on 21 August 2013 *by* the Assad regime, which *caused* hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries of Syrian civilians’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013, emphasis added). It is also implied that British military intervention would in turn ‘alleviate humanitarian suffering by deterring [the] use of chemical weapons’ (HC Deb 29 August 2013), thereby temporally linking, and implying that potential military action is a causal factor in the alleviation of humanitarian suffering.

2.5 Conclusion

As Miskimmon et al argue, ‘a focus on narratives allows us to understand when, why, and how legitimation is important’ (2013, p.35). By bringing the legitimation literature into conversation with IR’s narrative turn I have presented an analytical framework that allows for a systematic study of the narrative politics of legitimation that draws attention to the context of narrative production, narrative projection and narrative interpretation. The chapter began by conceptualising legitimacy as an intersubjective social quality that is dependent upon the process of legitimation. These processes of legitimation are reliant on legitimacy claims, which actors construct and then project through narratives to audiences who accept or reject them. The legitimation literature benefits from insights that have drawn attention to the importance of narrative in understanding global politics more broadly, and by engaging with this work I then provided a framework for researching the narrative politics of legitimation. I then demonstrated how this could be applied to a speech made in the Houses of Parliament by Prime Minister David Cameron.

Such a framework is, however, incomplete. This is because, just like most of the literature on legitimation and on narrative, the above framework is focused on written and spoken linguistic aspects of narrative. This is problematic because, as Stephen Chan reminds us, ‘there are other “languages”. Visual languages exist in art and cinema, and partake in elements of narratology—as does music’ (2003, p.387). Furthermore, ‘both the *content* and the *form* of a narrative are crucial’ (Wibben, 2010, p.2 emphasis in original), however there has been little discussion of the importance of non-linguistic forms of narrative in any of the legitimation or narrative literature. In this regard, Miskimmon et al argue that the type of media affects how narratives are

constructed, projected and received (2013, p.10) and they suggest that contemporary global politics is marked by ‘a new visuality’ (2013, p.22).

Despite this, their theorisation of the relationship between images and narratives is somewhat brief. They draw upon Ben O’Loughlin’s earlier work (2011) and for them it is the broader narratives that images represent that is important, rather than images themselves (2013, p.125). Indeed, as visual theorist W.J.T Mitchell reminds us: ‘there are no visual media. All media are mixed media’ (2002, p.170), and this leads to a need to understand the broader narratives that enable us to make sense of images. Therefore, Miskimmon et al’s approach should be welcomed as it moves towards appreciating the contexts of showing and seeing images rather than simply looking at their content. However, what is lost by this account is an attention to the ways in which images have their own system of signification (Barthes, 1977; Mitchell, 1984). Even if all media are mixed, different types of media have ‘varying ratios of senses and sign-types’ (Mitchell, 2002, p.150) and images communicate in their own ways, informing identities and invoking emotions in a way that words simply can’t. In response to criticism that they do not pay enough attention to visuality (Crilley, 2015), Miskimmon et al have admitted that:

In an increasingly visual media ecology we must account for the role of images in sustaining or challenging narratives in international affairs...
...While we have seen excellent work on the visual from Lene Hansen, David Campbell (again) and Roland Bleiker, there are no systematic investigations of how visuality and narrativity mesh (Miskimmon et al., 2015, p.343).

Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore how legitimation is not only reliant upon narrative politics, but also upon visual politics. With this in mind, the next chapter pulls together the theoretical footwork of the previous two chapters in order to draw attention to the ways in which studies of legitimation have often ignored visual media despite them being central in an increasingly visual media ecology. I then highlight how images are an important feature of the legitimation of war in the digital age. Here, I draw upon work within the field of visual culture to provide a suitable analytical framework for the following empirical case studies.

Chapter 3

The Visual Politics of Legitimation

In the previous chapter I argued that legitimation processes are reliant upon narratives. I brought together literature on legitimacy with literature on narrative in global politics, and I demonstrated how legitimation processes could be approached through the lens of narrative. I concluded by arguing that the research on legitimation, and on narrative, fails to convincingly account for *how* narratives are communicated through visual media in global politics. This chapter builds upon the last chapter by arguing that legitimation is often reliant on visual media. Therefore, we not only need to pay attention to the narrative politics of legitimation, but we also need to theorise and understand the visual politics of legitimation.

I begin with a discussion of the role of visual media in contemporary war, and I demonstrate that visual media are now fundamental to the conduct of war and conflict. I then turn to a brief redux of the literature on visual global politics, where I demonstrate that this work has often made reference to legitimacy, without exploring it in any detail, presuming that it is something we know when we see it. I critique such work and bring it into conversation with the legitimation literature discussed in Chapter 2 in order to provide a framework for understanding the intersection of visual politics and legitimation. I then suggest that the visual politics of legitimation can be best explored through a critical visual methodology. In order to do this I utilise work in the field of visual culture, and I argue that research concerned with the visual

politics of legitimation needs to go beyond simply looking at the content of visual media, and needs to also account for the contexts of production and reception.

3.1 The context of mediatized war

In September 2015, photographs of Alan Kurdi - a three year old Kurdish refugee - lying dead, face down on a beach in Turkey appeared on the front pages of at least thirty-nine national newspapers (Berenson, 2015). These images had political effects. They gave the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria 'a face' (Akkoc and Wilkinson, 2015), and they were directly attributed to a fifteen fold increase in donations to charities that help asylum seekers in the Mediterranean (Elgot, 2015). British Newspapers that had previously been warning of 'migrant invasions' had a sudden change of heart. They referred to Alan and his family as 'refugees' and called on the government to help solve the tragic 'human catastrophe' (Daily Mail headline in Allegretti, 2015). Whereas days earlier, David Cameron had warned of 'a swarm of people' (Cameron quoted in BBC News, 2015) and suggested that 'I don't think there is an answer that can be achieved simply by taking more and more refugees' (Cameron quoted in Channel 4 News, 2015), after seeing the images he took to the House of Commons to propose that 'Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees' (Cameron, 2015). This sudden change in discourse and policy led one BBC journalist to ask 'has one picture shifted our view of refugees?' (Devichand, 2015).

The photographs of Alan Kurdi are a prime example of why images matter for global politics. To reiterate the theoretical points made in Chapter 1; first, the photograph of Alan Kurdi has been central to the circulation of news surrounding the Syrian conflict and the ensuing humanitarian crisis. Second, this image has had a powerful impact in

constituting the 'reality' of the Syrian conflict to audiences across the globe. Third, the image has had political effects: it has helped to shape the conditions of possibility for what is and can be done by political actors in response to the Syrian conflict and the humanitarian crisis that is affecting the Middle East and Europe. Of course, these images of Alan Kurdi are just a few of many images to depict the horrors of the Syrian conflict and its tragic human consequences. Images have been so central to the Syrian conflict that we can describe it as a mediatized war.

I now discuss how war and conflict are mediatized, and in doing so I argue that visual media are such an important aspect of war and conflict that they need to be accounted for in any consideration of how political actors legitimate their use of force. War has, in recent decades, been accompanied by various adjectives that are used to highlight how it is changing through the development and use of new media technologies. Contemporary war has been described as 'postmodern' (Gray, 1997; Moore, 2010), 'virtual' (Ignatieff, 2000), 'virtuous' (Der Derian, 2009), 'diffused' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010). More recently it has been modified by in vogue modifiers, becoming 'war 2.0' (O'Hagan, 2013) and 'iWar' (Pötzsch, 2013). It has also been described as being 'quantum' (Der Derian, 2013), and it has even been 'arrested' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015). Such approaches highlight and focus on different technological aspects of contemporary war, however they all share a common theme in that they recognise that the representation, perception, and communication of war are an incredibly important aspect of it. This recognition places attention on the mediatization of war, where 'media practices are becoming part of the practice of warfare to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role of the media in it' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.4).

Writing in 1997, Chris Hables Gray reflected on ‘the mania of the last few hundred years for labelling new types of war’ (1997, p.21). He noted that this labelling stems from a sense that ‘War seems to be changing more quickly than it ever has before’ (Gray, 1997, p.21). Gray settles on the term ‘postmodern war’ because ‘information (and its handmaidens—computers to process it, multimedia to spread it, systems to represent it) has become the central sign of postmodernity’ (1997, p.22), and in war, information has now become ‘the single most significant military factor’ (1997, p.22). This condition of postmodernity and its associated digital technologies is one that is bound up with notions of virtuality; indeed, other scholars have used the term ‘virtual war’. Jean Baudrillard’s famous collection of essays on the gulf war explore the virtuality of conflict as a media spectacle and place attention on ‘the structural unreality of images’ (1995, pp.46–47). In this virtual reality - or what Baudrillard calls hyperreality - the reality of war is replaced by a simulacrum where the boundaries between what is real and what is not have become blurred through digital technologies. Virtual war is, according to Paul Patton, ‘deployed in an abstract, electronic and informational space’ (Patton in Baudrillard, 1995, p.9). Such points explicitly draw attention to how digital and visual media technologies are important to the contemporary legitimisation processes of war.

Michael Ignatieff also uses the term virtual war, and he has written about the importance of images in contemporary war (Ignatieff, 2000, p.5), as has James Der Derian (2000; 2009). For Der Derian, the virtual dimensions of contemporary war constitute ‘virtuous war’ (2000; 2009), where ‘new technologies of imitation and simulation as well as surveillance and speed have collapsed the geographical distance,

chronological duration, the gap itself between the reality and the virtuality of war' (Der Derian, 2009, p.10). The main implications of these technological developments are an increasing quantity of media related to war, an increase in the speed at which this is communicated, and an increase in the size of the audience that receives this media.

One problem with the above approaches is that they are all engaging with a specific type of 'Western' warfare. In his critique of the postmodern, virtual approach to war, Cerwyn Moore argues that it 'does little to offer a reading of war not conditioned solely by this form of technological superiority. Nor does it shed light on the emergence of armed resistance movements within the context of globalisation' (2010, p.71). Despite this critique, Moore notes that one of the contributions of this literature is an attention to 'the interface between war and its coverage through the news media' (2010, p.71). Mediatization is therefore central to all of these conceptualisations of contemporary war, because communication, representation, and visual media are paramount in the conduct of war and conflict (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010). As is exemplified by the sophisticated use of digital and visual media in the ongoing Syrian conflict (Lynch et al., 2014; Powers and O'Loughlin, 2015), today's wars and conflicts, whether they are waged by technologically dominant 'Western' militaries, or by loose collections of armed resistance movements, are now mediatized.

James Der Derian highlights why it is important to understand the mediatization of war when he writes that 'More than a rational calculation of interests takes us to war. People go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others' (Der Derian, 2009, p.238). Therefore, if we are to understand contemporary

war we need to understand how it is mediatized. We need to pay attention to how it is represented, communicated, and how audiences receive, interpret and engage with these media; media that are increasingly digital and visual. These issues are not peripheral. They are at the heart of the conduct of contemporary war and conflict. This is because, regardless of whether war is being waged by technologically superior states or by non-state actors, 'the planning, waging and consequences of warfare do not reside outside of the media' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.5).

The work of Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin offers the most comprehensive account of what mediatized conflict is. They draw upon the work of Stig Hjarvard who defines mediatization as a process 'whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence' (Hjarvard in Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.5). This institutional approach to mediatization focuses on how different social fields, or systems, adopt media logics (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.196), and according to Hoskins and O'Loughlin, war is now 'diffused'. This is because mediatization has led to diffuse causal relations between action and effect, and this in turn leads to greater uncertainty for actors engaged in war (2010, p.4). Hoskins and O'Loughlin argue that mediatization is an important aspect of war and conflict

because perceptions are vital to war – the perceptions a public who can offer a support to a war, of government trying to justify a war, and of those in the military themselves, who are trying to perceive and understand exactly what is happening when war is waged (2010, p.5).

This is true of war and conflict throughout history, as perceptions have always been vital to the conduct of war (O'Hagan, 2013, p.556). However, in the new media ecology it becomes evermore apparent that 'to fight a war is to fight to construct and fill in fields of perception' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.6) as developments in digital media technologies enable more people to create, share, and access information about war and conflict.

Consequently, in order to make sense of contemporary war we need to pay attention to how political actors use 'a complex mesh of our everyday media: news, movies, podcasts, blogs, video games, documentaries and so on' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.7). This is because, in the new media ecology, 'the conventions of so-called "traditional" warfare have been splintered by the availability and connectivity of the principal site of war today: the electronic and digital media' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.7). This is salient for understanding legitimation because these electronic and digital sites are now central to legitimation processes, yet they have been overlooked in the discipline of International Relations. Instead, as noted in the last chapter, the focus has been on legitimation processes in the realm of 'high politics', in the spoken words of political leaders, debates in international institutions, and articles in print publications. Furthermore, the everyday media that Hoskins and O'Loughlin note as being so important in mediatized war have an inherently visual element.

Writing on the mediatization of war in 2006, the communication theorist Dennis McQuail stated that 'theory and research is still dealing with (rather than fighting) the "last war", perhaps even quite a few wars ago' (2006, p.114), and similar arguments

have been made by those working in the discipline of International Relations. Patricia Owens has noted that 'international theory engages relatively little with the high technology that many see as transformative not only of the global economy and political interaction, but also of war' (2003, p.595). Furthermore, these technologies in a broad sense, and processes of mediatization in a more narrow sense, require 'new modes of comprehension and instruction, and scholars have not been very quick to take up the challenge' (Der Derian, 2009, p.253). Hoskins and O'Loughlin have gone some way in addressing this challenge, and so have several others who again use different modifiers to define contemporary war as 'war 2.0' (O'Hagan, 2013), 'iWar' (Pötzsch, 2013), 'quantum war' (Der Derian, 2013), and 'arrested war' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015). This literature emphasises the importance of digital and visual media in contemporary warfare, and provides a platform for beginning to think about their importance in legitimation processes.

Jacinta O'Hagan discusses war 2.0 and focuses on the impact of digital media technologies on war. She is interested in how digital media has led to the diffusion of power through the increased accessibility of media tools to non-state actors (O'Hagan, 2013, p.559). This proliferation of agency leads to a need to focus on how actors present 'different representations of themselves, of the issues at stake, and of the nature and course of the conflict' (O'Hagan, 2013, p.561). According to O'Hagan, such representations are bound up with legitimation, as it is through representations that actors construct, assert, and justify the legitimacy of themselves and their actions in war, whilst also contesting the legitimacy of others (O'Hagan, 2013, p.563).

Further to this, Holger Pötzch has used the concept of iWar (2013) to reiterate how mediatization is one of the most prominent issues in contemporary war. Pötzch draws upon Johnny Ryan (2007) and Mark Andrejevic's (2007) use of the term iWar and develops it by focusing on the socio-technical dimensions of individuation, implicitness, interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy (Pötzch, 2013, p.2). These themes draw attention to the various 'consequences of new media and communication technologies for changing practices and perceptions of contemporary warfare' (Pötzch, 2013, p.2). Pötzch argues that iWar builds upon the concepts of virtuous and diffused war by addressing some of the most recent technological developments that the likes of Der Derian and Hoskins and O'Loughlin do not account for (Pötzch, 2013, p.4).¹²

James Der Derian has recently suggested that war is now 'quantum' (2013) and he has argued that 'Global media is now an unparalleled force in the organisation, execution, justification and representation of global violence' (Der Derian, 2013, p.572). Moreover, Der Derian advocates an approach that 'recognises the increasing power of images over words in all global politics' (2013, p.572). Harking back to his earlier work, he reasserts a need for an aesthetic approach to global politics as images have become 'the new currency of war' (Der Derian, 2013, p.578). He writes:

Networked, proliferated and accelerated by multi-platform transmedia, the images of war are instantaneously Googled, Wikied and Twittered into

¹² For Pötzch these developments include 'the epistemological effects of individualizing filter technologies and new search algorithms, the feedback-enhanced forms of control enabled by new data mining applications and new Internet protocols, or improved techniques of visualization that digitally enhance access to the dis-located battlefield' (Pötzch, 2013, p.5).

branded identities and virtual realities... ..images of violence - no matter how degraded, night-scoped or pixelated - grab more eyeballs and engender more controversial interpretations than even the most well-crafted print story (Der Derian, 2013, p.581).

The importance of images in war has also been reiterated by Hoskins and O'Loughlin who have revisited their earlier work on diffused war, and have instead suggested that war is now 'arrested' (2015). Whilst tempering their earlier claims that mediatization has led to more diffuse citizen-centric power and uncertainty, Hoskins and O'Loughlin suggest that the mainstream media, and political actors engaged in war, have become proficient at utilising digital new media for their own purposes. They argue that 'professional media and military institutions have arrested the once-chaotic social media dynamics and more effectively harnessed them for their own ends' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015, p.1). Hoskins and O'Loughlin use examples of the British Military production of *Our War* and their development of Media Operations in Afghanistan, as well as the use of media in Ukraine (for example the cartographical Twitter spat between Canada and Russia), to reify the argument that visual media are a fundamental aspect of contemporary war. The fact that actors involved in conflict have become adept at using digital and visual media in the context of 'arrested war' suggests that the need to understand the role of these media in processes of legitimation is of the utmost importance.

Regardless of the modifiers used to describe war, the common theme across this literature is the recognition that war and conflict is mediatized. The development and proliferation of digital media technologies has led to media and information becoming

vital to the conduct of war. There is now more media about war circulating around the globe, and this media is often visual. This visual media is also communicated globally at near instantaneous speeds online to larger audiences than ever before. This is true for both those states conducting the technologically superior 'western' way of war, as well as those involved in non-state armed resistance movements.

Drawing upon the approaches to mediatization in the work of Couldry and Hepp (2013) we can see that, in one sense, mediatization has had an impact on the institutions involved in the waging of wars as they have now adopted media logics and utilise media for their own purposes.¹³ In another sense, it is apparent that mediatization has led to the reality of war becoming manifest in digital and visual media that have consequences 'for the overall process whereby [the] sociocultural reality [of war] is constructed in and through communication' (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.196). In the contemporary media ecology it is therefore important to explore the representation, communication, and perception of war through digital and visual media, because these have a very real impact on the conduct of war and conflict. If we are to understand how political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force in the digital age we need to go beyond studying written and spoken narratives in non-digital places. Such an argument suggests that we need an aesthetic approach to make sense of legitimation processes, and we need to understand how the politics of legitimation operate through visual media.

¹³ For a broad theorisation of this argument see (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, 2015; Roger, 2013). Sarah Maltby has explored how the British Military has adopted a media logic (Maltby, 2012b, 2012a; Maltby et al., 2015) and Thomas Crosbie has analysed this in the context of the US military (2015).

3.2 The visual turn redux: Going beyond knowing legitimacy when we see it

The following section of this thesis demonstrates that scholars of global politics have made frequent references to how visual media are important in creating and sustaining the legitimacy of war in some way, shape or form. However, despite this work making the general observation that the legitimacy of war is inextricably linked to visual media, there is a lack of engagement with legitimacy as a concept, or the rich and diverse literature on legitimacy and legitimation that exists within the discipline of International Relations. In certain cases legitimacy is simply mentioned briefly and even when it is a concept that is central to the argument, it is not defined or explained (see for example Shepherd, 2008). Presumably, legitimacy is simply something we know when we see it.

In response to this, I argue that a sustained engagement with the literature on legitimation is required in order to fully understand the importance of visual media in the context of mediatized war. In the previous chapter I demonstrated a need for scholars interested in legitimation to go beyond the confines of written and spoken language in the realm of 'high politics'. I now demonstrate a need for scholars of visual global politics to provide a richer engagement with legitimation. By drawing attention to the visual politics of legitimation I contribute by providing a conceptually grounded understanding of legitimation that is attuned to the importance of visual media. This section begins by surveying the poststructural work on visual global politics, and I argue that it fails to provide a sufficient account of legitimation. I then draw upon work that explores war through the lens of media and cultural studies, and I argue that this work provides a more convincing account of legitimation because, in

addition to focusing on the content of legitimacy claims, it places attention on actors who produce these claims, alongside the audiences who interpret them.

In the introduction to their special issue on visual culture and securitization, David Campbell and Michael Shapiro never mention legitimacy explicitly, however they allude to it when they suggest that ‘visual culture is implicated in new military strategies, at the same time as it enables critical practices contesting those military strategies’ (Campbell and Shapiro, 2007, p.133). Similarly, further articles in the special issue are concerned with legitimacy, either implicitly or explicitly. Whilst these articles provide an insightful contribution to the role of images in the context of the ‘war on terror’, none of them provide a sophisticated account of legitimation beyond either alluding to it or suggesting that it occurs when one political actor is represented as a good, civilised self in opposition to an evil, barbaric other.

For example, Elizabeth Dauphinée and Klaus Dodds explore how images serve to challenge, contest, and delegitimise the Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’, but neither author goes beyond mentioning legitimacy in passing (Dauphinée, 2007, p.153; Dodds, 2007, p.174). Frank Möller argues that verbal and visual references to 9/11 are used ‘so as to give legitimacy to current policies’ (2007, p.184) and he concludes that ‘The twin towers will be available as a legitimacy provider for a long time, seemingly narrowing the range of possible foreign policy options’ (2007, p.192). Beyond this, Möller does not explain exactly how such images of the twin towers serve to legitimise foreign policy options. In her contribution to the special issue, Louise Amoore asks ‘has vision come to be represented not only as the primary sense... ..but also as, precisely, the sovereign sense – the sense that secures the

state's claim to sovereignty and legitimates violence on its behalf?' (Amoore, 2007, p.218). Her answer to the question is an astounding yes (Amoore, 2007, pp.220–223), however she never provides an account of exactly how images and vision serve to legitimise state violence beyond securing notions of Self and identifying Others (Amoore, 2007, p.223).

This understanding of legitimacy being created by representations of Self in opposition to an Other is also apparent in the work of other scholars in the special issue. Marcus Power and J. Marshall Beier only make passing reference to legitimacy, and they do not detail exactly how the politics of legitimation are at work in the video games or the photographs they study beyond whether those depicted in images are depicted as a civilised 'us', or a dangerous, barbaric, and savage 'them' (Power, 2007, p.278; Beier, 2007, pp.265–268). Legitimation is however, central to Christian Erickson who analyses television series after 9/11 (2007). He suggests that 'Examples of the theme of legitimization are instances that show the effectiveness of counter-terrorist agents, agencies, and technologies' (Erickson, 2007, p.198). Here, to equate legitimation simply with effectiveness is reductive. Take, for example, the television show *24*, whose protagonist Jack Bauer is often very effective, however his methods of being effective - such as torture - are illegitimate both in the eyes of other characters in the TV show and audiences watching at home.¹⁴ Whilst the construction of Self and Other is no doubt important to processes of legitimation, I argue that there is more to the visual politics of legitimation than this on its own. As I demonstrated in

¹⁴Throughout the various series of *24*, the US government, Jack Bauer's friends, colleagues and family all contest his methods of effectiveness. Similarly, just because torture is used as a dramatic device in *24*, does not mean that audiences accept actual torture as legitimate US policy. As Jonathan Freedland puts it 'Caught up in the story, we wanted Bauer to, say, sever the head of the villain with a hacksaw. But that is not necessarily what we wanted from our governments' (Freedland, 2014).

the last chapter, legitimation is a narrative process that involves a complex mix of acts, scenes, agents, agency and purpose; all of which are structured and brought together through emplotment. Therefore, reducing legitimation to dichotomies is to oversimplify a complex process.

Even so, outside of this special issue, other scholars have drawn attention to the links between visual politics and the legitimacy of war, yet they have also provided an unsatisfactory account of legitimation. Laura Shepherd argues that ‘visual representations were mobilised in service of the “war on terror” and functioned to construct narratives of legitimacy and authority’ (2008, p.213). Shepherd suggests that images make ‘claims to legitimacy’ (2008, p.214) and she makes reference to ‘narratives about legitimacy’ (2008, p.218), whilst never highlighting what legitimation entails or how narratives function to provide legitimacy. Other poststructural work on visual politics and security is similarly guilty of such brief engagements with legitimation. In her article on visual securitization, Lene Hansen suggests that ‘the [visual] constitution of threats legitimizes the adoption of emergency measures’ (2011, p.57), and whilst Hansen provides an extensive framework for understanding how images securitize, she does not account for how images legitimise.

Further work on visual securitization makes passing reference to legitimacy but doesn’t explore its complexity (Heck and Schlag, 2013, p.905), and other poststructural work on visual politics and security draws attention to legitimation yet fails to fully explain what it involves. For example, Simone Friis has recently suggested that ‘the visibility of war and violence shapes the general perception of

threats and conflicts, and, accordingly, indirectly affects which political responses will appear sensible and legitimate' (Friis, 2015, p.731). She argues that ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) beheading videos have been 'persistently invoked as an important element in the *legitimization* of particular responses to ISIS' (Friis, 2015, p.738, emphasis in original), however no clear theorisation of legitimation is apparent in her work.

What we often see in the poststructurally informed, visual global politics literature are references to legitimacy without the concept being developed, or without the process of legitimation being accounted for. This is not to say that the literature discussed above is wrong, or that it does not provide interesting and persuasive analyses of the role of images in global politics. Rather, it is to suggest that if legitimacy is a fundamental concept to International Relations, and if legitimation is fundamental to so much of global politics – including the use of force and war – then understanding exactly how images serve to legitimate certain political possibilities is of utmost concern. We therefore require an account of the visual politics of legitimation that goes beyond simply mentioning legitimacy and legitimation as if they are devoid of any complexity or historical intellectual discussion (see for example Weber, 2008b; Habermas, 1975; Beetham, 1991; Barker, 2001).

Scholars who engage with war from the perspective of media and cultural studies provide a more sustained engagement with legitimacy and legitimation than is seen in the poststructural work discussed above. I now discuss this work in order to provide a platform for theorising the visual politics of legitimation. Milena Michalski and James Gow argue that 'Legitimacy is the key to success in war; the image is the key to the

formation of legitimacy, or critical challenges to it' (2008, p.1). Theorising images as weapons of war, they argue that 'it is necessary to appreciate that the battle for hearts, minds and retinas... ...is the core purpose in contemporary warfare, not a subordinate, supporting activity' (Gow and Michalski, 2008, p.210). Whilst arguing that images are central to the legitimacy of war, Gow and Michalski's work lacks a thorough engagement with how exactly legitimisation works.¹⁵

James Gow's work with Marie Gillespie, Ben O'Loughlin, Andrew Hoskins, and Ivan Žveržhanovski also places legitimacy at the forefront of our attention, and explores legitimisation in the context of media production, media representations, and media reception. The authors note that 'legitimacy is key to security in the contemporary environment, but transformations in media production and consumption render legitimacy more difficult for policy-makers to secure' (Gillespie et al., 2010, p.240). Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin have also made similar arguments, suggesting that 'the legitimacy of a war depends on how it is described and explained through media' (2010, p.162). Subsequently, their analysis of legitimacy focuses on representational strategies that are used by 'those attempting to legitimize military or security policy' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, p.168). As with much of the poststructural work on visual politics and legitimacy, Hoskins and O'Loughlin reduce legitimacy to dichotomies of us/them, routine/exception, and justifiable/unjustifiable death (2010, pp.168–178). Whilst such binary representations are important in legitimisation, as I argued earlier, there is much more to legitimacy than this. Even

¹⁵ Furthermore, they suggest a need for Western governments 'to develop principles of image-environment domination, containment and suppression' (Gow and Michalski, 2008, p.216). Such a propagandist argument is somewhat alarming, and also, as Ben O'Loughlin suggests, problematic due to how audiences are extremely sceptical of propaganda and restrictions on journalistic activity (O'Loughlin, 2011, p.73).

Hoskins and O'Loughlin themselves note that 'people do not always think in such simplified terms' (2010, p.184), and I suggest that when theorising the visual politics of legitimation, neither should we.

Legitimation is a complex process, and we need to recognise this in our accounts of the role of visual media in war and conflict. As Marie Gillespie notes:

Legitimacy is a multivalent and contested political concept. It refers to a quality that inheres in and justifies a power relationship. Legitimacy is the result of processes of legitimation: leaders seek political legitimation via the media, and citizens accept or reject such appeals (2006, p.474).

Gillespie provides an illuminating study of how audiences perceive the legitimacy of the Iraq war, and using interviews she focuses on how legitimacy is prevalent in audience discussions of media, rather than on how legitimacy and visual politics are bound up together. What we can, and should, take from Gillespie is an attention to the role of audiences in the legitimation process. Rarely is this done by anyone working within the tradition of the aesthetic turn or those who focus on visual global politics, nor is it done by those working on legitimation. This is perhaps surprising, seeing as though aesthetics is fundamentally about interpretation and experience (Bleiker, 2009; Moore and Shepherd, 2010), yet audience analysis is more prominent in the work informed by cultural and media studies (Gillespie, 2006; Gillespie et al., 2010) as opposed to the poststructural approaches to visual global politics on the one hand, and the constructivist approaches to legitimation on the other. Therefore, the call to explore the site of audience interpretation (alongside the context of production and

representation itself) that I made in Chapter 1 is prescient because this is a fundamental feature determining the political effects of narratives and images, and subsequently legitimation processes.

The take home message from this above discussion is that poststructural scholars working on visual global politics have often made reference to legitimacy, but understanding it in terms of simple binary oppositions - where visual representations of a good, civilised self implies legitimacy - is insufficient as it simplifies a complex narrative process. Furthermore, understanding processes of legitimation requires an attention to visual media and the contexts of production, representation, and reception; a point that has been made by scholars analysing war from the perspective of cultural and media studies. If we are to understand the visual politics of legitimation, we need to draw the insights of these various approaches together, and I now do so in the following section of this chapter.

3.3 The visual politics of legitimation

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it brings together several insights from various bodies of literature in International Relations; including that which focuses on legitimation and narrative, with that which focuses on visual global politics (broadly understood as including approaches informed by poststructuralism and those informed by media and cultural studies). These strands of work have paid little attention to each other; however, in the context of mediatized war they need to be brought together in order to explore the politics of legitimation. This is because the legitimation of war relies upon narratives, and narratives are increasingly being told through visual media. Therefore we need to begin to theorise and research the visual politics of legitimation.

Producing a framework for understanding and researching the visual politics of legitimation is therefore the second, and main purpose of this chapter.

Such a framework posits that, first, legitimation takes place through narratives, and narratives are often told through visual media. We therefore need to analyse how political actors use images to project narratives in order to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Second, when images are used to claim legitimacy they cannot be reduced to the captions and written words that accompany them (in the case of media such as photographs) or to dialogue and spoken words that feature alongside them (in the case of video media). Therefore we require visual research methods that are attuned to analysing the content of images. Third, focusing on the content of visual media is not enough if we are to fully understand processes of legitimation. This is because political actors produce and circulate images and narratives for specific purposes and they thereby shape the content of this media before beginning the legitimation process. Furthermore, audiences interpret and have feelings towards these media, and it is this interpretation and emotional response that leads to images having political effects. Ultimately, in analysing the visual politics of legitimation we need to explore how and why images are produced and circulated by political actors, whilst also attempting to understand how audiences interpret them.

3.3.1 Legitimation and narratives told through images

As we observed in Chapter 2, legitimacy is an abstract, intersubjective social concept that is difficult to measure. However, what we can readily observe in the daily goings on of global politics are processes of legitimation where political actors claim legitimacy for themselves, their institutions, and their actions through the telling of

narratives and the contestation of other narratives (Barker, 2001; Reus-Smit, 2007; Goddard and Krebs, 2015). In the digital age political actors are increasingly using visual media to project narratives, and as we saw in Chapter 1, visual media are a fundamental aspect of contemporary global politics.

Ben O'Loughlin has warned against considering images as primary in our accounts of global politics, and he suggests that it is not the content of an image that matters, but what that content represents (2011, p.74). Indeed, within the field of visual culture, debates about occularcentrism – the primacy of vision in 'Western' culture – are still ongoing (Jay, 1993; Mirzoeff, 2011). However, if images communicate in their own special ways, through their own systems of signification (Barthes, 1977d), then they still require attention and an approach that is attuned to their specificity. Moreover, in the few years since O'Loughlin was writing, images have become increasingly important to social media sites. Over 1.8 billion images are now uploaded and shared online on a daily basis (Vis, 2015) and images on social media sites are increasingly used by people as their main source of news (Barthel et al., 2015).

Even so, it is important to recognise O'Loughlin's argument that when studying images 'it is not merely a question of image or larger narrative, but how the two are composed together' (2011, p.84). The challenge for scholars is not to simply study the content of images, but rather it is to 'understand when, how and why images mesh or jar with narratives' (O'Loughlin, 2011, p.89). With this in mind, it is somewhat problematic that in the discipline of International Relations 'there are no systematic investigations of how visuality and narrativity mesh' (Miskimmon et al., 2015, p.343). The following section thus serves to outline the relationship between visual

media and narrative, whilst also exploring the implications of this for understanding the politics of legitimation.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, narratives are fundamental to how we understand the world. As such, narratives can be told in many forms, whether in the form of spoken language such as speeches, or in the written words of novels and newspaper articles. Whilst these realms of language and narrativity have been quite well documented in International Relations, other forms of narrative have not (Chan, 2003; Weber, 2008a). As Roland Barthes suggests:

Narrative can be supported by articulated speech, oral or written, by image, fixed or moving, by gesture, and by the organized mixture of all these substances; it is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, tragedy, comedy, epic, history, pantomime, painting, stained glass window, cinema, comic book, news item, conversation (Barthes, 1975, p.79).

Whilst some scholars working in the tradition of the aesthetic turn have begun to explore forms of narrative outside of written and spoken words - such as in visual or aural media - their analysis has yet to be fully integrated into studies of legitimation (Reus-Smit, 2007; Goddard and Krebs, 2015) or narrative in global politics (Wibben, 2010; Miskimmon et al., 2013).

In written and spoken language we can easily see narrative elements at play. Take for example the statement that ‘the twin towers of the World Trade Centre collapsed because terrorists flew planes into them’. Even in such a short sentence we can

identify ‘what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)’ (Burke, 1969, p.xv). However, if you were to simply look at a photograph of the towers collapsing, or of lower Manhattan covered in dust, it becomes harder to see exactly how the narrative elements work. Indeed, Susan Sontag argues that ‘strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph... ..only that which narrates can make us understand’ (Sontag, 2008, p.23). In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag affirms this view, she asks ‘could one be mobilised to oppose war by an image[?]’ (Sontag, 2004, p.110), and she responds that ‘a narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image’ (Sontag, 2004, p.110).

This argument seems at odds with the cliché that ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’. Such a disjuncture is problematic, not simply because the trouble with clichés is that they are often true, but because of an undeveloped understanding of the relationship between images and narratives. To develop our understanding of this relationship we need to explore several issues. First, we must appreciate narrative as the overarching subject of interest in studies of legitimation, but we must consider visual media as particular - and important - methods of conveying these narratives. Sontag states that ‘the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb’ (Sontag, 2004, p.20). In this way, visual media such as photographs serve as particular moments that can epitomize a narrative and its main theme.

Following from this we need to recognise that ‘there are no visual media. All media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign types’ (Mitchell, 2002,

p.170). More often than not, images such as photographs are accompanied by captions, and video footage is accompanied by sound and dialogue. However, this does not mean, like Sontag argues, that ‘all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions’ (Sontag, 2004, p.9). This is because the content of photographs and other still images (such as stained glass windows) can itself narrate (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006, pp.45–78). Of course, narrative is also central to film, where narration doesn’t necessarily take place through a narrator telling the story, but through the juxtaposition of certain shots that imply the passage of time and causality (Wollen, 2003, 2013). Therefore we need to understand how images narrate without simply placing our attention on photographic captions and dialogue in films. This is because visual media ‘are not reducible to the meanings carried by those other things’ (Rose, 2012, p.16).

3.3.2 Analysing the specificities of visual media

In order to understand how the content of visual media is important in the legitimisation processes of war, we need to go beyond the disciplinary boundaries of IR. We need to draw upon work and disciplines that are accustomed to studying visual media. In Chapter 1 I critiqued work within IR’s visual turn and suggested three points of importance if we are to move forward in our understanding of visual global politics. First, we need to go beyond looking at the content of visual media towards understanding their contexts of production, circulation and interpretation. Second, we need to account for vernacular images, rather than only focusing on those that achieve iconic status. Third, we need to recognise that the contemporary media ecology is one of multimedia, and we need to account for various visual multimedia together rather than exploring still images on the one hand and moving images on the other. Such

arguments were developed by drawing upon work within the field of visual culture (Mitchell, 2002; Rose, 2012, 2014), and a further engagement with visual culture helps in understanding the visual politics of legitimation.

The study of images has been central to scholarly traditions in art history (Gombrich, 2007; Janson, 1977; Berger, 2008), iconology (Panofsky, 1972), semiotics (Barthes, 1977b, 1981; Metz, 1990; Wollen, 2013), and cultural studies (Hall, 2005). Whilst being diverse in their approaches to images, such traditions have informed and shaped the field of visual culture. Visual culture is both a field of study, and an object of study; cultures that are ‘pervaded at all levels by a host of cultural technologies designed to disseminate viewing and looking practices through primarily visually mediated forms’ (Evans and Hall, 1999, p.7).¹⁶ As such, the field of visual culture is concerned with interpreting images and understanding the social effects of their content. This content can be approached from a variety of different positions and I now discuss the key tenets of several traditions of studying images, beginning with content analysis before moving on to semiotics and iconography. I argue that an approach to images influenced by cultural studies (Rose, 2012, pp.189–260; Lister and Wells, 2000; Hall, 2005) provides for the most robust and appropriate approach to understanding firstly, the content of images, and secondly the contexts of their production, circulation and interpretation related to the visual politics of legitimation. This approach to visual culture is concomitant with the aesthetic approach to global politics as outlined in Chapter 1, as it shares many of the same assumptions concerning ontology, epistemology, and ‘everyday’ sites of importance. Moreover, those working within the aesthetic turn have been influenced and do, at times, directly

¹⁶ Debates abound about whether visual culture is itself an academic discipline, or an interdisciplinary field of study (See Mitchell, 2002; Bal, 2003).

draw upon scholars of cultural studies (Bleiker, 2001; 2015; Moore and Shepherd, 2010).

Content analysis is concerned with testing hypotheses about the ways in which images represent people and events (Bell, 2000). It aims to quantify the content of images into distinct categories and variables such as dimensions (size, colour, place on a page) and content (participants, settings, actions). Such variables are then accorded numerical values in the aim of making replicable, quantitative generalizations through reliable classification and observation (Bell, 2000, p.34). This approach is often used to analyse large numbers of images, but it has been critiqued due to its positivist theoretical assumptions and lack of reflexivity (Rose, 2012, pp.101–103).

By contrast, semiotic analysis is concerned with interpreting the specific meaning of symbols and signs in images rather than simply counting their content (van Leeuwen, 2000). According to Roland Barthes, images have two layers of meaning; denoted and connoted (Barthes, 1977d, 1977c). Denoted messages refer to what is literally in the image; such as who or what is depicted, and the connoted message refers to what values and ideas are expressed through what is represented and how it is represented. An example Barthes uses is an advertisement for Italian food, where the denoted message and the depicted content of vegetables create the connoted message of what Barthes calls 'Italianicity' - good, fresh, healthy Italian food and culture (Barthes, 1977d, pp.33–37). Barthes suggests that when conducting a semiotic analysis of images we need to also concern ourselves with technical effects such as 'framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed' (Barthes, 1977d, p.44) as well as the ways in which

composition, and the sequencing of images convey meaning alongside the content of objects and poses apparent in images (Barthes, 1977b). Such an approach is similar to that of iconography as both Barthes and Erwin Panofsky concerned themselves with ‘the same two fundamental questions: the question of representation (what do images represent and how?) and the question of “hidden meanings” of images (what ideas and values do the people, places, and things represented in images stand for?)’ (van Leeuwen, 2000, p.92).

The main difference between semiotics and iconology has been ‘in their objects of study – art works of the past versus media images of the present’ (van Leeuwen, 2000, p.117), and grounded within the tradition of art history, iconography pays attention to three levels of meaning; the ‘primary or natural subject matter’ (Panofsky, 1972, p.53); the iconographical symbolism of ‘artistic motifs (compositions) with themes or concepts’ (Panofsky, 1972, p.54), and the iconological symbolism which hints towards ‘underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion’ (Panofsky, 1972, p.101). Both traditions of semiotics and iconography have had influence in the development of the analysis of images within the field of cultural studies (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.71), and this approach to studying visual media informs this research project.

It is not possible to talk of a singular cultural studies approach to images, as ‘it has become clear that a too rigid application of systematic analysis for visual analysis... ..is self-defeating’ (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.73). Instead, cultural studies approaches stress ‘the plural, messy, contested and even creative nature of our discourse with the visual and with images, [and] the manner in which this is a site of a

struggle over what something means' (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.73). Therefore, when analysing the content of images we need to recognise that even with the most thorough content, semiotic, or iconographical analysis, there is never simply one, 'right' interpretation or method of analysis. In this regard, Roland Bleiker has recently called for images to be studied using multiple methods (Bleiker, 2015, p.873) and other scholars have also argued for 'an interpretive and multi-layered approach to the discovery of meaning in visual texts' (Howells, 2003, p.6). A cultural studies approach therefore provides a suitable approach to understanding the visual politics of legitimisation, as it embraces methodological eclecticism and holds 'diverse approaches to the image' (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.90). Furthermore it benefits from 'a range of systematic methods of analysis in order to complexly address questions of form, production, reception, and meaning while taking account of political issues, institutions and ideological discourses' (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.90). I address issues of production and interpretation in the next section of this chapter, and I now turn to a discussion of how visual media content concerns the politics of legitimisation.

In the previous chapter I argued that we can make sense of legitimisation through an attention to four aspects of a narrative's content:

1. acts, scenes, agents, agency, purpose
2. partiality and selectivity
3. emplotment: the structure of relationship between parts
4. emplotment: implied causality

These aspects of narrative provide a useful starting point for thinking about the content of images and how they relate to the politics of legitimation. We can begin our analysis of images by drawing upon Burke's pentad (1969, p.xv) and identifying; what is being done (actions), where it is being done (setting/location), who is doing it (characters), how they are doing it (agency), and why they are doing it (purpose). These issues relate to what Roland Barthes called objects and poses (1977c), and other aspects of content that we might also include in our analysis consist of technical aspects such as framing, depth of field and focus, lighting and colour, and camera positioning. Framing refers to the totality of what is included in the image's frame, and the depth of field refers to how much of the scene is in focus (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.80). Lighting and colour are central to the feel and atmosphere of images and can greatly effect how we interpret the scene depicted, as can camera positioning. Such issues relate to the second point of narrative analysis; that narratives are partial and selective. As Sontag reminds us, 'to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude' (Sontag, 2004, p.41). Therefore we need to pay attention to what is represented in an image but we also need to accommodate 'the invisible, the unseen, the unseeable, and the overlooked' (Mitchell, 2002, p.170).

Even though these two narrative elements might be easily recognisable in the content of images, emplotment is something that is perhaps harder to identify. Indeed, Sontag dismisses the narrativity of images (Sontag, 2004, p.80), however in contrast I argue that images themselves do narrate, and we can begin to understand how they do so by focusing on two aspects; 1) the composition of the image's content; and 2) the connoted message implied by this content. In narrative, emplotment functions to temporally order and bring together events, goals, causes and chance (Ricoeur, 1984,

p.ix). In images, we can begin to analyse emplotment by focusing on the relationship between the various objects depicted. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue that the composition of an image narrates, and they argue that they do so through vectors which ‘present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.59). An example here would be an image of a car driving down a road; the car is the actor, the road is the setting but also the vector that suggests movement, the process of driving from A to B. Kress and van Leeuwen present a complex model for understanding the myriad ways that images ‘can represent the world “narratively” – that is, in terms of “doing” and “happening”’ (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006, p.74), where issues of composition become central to our understanding of images.

Composition is also related to the second way of considering emplotment through exploring the connoted messages in images. Paul Ricoeur argued that narratives have a central theme (Ricoeur, 1984, p.67), and in a similar vein, Roland Barthes demonstrated that images often have central themes or connoted messages (Barthes, 1977d). Barthes argues that reading images and understanding connoted messages ‘is always historical; it depends on the reader’s “knowledge” just as though it were a matter of real language’ (Barthes, 1977c, p.28). He then demonstrates how the composition of the aforementioned Italian advertisement shapes how we understand it, arguing that the composition of the groceries flowing from the bag is important (Barthes, 1977d). In this sense, composition and the connoted message can be understood in relation to emplotment as they both serve to structure content into a meaningful whole that imparts a sense of causality to the relationship of the constituent parts.

Therefore if we are to make sense of the visual politics of legitimation we need to focus on narratives, and how they are told through the content of visual media. When studying the visual politics of legitimation we need to consider how the content of images relates to the three dimensions of legitimacy suggested by the likes of Beetham (1991) and Coicaud (2002). As outlined in Chapter 2, these dimensions include: 1) a conformity with legal rules, 2) justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms, and 3) seeking consent from/consent being expressed by others. When exploring the visual politics of legitimation we need to analyse the content of images - such as actions, setting, characters, agency and purpose - as well as technical aspects such as framing, depth of field and focus, lighting and colour, and camera positioning. Further to this we need to pay attention to how these elements are composed together and how they articulate connoted messages.

Images such as photographs and videos serve to visualise complex narratives in what often seem like simple, easy to read 'quotations' (Sontag, 2004). Despite this, the properties of visual media, and their interpretation by audiences, are not fixed, and as Jay Ruby suggests; 'the study of images alone, as objects whose meaning is intrinsic to them, is a mistaken method if you are interested in the ways in which people assign meaning to pictures' (1995, p.5). Therefore, alongside looking at the content of visual media, we need to take into account how political actors attempt to visualise narratives in order to claim legitimacy for the use of force. We also need to explore how audiences interpret, and make sense of these visual media through narrative. This argument is developed in the next section.

3.3.3 Beyond content: Towards a critical visual methodology

I now draw upon the field of visual culture in order to argue that if we are to understand the visual politics of legitimation, focusing on the content of images only gets us so far. Therefore we also need to explore the contexts of image production and interpretation. Those working with a poststructural approach in International Relations have often eschewed the context of production, following claims that authors ‘assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing’ (Foucault, 1991, p.103; see also Barthes, 1977a) and understanding that ‘there is nothing outside of the text’ (Derrida, 1998, p.158). In the study of visual global politics there are very few investigations into how or why images have been produced, as the overwhelming focus is on offering an interpretation of images and their political effects (see for example Hansen, 2011, 2014; Heck and Schlag, 2013; Bleiker et al., 2013; Shim, 2013; Hutchison, 2014).

This is problematic because, as the photographer Ansell Adams famously stated, ‘You don't take a photograph, you make it’ (Adams, 2015). Even Foucault himself suggested that the author serves as a function of discourse that warrants attention ‘not in order to re-establish the theme of an originating subject, but to grasp the subjects points of insertion, modes of functioning, and systems of dependencies’ (Foucault, 1991, p.118). Despite the context of production being important to those working in the field of visual culture (Hall, 2005; Mitchell, 2002; Lister and Wells, 2000; Rose, 2012), calls to include this aspect of the visual world in our studies of global politics have only recently been made (Bleiker, 2015, pp.877–878; Andersen et al., 2015, p.86).

My approach to the visual politics of legitimation heeds such calls, and draws upon the idea of *visuality* as the construction of vision (Rose, 2012, p.2), where we are concerned with what we see (vision) but also with ‘how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseeing therein’ (Foster, 1988, p.ix). *Visuality* in this sense refers to ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger, 2008), and leads to the recognition that how and why images are produced, circulated and seen is important (Sturken and Cartwright, 2000, p.6). Essentially, it goes beyond looking at the content of images, to exploring ‘who or what represents what to whom with what, and where and why?’ (Mitchell, 1995, p.423).

As I argued in Chapter 1, what we often see in the visual global politics literature is a focus ‘on *visibility* rather than *visuality*’ (Rose, 2014, p.32 emphasis in original), and Gillian Rose’s ‘critical visual methodology’ (Rose, 2012, p.xix) helps draw attention to the ways in which the contexts of production and interpretation are important in the study of visual media. This approach to researching *visuality* is critical as it

thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging (Rose, 2012, p.xix).

Such an understanding resonates with Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding (Hall, 2005), and it directs our attention to a broader understanding of *visuality* outside of the content of images. According to Hall, the cycle of communication begins within an institutional production process that ‘constructs the message’ (2005,

p.118). Visual media are encoded with meaning as they are produced, and this has the effect of ‘constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate’ (Hall, 2005, p.125).¹⁷ For Hall, the process of production is framed by such things as ‘knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, [and] assumptions about the audience’ (Hall, 2005, p.118).

This understanding places our attention on the context of production where we need to account for ‘the intentions and motivations of others, and the institutional and other social contexts, imperatives and constraints in which they work’ (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.68). This is because ‘producers employ particular strategies, which will not be the only solutions that could have been adopted, but they are outcomes of intention and “producerly” knowledge and skill’ (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.70). Features of images ‘are not arbitrary but the result of a complex interaction’ (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.70) and subsequently we need to pay attention to the factors that shape how political actors create and use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The task here is to understand how and why images are taken; in terms of technical processes and choices, as well as decisions that shape what is seen in any given image (Bleiker, 2015, p.877).

Further to analysing the context of production, our understanding of the visual politics of legitimation can be enhanced by a greater attention to the context of reception and how people view images. As Stuart Hall suggested, before visual media can have any

¹⁷Although we cannot guarantee perfect symmetry between the producer’s encoded meaning of an image and the audience’s decoded meaning, we should presume some degree of reciprocity between the two, otherwise there would be no meaningful communication at all (Hall, 2005, p.125).

effect they must be ‘appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded’ (Hall, 2005 [1973], p.119). Once decoded by audiences, images ‘have an effect, [they] influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences’ (Hall, 2005 [1973], p.119). It is therefore important to explore the context of reception, as ‘there are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer’ (Adams, 2015). Again, how people actually interpret, understand, and feel about images has too often been ignored by those working on visual global politics, despite this aspect being of utmost importance in global politics (O’Loughlin, 2011). Images are central to how people find out and feel about the world around them, and they are also central to identity formation. Because expressions of consent are central to legitimation processes it is important to understand how people actually interpret, feel about, and respond to visual media.

In light of this, we need to understand who the viewers of images actually are, how they are placed to look, and how they actually do look at images (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.83). In doing so we should stop presuming that spectators are naïve and passive in their consumption of visual media. Whilst erudite readings of images are important, they will be more insightful if they are informed by and reflect how real people in real places actually engage with and make sense of them. This attention to visibility ‘rather than on stand-alone “images” or visual artefacts’ (Andersen et al., 2015, p.86) provides a more thorough account of the role of visual media in global politics. It suggests that our understanding of the visual politics of legitimation needs to be concerned with why and how images are made and circulated, and also how audiences interpret and feel emotions about them.

One fundamental aspect of the context of reception concerns emotions and affect. These matter in the visual politics of legitimation because ‘affect plays a central role in identity and the power of discourse’ (Solomon, 2014, p.727-728). Emotions and affect, specifically the notion of ‘affective investment’ (Solomon, 2014, p722), help to explain one of the fundamental mechanisms by which legitimation works. Emotions and affect have often been neglected in the study of global politics (Crawford, 2000; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Åhäll and Gregory, 2015), and by drawing upon the work of Ernest Laclau, Ty Solomon has recently suggested that emotions and affect explain how discourses appeal to audiences (2014). According to Laclau, when analysing discourse scholars often focus on the ‘form’ in which discourse structures identities through language (2005, p.326). This is done at the expense of looking at the ‘forces’ of discourse; the affective and emotional aspects that make discourses appeal to audiences (Laclau, 2005, p.111). For Solomon, ‘words alone often cannot carry the power that they often have — the force of affect is needed to explain how words resonate with audiences and have political effects beyond their mere verbal utterance as such’ (2014, p.729). The same can be said for visual media, as visual media do not have political effects just because of their content, but because of how people feel about that content (Andersen et al, 2015).

The concept of affective investment is useful in understanding how discourses, and in this case, visual legitimation claims, resonate with, and are consented to by audiences.

Defined as

anchoring forces that bind subjects to their identities and particular kinds of discourses... ... affective investment is a key link between, on one hand,

identities constructed in language [and visual media] and, on the other hand, the ‘force’ that imbues... ..identities with their potency and binding power (2014, p.729).

Therefore, when studying the visual politics of legitimation it is important to understand the emotions felt, and the affective investments made, by audiences. This is because the effectiveness of legitimation lies ‘in the affective investments by audiences in narrative identities constructed by [political actors]’ (Solomon, 2014, p.737). Subsequently, it is affective investment that provides a link between the encoders and decoders of visual legitimation claims, and by exploring the emotive responses of audiences we can begin to understand how legitimation claims are successful.

3.3.4 The limitations of a critical visual methodology

Whilst the critical visual methodology discussed above provides a productive way of beginning to research the visual politics of legitimation, there are of course several limitations. The first of these concerns my choice to focus on one social media site - Facebook - as the main site of analysis. In the contemporary media ecology political actors utilise various social media platforms whilst also being involved in the production of more traditional media content such as press briefings, articles in print outlets, and broadcasts on radio and television. Whilst there is a need to analyse how actors utilise traditional media and social media platforms in different ways - what some have called multimodal research (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010) - collating and analysing such a voluminous amount of data over long time periods is difficult within the confines of limited PhD resources. Therefore this thesis provides a detailed

analysis of one social media site in each case study. I do so in order to provide a focused analysis of how the political actors use a specific social media platform to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Whilst this may not reflect the overall discursive environment and myriad ways that political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force, it certainly provides a context specific insight into how each political actor uses the most popular social media platform in the world (Vis, 2015) to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Nonetheless, future research into how the political actors studied herein utilise other media platforms would reveal interesting comparative points that would enable us to make more sense of the overall discursive environment in which political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force.

There is also a limitation concerning the coding of narrative and visual media content. Due to this being a PhD project with an interpretivist philosophical foundation, there are no inter-coder reliability measures and because of this some might hold ‘a fear of relativism’ as they often do when confronted with research on visual global politics (Bleiker, 2015, p.889). My response to this limitation is that I agree with Bleiker and I recognise that

Images always need to be interpreted. They have no meaning on their own...
...There is, thus, always a leap of meaning that forces a scholar to offer a particular interpretation. This interpretation is never definitive. It is always linked to particular methodological choices (Bleiker, 2015, p.887).

Therefore, I am reflexive in my analysis and I make it clear in the later case studies how and why the narrative and visual content analysed has the political significance it

does. Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that ‘self-reflectivity will always remain incomplete. The very nature of discourse is that there is no outside: we are inevitably caught in a web of meanings and we can only be aware of part of them’ (Bleiker, 2015, p.887). This limitation is not only limited to this research project, as no matter what research paradigm one conforms to, ‘we, as scholars, inevitably impose our subjective position upon a far more complex political world’ (Bleiker, 2015, p.889), and it is hubristic to think ‘that one can possess definitive and indisputable knowledge’ (Bleiker, 2015, p.889).

Moving from the site of representation, towards the context of production, we are confronted with another limitation concerning semi-structured interviews with people who work for, or have been involved in the political actors studied in the case studies. In conducting any type of research with human participants there is a worry that people might lie, and this is especially the case when studying political actors who might simply ‘toe the party line’ or attempt to influence researchers in order to pursue an agenda (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008, p.53). This is a limitation if you are attempting to uncover an objective, truthful depiction of how things really are. However, in the interpretive tradition of research, interviews are conducted in order to ‘reflect narrative truth rather than historical truth’ (Josselson, 2013, p.3). As such, ‘Interview data do not create a picture of some (unknowable) objective reality. Rather, they allow us to encounter the mental sets of the interviewee—the subjectively created reality in which the interviewee experiences life’ (Josselson, 2013, p.3). Therefore, the interviews discussed in the case studies of this thesis should be understood as providing an insight into the lived experiences and subjectivities of

the people I have spoken to. They are discourses, not examples of true intentions or true facts.

Another limitation concerning the interviews, as well as the Facebook analysis, is the ethics of naming participants. In order to address this, all interviewees were offered the right of anonymity. In the case of the British Army, most interviewees wished to remain anonymous. However in the case of the NSC, all interviewees wanted to be named in the thesis. In regards to the Facebook comments analysed in the case study chapters, I have not used any names and I have edited the comments slightly so that they cannot be searched for using Internet search engines. I have done this to respect the privacy of the Facebook users whose comments are analysed. This is in accordance with the guidelines from the Association of Internet Researchers and it has been granted ethical approval by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee.

Following from this is another limitation concerning how I only focus on Facebook comments when I study how audiences interpret the legitimisation claims presented to them. As Gillian Rose suggests,

given enough time and resources, a researcher can explore many sites of audiencing in all their modalities in great detail, examining their co-constitution and the working of recontextualisation across them. But researchers with less time and resources will not have the luxury of extended, close-up ethnographic observation (2012, p.293).

Subsequently, with limited resources, this project does not analyse the site of the audience through methods such as surveys, public opinion polls, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, or photo elicitation. Whilst such methods would be appropriate, they are costly and time consuming, and beyond the financial and temporal resources of this project.

Some might suggest that it is problematic to analyse Facebook comments as a site of evidence when exploring the success of legitimisation claims. This is because Facebook is an 'echo chamber' (Del Vicario et al, 2016) and presumably people will consent to the legitimisation claims made on the Facebook Pages that they already 'like'. Whilst this is a limitation, it must be noted that first, it is impossible to know exactly who likes a Facebook Page unless you have administration access to that Page. Second, it is not simply the case that content on Facebook Pages only gets shown to people who like a specific Facebook Page itself. Facebook's News Feed is reliant on an algorithm that takes into account over a thousand factors in order to decide what appears on an individual's News Feed (Kacholia 2013). And if, for example, you and I are friends on Facebook, and I like a post published by another Facebook Page (such as the British Army or the NSC), that content may appear on your timeline. Therefore, without having administration access to the Facebook Pages studied in the case studies, I cannot determine whether the people who comment on the legitimisation claims already like the Facebook Pages studied. If we presume that they do, then studying Facebook comments is still worthwhile because we can also presume that just because someone likes a Page, that doesn't mean that they necessarily like and consent to everything that that political actor does. For example, recent research has

found that people frequently like Facebook Pages and use them to complain about the business or services that that Page represents (Istanbulluoğlu, 2014).

Furthermore, analysing social media comments and ‘online behaviour tells us more about what people *do* in their monitoring of media coverage of war and conflict, compared to measures of exposure to radio or television broadcasts’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010, p.187, emphasis in original). In this sense, the Facebook comments analysed in the case study chapters stand as evidence of how people actually do respond to the legitimisation claims made by political actors. Even if this does come with the caveat that it is likely that Facebook audiences will consent to these claims, it is still worthwhile analysing these comments as they provide an insight into “audience discourse” i.e., the statements and actions of audiences which serve as evidence about their experiences and uses of media’ (Bruhn Jensen, 2003, p.169). To that end, the Facebook comments do provide evidence of how an actual audience have interpreted and responded to actual legitimisation claims made by political actors on Facebook.

Further to this, some scholars have argued that emotions and affect ‘cannot be fully captured by representational theories’ (Andersen et al, 2015, p.101). Therefore it is somewhat of a limitation to look at Facebook comments in order to understand how people feel. Nevertheless, Emma Hutchison has provided a powerful account of why it makes sense to study emotions through representational methods such as discourse analysis of images and words (including Facebook comments). Two main reasons are that, first:

Representations are as close as one can get to conceiving of emotions. This is because the internal, ephemeral nature of emotions precludes the possibility of understanding them through any other means than their instrumental display. Emotions become manifest through the media—the words, visual images, and gestures—in which they are expressed (Hutchison, 2014, p.4)

And second, representations allow us to appreciate the social nature of emotions, and this is important because emotions are a ‘social and cultural phenomena that are shaped by processes of representation and interpretation’ (Hutchison, 2014, p.4). Therefore it makes sense to use discourse analysis to analyse Facebook comments in order to begin to understand the emotions and the affective investments made by audiences.

Scholars in IR have recently suggested there is a need to understand the site of audience reception in the digital age, and whilst it is true that ‘much internet content can be tracked through social media monitoring methods’ (Miskimmon et al, 2014, p.185) using Big Data tools and social media analysis software requires more money than is available to me in this project. Therefore, deeper analysis of audience responses to legitimisation claims must be left to future projects with more resources. For now, the Facebook comments presented in later chapters must stand as context specific examples of people responding to legitimisation claims rather than generalizable evidence of successful legitimisation.

Finally there are limitations in drawing together these different sites of analysis and drawing upon different methods. Roland Bleiker has recently suggested that projects

that draw upon multidisciplinary and mixed methods research to study images in global politics ‘might be considered “thin” since they disperse their efforts across a range of complex bodies of knowledge and thus seem to lack the kind of detailed insights that only specialists can provide’ (Bleiker, 2015, p.880). Following Bleiker, I believe that rather than being a limitation, such diversity and interdisciplinary is necessary to make sense of the problems of global politics such as war and conflict. Therefore, whilst there might be relatively few interviews conducted in each case study, and whilst there is only an audience analysis of Facebook comments, this thesis provides a foundation for using a critical visual methodology in order to understand the visual politics of legitimation. With more resources, time, and money, a deeper insight could be gained into the narrative and visual media used across various media sites by the political actors studied herein. Future studies could also delve deeper into the contexts of production and reception. However, for now, the focus on the British Army and the NSC on Facebook must suffice in order to provide an insight into how the visual politics of legitimation plays out on the world’s most popular social media platform.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in the context of mediatized war, the visual politics of legitimation are of paramount concern. I began by discussing how various scholars have drawn attention to the important role of digital and visual media in contemporary war and conflict. Whilst scholars label war with many different modifiers, they are in agreement that we need to explore the role of digital and visual media in war. As digital media technologies have proliferated, there is more information about war circulating around the globe, and political actors have become proficient at using

digital and visual media technologies for their own purposes. One of the key ways they use these technologies is to claim legitimacy for their use of force by projecting narratives. As such, our accounts of legitimation need to explore how digital and visual media are enmeshed in these processes. We need to analyse legitimation at sites other than politicians' speeches, institutional debates, and print articles that have so far been the major focus of the legitimation literature.

I then highlighted how much poststructural literature on visual global politics has often mentioned legitimacy but has never explained what it is, or how legitimation works. This work often implies that legitimation simply involves the representation of political actors as good, civilised and just, in opposition to illegitimate, bad, barbaric and unjust others. This is reductive and oversimplifies the complex narrative process of legitimation. Therefore, work that analyses war from the perspective of media and cultural studies has provided a better account of legitimation. This is because it recognises that legitimation is a complex process that can only be understood by looking at the contexts of media production and interpretation as well as the content of media representations themselves.

I then built upon this argument and the previous two chapters by bringing together the literature on legitimation and narrative with that of visual global politics. I argued that legitimation is reliant on narratives and that narratives are often told through images. We therefore need to understand the visual politics of legitimation. I articulated a framework for theorising and researching the visual politics of legitimation, arguing that images project narratives and that their specificities need to be given attention. Therefore, images can best be researched by drawing upon the field of visual culture.

A brief foray into visual culture discussed content analysis, semiotics, and iconography, and then highlighted how these informed a cultural studies approach to images. Such an approach is concurrent with a broader aesthetic approach to global politics as discussed in Chapter 1. It informs my approach to the visual politics of legitimation as it focuses on the content of images and their relation to the narrative aspects discussed in Chapter 2. These are; first, actions, settings, characters, agency, and purpose; second, the partiality and selectivity of this content; and thirdly, how the content of images is structured together through composition that denotes emplotment. When analysing the visual politics of legitimation we need to understand how these aspects relate to the three dimensions of legitimacy: a conformity with legal rules, justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms, and seeking consent from/consent being expressed by others.

Furthermore, I argued that an approach to the visual politics of legitimation needs an appreciation of visuality, rather than a simple focus only on the content of images. This understanding, informed by a cultural studies approach to images incorporating a critical visual methodology and an appreciation of encoding/decoding (Hall, 2005) suggests that we also need to account for the contexts of image production and interpretation in the study of legitimation. In particular, by paying attention to the affective investments of audiences we can understand how legitimation is successful and we can begin to understand the link between encoders and decoders by exploring how audiences are emotionally attracted to the legitimation claims presented to them. This framework informs the subsequent empirical analysis of this research project. The following two chapters provide an analysis of how the British Army has used the digital social media platform of Facebook to claim legitimacy for their use of force.

These chapters provide an exploration of how military media management is important in the context of mediatized war. Chapter 4 begins by situating the case study in the context of military media management, where I argue that the visual politics of legitimation are an inherent aspect of the British Army's use of digital media. I then analyse how the British Army has used narratives and images on Facebook to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Building upon the argument that the contexts of production and interpretation are important in the visual politics of legitimation, Chapter 5 demonstrates the value of theory by drawing upon interviews to make sense of how the British Army encode their legitimacy claims. I then analyse Facebook comments in order to understand how these are decoded by audiences.

Because 'digital new media has introduced a wide range of voices into the mediatisation of war' (Kaempf, 2013, p.601), and these new voices include non-state actors and individuals, Chapters 6 and 7 explore how citizen journalism is entwined with the visual politics of legitimation in the case of the National Coalition of Syrian and Revolution Forces (NSC). Chapter 6 places the case study in context before analysing how the NSC has used narratives and images on Facebook to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Chapter 7 then builds upon this by exploring how these have been encoded by their producers and decoded by their audience. These cases therefore provide two distinct examples that allow me to explore how the visual politics of legitimation is at play in two important aspects of mediatized war: military media management and citizen journalism. They allow for the theoretical arguments in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to be explored in detail, and they develop my theoretical contribution by providing two original empirical investigations of the visual politics of legitimation.

Chapter 4

The British Army on Facebook

Using the British Army's official Facebook Page as the main site of interest, this chapter explores how the British Army has claimed legitimacy for the use of force through narratives and images published on Facebook. I begin by situating this case study in the context of 'military media management' (Maltby, 2012a) and I briefly explore how the British Army has historically used visual media in war. In doing so, I demonstrate how such practices involve the politics of legitimation, and in making this case I build upon earlier chapters by exploring how the visual politics of legitimation is important to the British Army in the digital age. I support this claim by analysing the content published by the British Army on their official Facebook Page during a time period of three years beginning in September 2009 when they created their official Facebook Page. This section includes an analysis of 1570 posts published on Facebook by the British Army between October 2009 and September 2012.

This chapter provides an empirical contribution by applying the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, and I suggest that by paying attention to the visual politics of legitimation we can begin to understand the important role that the British Army's use of Facebook serves in the context of mediatized war. I also contribute to knowledge by going beyond research that has looked at the British military's relationship with the media (Jensen, 2011; Maltby, 2012a) as I explore how the British Army has used digital social media such as Facebook to become a media actor in its own right. I

analyse the narratives that the British Army have published on Facebook and I explore how these narratives are used to claim legitimacy for the use of force. I then demonstrate how visual media was an important way of telling these narratives by analysing 480 sets of images (individual photographs, galleries of photographs, and videos) posted during this time. I then focus specifically on images of combat operations. Here, the core argument is that the content of the British Army's Facebook page constitutes a visuality of 'clean war' that is used to claim legitimacy for the use of force. As we shall see in the next case study, this stands in stark contrast to other political actors who use images on Facebook to constitute a visuality of suffering by making the effects of warfare highly visible. This chapter demonstrates the utility of my theoretical approach and provides a focused analysis of how legitimisation claims that sanitise war have been articulated through visual media. I then build upon this in Chapter 5 by exploring how these claims are produced and then interpreted.

4.1 Military media management: The case of the British Army

The previous chapter began by highlighting how narratives and images are of vital importance in processes of legitimisation. Specifically I argued that political actors use visual media to project narratives that are used to claim legitimacy for themselves and their actions in wars and conflicts. Contemporary war and conflict are often described as being 'mediatized' (Cottle, 2006; Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010), and Sarah Maltby has explored how mediatization has impacted on the operations of the British Army (2012a, 2012b). Her work draws attention to the ways in which the British military is increasingly mediatized and reliant on 'the media and their logic' (2012a, p.256). Maltby examines Media Operations and she looks at how the British military

seeks to work with, and manage, the media and their coverage of British military actions (2012a, 2012b). She suggests that the military have recognised ‘that the media are of strategic importance to the attainment of institutional goals’ (2012a, p.265), and they therefore seek to harness media influence whilst protecting against adverse media coverage (2012a, p.262). This work provides an insight into the British military’s mediatisation, however it focuses on the relationship between the military *and* the media, and there is little attention given to how developments in digital media technologies have enabled militaries such as the British to become media actors themselves. This chapter addresses this gap by analysing how the British Army has adopted media practices; specifically the use of digital social media platforms to publish their own media content.

Since the formation of the British Army in 1707, they have used a variety of media to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The following section provides an historical account of the British Army’s use of visual media, and the purpose here is to demonstrate that visual media have always been important to the ways in which the British Army have claimed legitimacy for the use of force. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, printed posters were used for recruitment purposes, and these featured text and written narratives that depicted the British Army as a legitimate actor in conflict with a barbaric, illegitimate other. One such poster from 1795 described the 6th (Warwickshire) Regiment as ‘the pride of England and the admiration of the world’, a fighting force who have won many victories ‘over that most execrable and detestable banditti, THE FRENCH’. This poster and others from this time draw upon the limited media that was available then: illustration and the printing press. During this period, paintings were used for similar reasons. These fell into two categories; those of heroic portraits and those of battles, both of which were

used to confer prestige and justify military endeavour (Brandon, 2006, p.28), and war artists have thus been important to the British Army for centuries (Harrington, 1993; Brandon, 2006; Gough, 2010).

Just over twenty years after the invention of chemical photography in 1822, John McGosh - a doctor in the British Empire's Bengal Army - became the first named war photographer in 1849. His images depicted officers and scenes of destruction in the Second Anglo-Sikh War in the Punjab region of India (Marwil, 2000). However it was not until several years later that the British Army began to use photography for official purposes. In 1854, during the Crimean War, the British Army employed the professional photographer Roger Fenton to document the conflict in order to counter the negative press that the British Army was receiving in *The Times* (Sontag, 2004, p.44). Ulrich Keller has described the Crimean War as 'the first media war' (2001, p.251), and he notes that 'the aesthetic surface of the military events is the level of the ideological legitimization of war' (2001, p.x). In this regard, Fenton's employment and the creation of his photographs was fundamentally about legitimization, as the British government believed that the new visual media of photography could be used to legitimate their use of force.

Before his departure to the Crimea, Fenton was cautioned 'not to photograph the dead, the maimed, or the ill' (Sontag, 2004, p.44), and instead he 'went about rendering the war as a dignified all-male group outing' (Sontag, 2004, p.44). Even with Fenton's most famous photograph - *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* - where six hundred British soldiers had been ambushed and killed, we can only see cannonballs strewn across an arid landscape. It is, as Susan Sontag put it, 'a portrait of

absence, of death without the dead' (2004, p.45). Here, Fenton's photographs established an axiom of war photography where 'although in most cases the camera does not lie directly, it can lie brilliantly by omission' (Knightley, 2004, p.14). With Fenton's photographs from Crimea we begin to see the British Army attempting to claim legitimacy for the use of force through the selective use of photographic images that frame their actions in a certain way. This example also demonstrates that the British Army has been at the forefront of using media technologies to claim legitimacy for their use of force (Sontag, 2004, p.44-45), and as photographic and video media technologies developed over the next few decades, the British Army utilised them to great effect.

Moving into the 20th century, the British government banned journalists and photography on the battlefield during the first year of the First World War. Winston Churchill, then serving as First Lord of the Admiralty, remarked 'a warship in action has no room for a journalist' (Churchill quoted in Knightley, 2004, p.91). However, due to pressure from the press, the War Propaganda Bureau appointed several official war photographers and film makers in 1915, and from then until 1918 there were twenty two official and semi-official photographers in the British Army (Taylor, 1991, p.43). During this time there was strict censorship on the photographs that were taken and released to the press. The photographers were told to take photos of the troops relaxing, building trenches or on their way to the front (Taylor, 1991, p.43), and the government 'kept a very tight control over what they wanted to be perceived as the truth' (Taylor, 1991, p.44). In 1917, troops were officially forbidden from documenting gruesome scenes and instead were told that photographs of generals giving orders were 'exactly the sort of twaddle people love to gape at' (Ministry of Information quoted in Taylor, 1991, p.44).

Throughout the early years of the First World War, several departments were responsible for the management of propaganda and in 1917 they came together under the Department for Information, which in March 1918 became the Ministry of Information (MoI). This commitment to producing visual media under the label of propaganda highlights how the visual politics of legitimation began to be considered as important by the British Armed Forces. The fact that the *Battle of the Somme*, a video filmed and produced by the British Army's first official cinematographer, Geoffrey Malins, was viewed by over 20 million people - therefore being one of the most watched films 'in British cinema history, even bigger than *Star Wars*' (Stock, 2014) - also demonstrates that visual media was fundamental to how people made sense of, and subsequently consented to, the British Army's use of force in the First World War.

As the First World War ended, the British government dissolved the MoI, only to reform it at the outbreak of the Second World War, and on 11 September 1939 the British Directorate of Public Relations appointed the first cinematographer of the Second World War (Gladstone, 2002, p.317). Over the next two years the Army held a negative view towards the publicity that was offered by official photographers and cinematographers, as well as the press. This, however, began to change when Ronald Tritton was appointed as the War Office Publicity Officer in February 1940 (Gladstone, 2002, p.319). By November 1940, Tritton had established the Army Film Unit, whose footage of the Blitz, filmed from the dome of St Pauls cathedral, was widely used by newsreels at the time (Gladstone, 2002, p.321).

In March 1941 Tritton produced a documentary titled *Film As a Weapon* in order to show how Nazi Germany had four fighting services: air, land, sea, and propaganda. The film concluded with the statement that ‘by press, radio and film the legend of dictatorship was established. Press, radio AND FILM can help our armed forces to kill that legend and reassert the legend of democracy’ (Ministry of Information, 1941, emphasis in original). By emphasising that images were essential to Britain’s military efforts, Tritton was able to gain the support needed to set up a new film and photography unit. The Army Film and Photography Unit (AFPU) broke from the previously established precedent of using professional photographers to document military activities, and instead it recruited camera operators from directly within the Army’s ranks (Gladstone, 2002, p.323).¹⁸ In contrast to the First World War, there is no evidence that the AFPU were instructed to censor what they filmed ‘beyond carrying out their primary task, to cover the operations of the British Army’ (Gladstone, 2002, p.327) as all visual material was later subject to censorship by the War Office. Nonetheless, the creation of the AFPU stands as a key moment in the British Army’s history, where the visual politics of legitimation were deemed to be of such importance to their operations in World War Two that a whole unit was dedicated to producing visual media.

At the end of the Second World War, the MoI was dissolved once more, and according to Phillip M Taylor there was a period of policy being ‘determined without adequate consideration of the problems of presentation’ (Taylor, 1999, p.240) during the Cold War. For Taylor, this was due to the shifting global political order after the Second World War, and Britain’s changing role in international affairs (1999, p.240).

¹⁸ This practice continues today in the form of the British Army photographers and Combat Camera Teams.

The 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland during the 1960's and the Falklands War in 1982 lead to the Ministry of Defence placing a renewed attention to the visual presentation of war through media management.

In the Falklands, Margaret Thatcher's government only granted access to two photojournalists, denying access to esteemed war photographers such as Don McCullin (Sontag, 2004, p.59). According to Susan Sontag 'There had not been such drastic restrictions on the reporting of a British military operation since the Crimean War' (2004, p.59). The MoD's approach to media management in the Falklands was shaped by the experience of the United States in Vietnam where it was believed the Americans had been 'over-generous' with the media (Badsey, 1996, p.10), and that this had subsequently led to the American public becoming disillusioned with the war (House of Commons Defence Committee cited in Robins and Webster, 1986, p.61). In essence, the British believed that visual media coverage had delegitimised the American use of force in Vietnam, and they feared that the same would happen to them in the Falklands. Again, this demonstrates how the visual politics of legitimisation were important to the British Armed Forces as they sought to control the visual representation of their use of force.

The MoD's handling of the media during the Falklands war garnered much criticism (Harris, 1983; Robins and Webster, 1986). A BBC memorandum to a Parliamentary Defence Committee hearing on the press aspects of the war accused the government and the MoD of censorship, of suppressing pictures from the theatre of war, and of planting disinformation. It also noted that the government had 'come very close to the "management" or "manipulation" of news, an idea that is alien to the concept of

communication in a free society' (BBC Spokesperson quoted in Robins and Webster, 1986, p.58). Such criticism has subsequently shaped the MoD's approach to media management, and the Parliamentary Defence Committee Report on the press and the Falklands war highlighted the need of 'incorporating the media into the organisation for war' (House of Commons Defence Committee, 1982, p.iii). Further to this, in the MoD's 2010 *Green Book* - a guidebook that sets out the procedures and legal framework for how the press can work with the Armed Forces - the MoD note that such considerations are the 'result of continuing dialogue between the MOD and media organisations and representatives which began after the Falklands Conflict' (Ministry of Defence, 2010, p.1). Therefore not only does the Falklands war mark another point at which the visual politics of legitimisation were clearly important, but also, as is stated in the *Green Book*, it stands as a point that still informs how the British Armed Forces utilise the media today.

Alongside the Falklands, the First Gulf War led to the MoD placing greater attention on shaping the visual representation of war and combat operations (Taylor, 1999, p.248-257). However, the means of doing so were different to those used in 1982. In the context of almost omnipresent (at least in 'the West') telecommunications technologies such as television (in both analogue and cable/satellite forms), the First Gulf War marked a watershed moment for the nexus of visual representation and warfare (see Baudrillard, 1995; Virilio, 2002). One British Army officer noted that during the build up to the First Gulf War; 'very soon media was not third on my list of priorities but first on the agenda of the daily conference' (Brigadier Patrick Cordingley quoted in Badsey, 1996, p.5). And as the British moved in to Kuwait with their coalition counterparts, they offered journalists access to the frontline by pooling

them and embedding them with military units. In doing so the MoD not only attempted to influence what they reported, but also censored all their content before it could be sent to London or aired on television (Knightley, 2004, p.490-491). Whilst there had been unprecedented constraints on press access in the Falklands War, the First Gulf War gave rise to the practices of embedding reporters with military units and media pooling becoming widespread (Badsey, 1996, p.17).

In the First Gulf War, the British military formed Media Response Teams alongside American forces, and these teams brought together a television crew and several reporters with a military officer responsible for escorting them (Lewis et al., 2006, p.10). With access to the frontline, content produced by this team was then shared with other journalists and media outlets. Whilst such a development did - to a certain extent - open up the Armed Forces to the press, it is worth remembering that the number of pool places was limited to 200 places. Moreover, these places were only open to British, American and French journalists (Carruthers, 1998, p.134). Those who didn't gain access to the pools earned the moniker of 'hotel warriors' (Fialka, 1992) as they were left in luxury hotels in Riyadh where they were briefed by military press officers. Those who did gain access to the pools were subject to strict restrictions on where they could go and what they could cover. They were always accompanied by military minders (Carruthers, 1998, pp.134-135), their content was censored, and they were made to wear military uniform (Knightley, 2004, p.490-491). According to one journalist, 'the pools were a prison' (Thomson, 1992, p.82). By working with the press in this manner, the British Armed Forces sought to claim legitimacy by controlling the visual representation of themselves and their actions.

These practices of embedding and pooling continued ten years later in the context of the 'war on terror' as British and American troops began military operations in Afghanistan, and later Iraq. Embedding became widespread as journalists were attached directly to British and American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq (Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p.30). During military action in Iraq in 2003 there were approximately 600 American and 128 British journalists embedded with various military units (Tumber, 2004, p.50; Keeble, 2004, p.5). Writing about the experience of embedding, one journalist reported that 'we identified ourselves absolutely with the armies in the field' (Gibbs quoted in Tumber, 2004, p.50). Another wrote:

In our combat kit, we look and sound like soldiers, which is a tribute to the Army's embedding system... ..As our vehicle was being prepared, TV pictures showed an Iraqi bunker being blown to smithereens at close range by a US tank and I found myself cheering along like a bloodthirsty Dallas cowboy (Harrison quoted in Tumber, 2004, pp.194–195).

This practice of embedding was widely considered as successful from the military's point of view, whilst it was also popular with the press due to how it ensured 'dramatic and immediate coverage of coalition soldiers in action' (Robinson et al., 2009, p.681). Stephen Reese notes that 'reporters were inevitably drawn into the perspective of the soldiers with whom they travelled, and the dramatic, if often blurred and grainy, images from the scene gave a vivid impression from the point of view of the troops' (Lewis and Brookes, 2004, p.260). Embedding, as a practice of military media management, gave a troops eye view of military operations and led to

favourable UK media coverage¹⁹ that promoted the military's framing of their operations as progressive and humanitarian, where their culpability for civilian casualties and violence was marginalised (Lewis and Brookes, 2004, pp.298–299; Robinson et al., 2009; Parry, 2012).

This discussion demonstrates that over the later half of the 20th Century, the MoD has rethought how it would work with and manage the media. Whilst the media management of yesteryear was often thought of as pure propaganda, 'advertising has become the acceptable propaganda of the late twentieth-century free market enterprise democracies' (Taylor, 1999, p.244). With this shift, the label of propaganda has been dropped, and in the digital age it is replaced with the more euphemistic terms of

'influence activity', 'psychological operations', 'military information support', 'joint influence', 'public diplomacy', 'media operations', 'public affairs', 'soft power' and, indeed, 'strategic communication' (Jones and Baines, 2013, p.72).

Regardless of the labels for its use, these practices are invariably concerned with the visual politics of legitimation where, throughout history, the British military have used visual media to project narratives that their use of force is legitimate. What we have seen after the Falklands War is a British military that has placed more and more attention on working with the media, and 'military media management' has thus become central to the operations of the British Armed Forces (Jensen, 2011; Maltby, 2012a, 2012b). However, what is absent in these accounts is an analysis of how the

¹⁹ The success of embedding journalists to gain favourable coverage is perhaps best exemplified by the story of Stephen Paul Stewart. Stewart was a journalist with Scotland's *Daily Record* newspaper when he embedded in Afghanistan in 2009. According to Stewart, 'journalism turned me into a soldier' (Stewart, 2014, p.37), and after his embed he joined the Army and returned to Afghanistan for a tour of duty in 2011.

British Armed Forces have themselves utilised digital media technologies in order to communicate to audiences directly. The remainder of this chapter seeks to address this gap.

The British Army began to use digital media for official purposes in the mid 1990's. The earliest archived British Army webpage is from 1998 although the domain name is copyrighted in 1996 (Who.is, 2014). This 1998 website features images, soldiers diaries and interactive maps (British Army, 1998). In 2000 the Army launched *Now Ask ;)* 'Britain's first live online career service' (British Army, 2000) where prospective recruits could talk to Army careers officers in real time. After the events of September 11 2001, the Army announced Operation Veritas on their website in October 2001 (British Army, 2001). As this operation – in support of the American Operation Enduring Freedom (in Afghanistan) – went on, changing in name to Operation Herrick in 2002, and as the 'war on terror' moved into Iraq in 2003, not only did the British Army work with embedded journalists, they also set up their own Combat Camera Teams (CCTs).

These Combat Camera Teams were formed as a 'result of the MoD identifying a need for managing the media during conflicts' (Kiss, 2010) and with their creation there is a shift in the ways in which the MoD and the British Army conceptualise their use of images and media. Much like the AFPU of World War Two, Combat Camera Teams are populated by serving soldiers and the idea behind their existence is that 'they are able to go forward and interact with troops in ways that other forms of media can't' (British Army, 2014a). The material produced by CCT personnel are distributed to the

British and international media and they are also used by the British Army on various online sites (British Army, 2014a).

Despite having a digital presence since the 1990's, it wasn't until 2006 that the MoD began to formulate a digital communications strategy (Mediacor, 2013). At the time of writing the MoD and the British Armed Forces utilise a variety of digital social media platforms alongside their main website. The British Army, for example, joined YouTube in 2007 and uploaded their first video titled *British Army Diving with Sea Cows* (British Army, 2007). Two years later they joined Twitter (British Army, 2009) and Facebook (British Army, 2014b). In 2010 they began their first digital only recruitment campaign (Weekes, 2010) and they now actively engage in the use of websites, blogs, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook Pages. All of this amounts to a large online presence with a vast quantity of content being produced and circulated to online audiences.

This historical journey suggests that all of these practices can best be understood through an attention to the visual politics of legitimation, as despite their differences, they are all instances of the British Army using visual media technologies to support their military operations by claiming legitimacy for itself and its use of force. This can be seen in the paintings and recruitment posters of the 1700's; it can be seen in the form of visual propaganda that developed halfway through the 19th century and continued throughout both World Wars; it can be seen in the media management practices of the Falklands and First Gulf War. It can also be seen in the more recent utilisation of CCT's and social media in the digital age. These different examples also highlight the importance of analysing legitimation processes and the use of narratives

and images in context. The British Army has not claimed legitimacy for their use of force by using narratives and images in a singular way throughout their history, as the technological, social, and political context of the time has a large impact on what can be - and what has been - done. Providing an in depth discussion of all the nuances between the use of narratives and images throughout the history of the British Army is beyond the scope of this thesis, and this chapter instead seeks to explore how the British Army has used digital social media to claim legitimacy in the contemporary context of the digital age. To do so, I now analyse the content of the British Army's official Facebook Page between October 2009 and September 2012.

4.2 The British Army on Facebook 2009-2012

The rise of digital media has led to a dramatic increase in the volume of information that circulates around the globe on daily basis. In the context of mediatized war this has led to actors such as the British Army producing and circulating a vast amount of content on social media platforms, and to analyse everything the British Army has ever posted on all social media platforms would be practically impossible. Therefore, in order to make sense of how the British Army have claimed legitimacy for the use of force through social media platforms, I have limited the data to be analysed to a specific time frame and a specific digital media platform. Subsequently, this chapter provides an analysis of the content uploaded on the British Army's Facebook Page from the date they joined in 2009 to the start of September 2012.

This time and platform has been selected for several reasons. First, it provides a large but manageable quantity of data to be collected and analysed. Focusing on this time frame also shows how the British Army's use of social media has developed over a

three-year period. During this time - in 2011 - the Ministry of Defence publish Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1/11 (updated in 2012 to JDN 1/12) which outlines how the MoD and the British Armed Forces should use social media by defining the concept of strategic communication. Thus, this project looks at the British Army's use of social media both prior to, and after, it being laid out in doctrine. Moreover, by starting at the beginning of the British Army's use of Facebook, I provide a platform for any future research. Facebook has been selected as the medium of interest as it is the world's most popular social media platform and the British Army's official Facebook Page is the most popular British Armed Forces social media site (SocialBakers.com, 2014). Similarly, Facebook facilitates the publishing of many types of online content (text, image, audio), and one can publically see how audiences have engaged with this content.

On 28 October 2009, the British Army joined Facebook and created a Page that represents the British Army in an official capacity.²⁰ Over the next three years they publish 1570 posts. These posts consist of links to the official Army website, links to the official Army blog, and links to other official Army Facebook Pages and social media sites such as the video sharing platforms YouTube and Vimeo, the photo sharing platform Flickr, the microblogging platform Twitter, and the audio sharing platform Audioboo. They also include links to other websites such as the official MoD website, the websites of various media outlets, the British Forces Broadcasting Service, as well as other websites (such as charities, sports teams, and ticket selling) that have been categorised as miscellaneous websites.

²⁰ See www.facebook.com/britisharmy

The most common type of post published during this three year period are posts that consist only of text, link straight to the Army's website and often come with a small square 'thumbnail' image (38.92% n=611). The second and third most common types of content consist of photograph galleries consisting of two or more photographs (14.97% n=235) and individual photographs (11.59% n=182) respectively.²¹ This suggests that images are an important aspect of the British Army's use of social media and need to be taken into account in any consideration of how the British Army claim legitimacy for the use of force. Here it is worth noting that over the three-year period of analysis, images become increasingly important to the British Army's use of Facebook. For example, during their first month of using Facebook (November 2009) the British Army posted 56 individual items of content, of which one was a photograph, one was a video and four were galleries of photographs. During the last month of analysis (August 2012) the British Army posted 70 items; of which 42 were individual photographs, 15 were galleries of two or more photographic images and six were videos. Only six posts contained text with no visual multimedia. Therefore, we can see that the British Army's legitimisation claims do not simply consist of narratives told through language, they consist of narratives told through visual media such as photographs and videos.

Turning towards the visual content of the British Army's Facebook Page, we see that during the three-year period of analysis the British Army published 480 sets of images on Facebook. The most common type of image to be published is a photographic gallery and the total number of photographs published within these galleries is 739. In addition, the videos published vary in length from five seconds to six and a half

²¹ See Appendix 1: Figure 1 for a full breakdown of the type of content published on Facebook.com/britisharmy.

minutes. The total run time of the videos published by the British Army during the period of analysis comes to fifty-one minutes and fifty-five seconds.

*Figure 1: Type of image set on Facebook.com/britisharmy
(28th October 2009 – 31st August 2012)*

Type of Image Set	Number of Posts
Gallery of Photographs	235
Photograph	182
Video	59
Infographic	2
Painting	2

Again, this large quantity of images suggests that images are a central feature of the British Army's Facebook Page and if we are to understand how the British Army claims legitimacy then we need to take into account how they use images. In this sense, one needs to be concerned with the importance of both narratives and images in contemporary processes of legitimation because the content of social media sites is overwhelmingly multimedia, often consisting of both text and image.

The posts published by the British Army cover a wide variety of topics - ranging from Army rugby matches through to combat operations in Afghanistan, via preparations for the Royal Wedding - and all of the content published on the British Army's Facebook Page has been coded according to its main narrative theme. These narrative themes have been selected in accordance with the theoretical and methodological framework outlined in the earlier chapters, where according to Paul Ricoeur, narratives configure events into one meaningful whole and this whole is reducible to a theme (1984, p.67). As I suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, these themes are important in regards to thinking about employment, and by focusing on narrative themes we can make sense of a large amount of data in a systematic and manageable way.

In conducting this research I recognise that there is not an insurmountable divide between content and discourse analysis as some scholars have argued (Herrera and Braumoeller, 2004; Hopf, 2004), at least when one recognises that ‘the difference between discourse and content analysis has less to do with the degree of formality in the method per se than the methodological foundations on which the methods rest’ (Fierke, 2004, p.36). With a firm interpretivist methodological foundation, I recognise that all methods are inherently subjective and political (Fierke, 2004; Yanow, 2014; Aradau and Huysmans, 2014) and that a supposedly scientific and objective understanding of content analysis is problematic because every stage of content analysis – including the research question, the codes used, and the subsequent interpretation of the content – is concerned with meaning and significance. Thus, I am well aware that the thematic codes used are inherently subjective and influenced by the perspective of myself as a researcher.

As Karin Fierke notes, ‘the danger of going to any particular set of texts with a range of predetermined categories, for the purpose of coding, is that the world of analysis is limited from the start by the choices, and thus arguably the interpretation, of the analyst’ (Fierke, 2004, p.38). The codes and themes used were determined as the data was collected and analysed, rather than being predetermined prior to the conduct of research. Further to this, I am aware that quantifying and translating the complexities of textual and visual content into numerical values potentially loses ‘the very human, social and political processes by which actors call the world around them into question’ (Fierke, 2004, p.38). Therefore, whilst the following section does involve tables, charts and percentages of the narrative themes and the visual content of the

British Army's Facebook Page, it is intended to provide a platform for further analysis that follows in later sections of this chapter.

I first explore the broad themes, and their prominence on the British Army's Facebook Page, and I examine their importance for the politics of legitimation. I then provide a deeper reflection and a more thorough engagement with the visual politics of legitimation by engaging with the narrative aspects of language and images in regards to images of combat operations. Moreover the codes used are not mutually exclusive as they often are in more quantitative types of content analysis (Bell, 2000; Fierke, 2004). For example, a post on the British Army's Facebook page about a 'combat operation' in Afghanistan is also inherently about 'operations in Afghanistan' and could also be about a 'patrol in Afghanistan', 'Afghan Forces Capability' and 'Equipment in Afghanistan'. However, the content has been coded depending on what the central theme of the narrative was.

4.3 The narratives of the British Army on Facebook

23.69% (n=372) of the content published on the British Army's Facebook Page during the period of analysis is explicitly about the British Army operating in Afghanistan.²² Of this content, the majority (13% n=205) has been labelled as 'Operations in Afghanistan', and this refers to content that is concerned with the everyday life of British soldiers in Afghanistan and non combat operations (for example events in Camp Bastion and logistics operations). Other stories relating to the British Army's involvement in Afghanistan include those about combat between

²² This includes posts that refer to 'Operations in Afghanistan', 'Combat Operation', 'Equipment in Afghanistan', 'Afghan Forces Capability', 'Civil Assistance in Afghanistan', 'Patrol in Afghanistan' and 'IED Explosion'.

the British Army and the Taliban or local insurgents (3% n=54), and equipment that is being used by the British Army (3% n=43). There are also stories about the capability of the Afghan security forces or how the British Army are training them to be capable of maintaining security (2% n=28).

There are also stories about how the British Army are providing civil assistance in Afghanistan through the likes of building bridges and schools (1% n=25), as well as stories about patrols conducted by the British Army (1% n=14). The final narrative theme that concerns the British Army in Afghanistan relates to the explosion of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) (0.19% n=3). In comparison, 11.66% of the content is about training exercises (n=183) and 8.41% is about sport (n=132), whilst 5.99% (n=94) of content refers to ceremonies involving the British Army, and 5.61% is about medals and awards being awarded to British soldiers (n=81). Much more of the content relates to a wide variety of narratives ranging from Army jobs and careers (5.29% n=83) to the remembrance of dead soldiers (2.04% n=32), via seasonal celebrations for Christmas (0.45% n=7).

If we are interested in how the British Army claims legitimacy for the use of force then it is the content relating to combat operations and the British involvement in Afghanistan that is of central interest. However, as this only accounts for 23.69% of the content published, the rest of the content must still be considered important.²³ This is because it relates to the legitimacy of the British Army in a broader sense, and suggests that the British Army has sought to claim legitimacy through strategies that depict themselves as more than just a fighting organisation. The analysis of this

²³ See Appendix 1: Figure 2 for a breakdown of the narrative themes of the content published on Facebook.com/britisharmy.

Facebook content identified several broader themes that were used by the British Army to claim legitimacy for the Army as an institution.

As noted above, the first, and main theme of interest is that of the British Army operating in Afghanistan (23.69% n=372). A second major theme concerns combat readiness, and is implied through the use of narratives about training, deployment, equipment, defence spending as well as Army changes arising from the Strategic Defence and Security Review (14.84% n=233). A third important theme relates to the prestige of the Army and is implied through narratives about ceremonies, medals and awards, the Royal family, military history and the homecoming parades of soldiers returning from Afghanistan (16.82% n=264). The fourth - and by far the largest - theme is that relating to Army careers, jobs and the British Army lifestyle in a broad sense (35.61% n=552). This theme consists of content that is explicitly about the various jobs and careers available in the Army (such as musicians, Army photographers, war artists), sports, Armed Forces Day and other Army events, as well as a myriad of other, less frequent stories concerning things such as PR awards received by the Army. The fifth theme relates to the Army as a force for good in the world (7.26% n=114) and this content concerns narratives that concern the rehabilitation of injured soldiers, and civil assistance in the UK and other countries (such as help with flooding). Finally, the theme of death and remembrance can be seen in the content that is about remembrance, repatriation and the deaths of soldiers (2.23% n=35).

A discussion of the significance of these narrative themes and their intersections with visual media comes at the end of this section, however there are several points worth

bearing in mind here. First, the British Army has claimed legitimacy for the use of force through the use of content that concerns their operations in Afghanistan. Secondly, this type of legitimacy claim makes up for just under a quarter of what they publish on their Facebook Page, and rather than being unimportant, the other three quarters of this content are significant as they serve to claim legitimacy for the British Army in a broader sense. This content depicts the British Army as a prestigious force for good in the world that offers exciting careers and an adventurous lifestyle. In doing so this content serves to attract the consent of the public by invoking emotions of excitement, pride, and happiness that the British Army is doing good around the world. Third, much of this content is reliant upon visual multimedia – photographs, galleries of photographs, and videos – and therefore the role of visual media needs to be considered if we are to understand the phenomenon at hand.

4.4 The images of the British Army on Facebook

480 individual posts published by the British Army on their Facebook page between October 2009 and September 2012 had a central visual element in that they were a photograph, a gallery of photographs or a video. It is these posts that I now turn to in order to explore how the British Army claimed legitimacy for the use of force through the use of visual media. As with the non-visual content analysed, this visual content was coded according to the central narrative theme of the written text published, and it was also coded in accordance with what the visual image depicted. 19.58% (n=94) of the visual content published during this time period is related to the British Army being in Afghanistan and only 2.29% (n=11) is about combat. In Chapter 6 we shall see that contrary to this, the NSC make combat *the* focus of the images on their Facebook Page. However, the British Army utilise images to reinforce and emphasise

the major themes outlined above that take the focus away from the use of force. Images of sporting events make up for 15% (n=72) of all the visual content on the British Army's Facebook Page. Depicting sports such as rugby, football, skiing and rowing, these images serve to provide a sense of adventure, excitement and teamwork that depicts the Army lifestyle as appealing and attractive. Other images, such as those of training (13.75% n=66) imply a sense of capability and combat readiness. Images of ceremonies (10.63% n=51) and medals and awards (5% n=24) visually frame the Army as a prestigious institution. Further to this, images of remembrance services (3.13% n=15) stand as the only type of visual depiction of the theme of death and remembrance.²⁴

The political significance of these major themes, visually represented through photographs or videos, is worthy of discussion as it concerns the legitimacy of the British Army as an institution. However, as I am concerned with how the British Army claims legitimacy for the use of force, I now focus on images that explicitly depict combat operations. Whilst this may account for only 2% of the images shared by the British Army on Facebook, it is important to understand how the British Army represent the use of force. This is because, firstly, the use of armed force is the *modus operandi* of the British Army and the other Armed Services, and secondly, fighting an insurgency has been the primary task of the British Armed Forces in Afghanistan (Ministry of Defence, 2014b).

There are eleven sets of images depicting combat operations published during the period of analysis. Seven of these are photographic galleries containing 95 individual

²⁴ See Appendix 1: Figure 3 for a breakdown of the narrative themes of the visual content published on Facebook.com/britisharmy.

photographs, three are individual photographs, and one is a video that is one minute and twenty seven seconds in length. These posts are explicitly about combat operations as their captions make reference to events such as ‘clearing compounds’, ‘engaging the enemy’, ‘providing top cover’, and ‘meeting fire from insurgents’. They also make reference to seizing a ‘Taliban-controlled town’, ‘clearing out insurgents’, carrying out ‘a daring daylight helicopter assault’, coming ‘under fire’, and being ‘involved in the full spectrum of conflict including fire fights on the ground’. The visual content of these posts has been analysed in three ways that relate to the framework laid out in Chapter 3. Informed by a critical visual methodology (Rose, 2012, 2014) the images were analysed with an attention to the various important aspects of narrative. First, images were analysed according to who is in the image (characters). Second, by the activity that is being done (acts, agency, and purpose). And third, by what equipment is in the image (scene).²⁵

The majority of images show British Soldiers in a group or on their own (65% n=77), and 29% (n=34) show Afghan security forces in a group or on their own. Only six images (6%) show Afghan civilians or children. The activities depicted in these images are varied. 29% (n=28) depict soldiers patrolling, 13% (n=12) show British soldiers talking to Afghan soldiers, 9% (n=7) feature soldiers crouching and 4% (n=4) involve soldiers talking to Afghan civilians and children. 7% (n=7) of the images show weapons being aimed and only 4% (n=4) of the images actually show weapons being fired. The equipment that features in these images is again diverse. Weapons such as rifles, rocket propelled grenades and machine guns are the most frequently

²⁵ See Appendix 1: Figure 4 for a breakdown of people featured in images of combat operations. Appendix 1: Figure 5 provides an overview of the activities depicted in images of combat operations, and Appendix 1: Figure 6 outlines the equipment featured in images of combat operations published on Facebook.com/britisharmy.

seen pieces of equipment; appearing in 54% (n=45) of the images. Armoured vehicles feature in 19% (n=16) of the images and helicopters appear in 8% (n=7) of the images. By drawing upon the framework laid out in the previous chapter I now draw attention to the significance of this content as I explore the visual politics of legitimisation apparent on the British Army's Facebook Page.

4.5 The visual politics of legitimisation on the British Army's Facebook Page

With the basics of the content analysis laid out, I now analyse this content and discuss its political significance. The analysis here is informed by the framework set out in Chapter 3 and focuses on the content of the images in regards to:

1. Acts, scenes, characters, agency, purpose.
2. Technical aspects such as framing (relating to partiality and selectivity) as well as depth of field, lighting and colour, and camera positioning.
3. Emplotment and the structure of the relationship between parts.
4. Emplotment and implied causality.

The first point to note is that visual articulations of legitimacy claims for the use of force are rare. Despite the British Army being involved in three central tasks in Afghanistan, those of 'fighting an insurgency determined to undermine Afghan government control, creating and training the Afghan National Security Forces and providing a secure environment for reconstruction and development to take place' (Ministry of Defence, 2014b), sets of images of combat operations make up only 2.29% (n=11) of the visual content posted by the British Army during the period of analysis. This constructs a visuality of 'clean war' where war and conflict are

presented in a 'bloodless, humanitarian, hygienic' (Der Derian, 2000, p.772) way. According to Roger Stahl, 'clean war' involves audiences being alienated 'from the fact of death in order to maximize the war's capacity to be consumed' (Stahl, 2010, p.25). For Stahl, 'the disappearance of death represents the primary method of neutralizing the citizen's moral culpability in the decision to unleash state violence' (Stahl, 2010, p.27), as war and conflict become 'unavailable for critique: unthinkable not for its ghastliness but in its ghostliness' (Stahl, 2010, p.27). In a similar vein, Patricia Owens has noted that Western warfare is often represented in such a way that it is now 'almost death-free in principle, for both Western soldiers and civilians on the ground' (Owens, 2003, p.597).

Paying attention to the content and the representation of acts, scenes, agents, agency, and purpose in the images of combat reveals further dynamics of the visual politics of legitimation in this context. In terms of agents - the people in the images - the focus is almost exclusively on British soldiers. Whilst it is perhaps unsurprising that the British Army would focus on British soldiers in their images, it is worth noting that the images disappear, quite literally, the 30 million civilians in Afghanistan whose lives have been affected by recent conflicts and military interventions. Not only are civilian casualties absent from the representation of conflict, but civilians themselves are hardly in the picture.

Only 6% (n=7) of the images of combat operations feature local Afghans. In these, the Afghans shown are children or old men, aside from two images that feature young adult males. However, the fact that these men are sat on the floor, equally distanced from each other, hands by their sides, with British soldiers standing guard around

them suggests they are prisoners or insurgents (the caption to these two images contains no further information). If so, these are the only images of insurgents or prisoners during the period of analysis, and this representation of the Afghan population as old men, children or insurgents serves to claim legitimacy for the British Army's use of force as it renders the Afghan population as ill equipped to handle their own security (Shepherd, 2006). This focus on British soldiers also suggests a 'support the troops' rhetoric (Stahl, 2010, p.29) where public attention is turned 'away from the point of policy's creation and toward its point of execution... ..[where] the immediate battlefield plight of the soldier takes centre stage' (Stahl, 2010, p.30).

The British soldiers who form the focus of the images are involved in a variety of actions related to combat. Most frequently, we see soldiers patrolling, and we also see them talking to Afghan soldiers. Other common activities involve soldiers crouching or aiming their weapons, and we also see images of soldiers firing weapons. These actions show the British Army involved in combat operations, and once more they provide a somewhat 'clean' representation of combat. The arguments about clean war made by the likes of Stahl, Der Derian and Owens have often been made as an observation of a general cultural condition of the ways in which 'Western' warfare is represented. Yet, none of these authors provide an engagement with large bodies of empirical material to support their arguments (an exception here would be Parry, 2012). My analysis supports their arguments about the representation of western warfare, but it also suggests that the visuality of 'clean war' - at least in the context of the British Army on Facebook - doesn't just involve the disappearance of death, but it also involves the disappearance of combat and violence itself. This is because, even in

the images of combat operations, only four images actually show weapons being fired. Moreover, aside from two images of explosions, there are no images of any damage or after affects of weapons being used. Therefore, the use of force is seemingly invisible in the British Army's legitimization claims.

The activities depicted in the images analysed here imbue a sense of agency to British soldiers who are the primary 'doers' of the activities in the images. The purpose behind the British Army conducting the various combat activities shown in the images is framed as 'clearing compounds' or 'clearing out insurgents', 'providing top cover', 'meeting fire from insurgents', seizing a 'Taliban-controlled town', or carrying out 'a daring daylight helicopter assault'. Whilst such captions hint towards the tactical purpose of the activities depicted, they do not provide any information as to the broader purpose of why the British Army is using force, or as to why it is in Afghanistan in the first place. All of the images of combat are set in Afghanistan and often show a dusty desert with hints of vegetation and greenery such as fields of poppies. At times there are glimpses of structures made from mud or bare concrete blocks. Further to this background scenery, equipment plays an important role in these images. Weapons such as rifles are the most recurrent piece of equipment, but armoured vehicles and helicopters are also often featured. This suggests a visual framing of what Roger Stahl calls 'technofetishism' (Stahl, 2010, p.28); a focus on high-tech military hardware such as that which we see in the images of armoured vehicles and helicopters.

In regards to the technical aspects such as framing, depth of field and focus, lighting and colour, and camera positioning, the images of combat are of a professional

quality. They are well focused, and well framed according to photographic conventions such as the rule of threes (where a photograph's content is divided into three major parts) and leading lines (where aspects of a photograph guide the viewer's eye to certain points of importance). The photographs are often quite colourful and dramatic, and at times they display elements of style such as the silhouetting of people against a sunset, or of long-exposures to capture stars at night. In short, the photographs are aesthetically pleasing and of a quality one would expect from professional photographers. The content of the images is employed through their captions, but also through the relationships between the constituent parts of the images.

Whilst this framing of war is similar to how other 'Western' militaries use images (Stahl, 2010) it stands in clear opposition to how other actors use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The overwhelming focus on our soldiers is at odds with how political actors often use images to emphasise how victims of conflict need saving (see Chapter 6). However, it is in line with how the British Army has used images since the Crimean War, throughout the World Wars and later wars of the 20th Century. The high visibility of activities such as patrolling and aiming weapons, alongside the frequency of weapons and military vehicles serves to claim legitimacy by conforming to legal rules that warfare must not harm civilians. The emphasis on high technology resonates with the shared belief that actors should not cause collateral damage and must abide by the Laws of Armed Combat when using force. Consent is sought and implied by the 29% of images that feature Afghan soldiers and show that the British are part of the ISAF coalition. The invisibility of the enemy, alongside these other factors, demonstrate that the major way the British Army claim legitimacy

for the use of force is by emphasising the legitimacy of *themselves and their own actions*. In Chapter 6 we shall see a very different type of legitimisation claim that makes the enemy visible, and rather than focusing on the equipment of war, focuses on its effects, thereby serving to claim legitimacy by delegitimising the enemy and their actions.

Focusing on the main themes of all of this content provides an insight into the basic essentials of employment, but engaging in a more focused way with a singular set of images provides for a deeper insight into the ways in which the British Army use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The central aspects of this visuality involve the absence of violence, the disappearance of Afghan civilians, and a focus on British soldiers. The set of images analysed here are a gallery of photographs titled ‘Operation OMID HAFT’ and published on the British Army’s Facebook Page on 1 June 2011.²⁶ These images have been chosen as Omid Haft was a significant military operation for the British in Helmand province. Taking place in Helmand, Operation Omid Haft aimed to expand the ISAF security zone to villages in the areas of Lashkar Gah, Nad-e Ali and Nahr-e Saraj. It was one of ‘the largest partnered air assaults in Afghanistan since operations began’ (Ministry of Defence, 2011) and it also formed the basis for later operations (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2012). Operation Omid Haft was also one of only four named combat operations to be explicitly accompanied with visual media on Facebook, and this visual media consisted of a gallery of photographs rather than a singular photograph (as was used for Operation Tor Shezada) or a singular video (as was used for Operation Panther’s

²⁶ The direct URL for this gallery of images is <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150629699870615.687272.318319690614&type=1>

Claw). Featuring seventeen photographs, the gallery from Operation Omid Haft also features most, if not all, of the acts, scenes, agents, agency, and purposes that frequently arise in other visual representations of the use of force on the British Army's Facebook page. In this sense whilst it is not entirely representative of all representations of combat on the British Army's Facebook Page, this gallery does share a 'family resemblance' with other images of combat that are published there.

The set of images from Operation Omid Haft, displays as a gallery of four images alongside text that states that 'Hundreds of Afghan soldiers, supported by British and coalition forces, have taken part in Operation OMID HAFT in Central Helmand, to clear out insurgents from one of their last remaining strongholds' (Ministry of Defence, 2011). Once clicked on, the viewer is taken through to a gallery of seventeen images that can then be viewed, 'liked', 'shared' or commented on. These images are all framed by captions that relate to the content of the images. Most restate the caption above and inform the viewer that British soldiers have taken part in Operation Omid Haft in support of Afghan forces. Four images refer to a company of British soldiers taking over a local compound and setting up a check point in the town of Alikosi, one image is captioned 'Soldiers help each other out', and one other makes reference to a soldier talking to children that live in one of the local compounds.

The order of the images does not suggest a clear linear plot as one might expect from a gallery of documentary photographs, however the content of the images serves to emplot the events of Operation Omid Haft by relating various parts to each other. Of these images, two depict individual British Army soldiers, ten depict groups of British Army soldiers, two images show British soldiers with their Afghan counterparts, and

two depict British Army soldiers with Afghan civilians. One image of military trucks does not feature any people. The activities depicted include five images of British soldiers patrolling, and there is one image of a British soldier literally giving a hand to an Afghan soldier and helping him over an obstacle. There are four images of soldiers embarking or disembarking from helicopters, four images of soldiers using equipment such as telephones or binoculars, one image of a soldier aiming a sniper rifle and two images of British soldiers talking to Afghan civilians and one image of military trucks in convoy. Together these images and captions depict Operation Omid Haft as a successful operation where death, destruction and violence are not mentioned in the written captions or shown in the photographic images.

*Figure 2: Images from Operation Omid Haft on facebook.com/britisharmy
(Crown Copyright 2011)*



Indeed, the MoD announced in an official press release that ‘the mission was a resounding success and a textbook example of multinational co-operation’ (Ministry of Defence, 2011). In this announcement the MoD goes on to mention that an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) exploded in a compound, and tragically killed two soldiers, Lieutenant Ollie Augustin and Marine Sam Alexander. This is not mentioned on Facebook, and neither are the other five IED explosions that resulted in one British soldier breaking his leg, alongside two other British soldiers and one Afghan interpreter being injured (Hill, 2014, pp.154–166). Figures relating to the number of killed or injured ‘insurgents’ or civilians during the operation are unavailable; however it is worth noting that May 2011 was the deadliest month for civilians in Afghanistan since 2007 as 368 civilians lost their lives and a further 593 were injured (UNAMA, 2011). Whilst the point of analysing visual media is not to determine how ‘truthful’ images such as photographs are - and nor is it to suggest that the British Army should have taken photographs of death, injuries or destruction - it must be noted that no mention whatsoever of these soldier’s deaths is somewhat startling.

The visual framing of the images from Omid Haft, with a focus on British Army soldiers and vehicles is therefore one that constitutes a ‘clean war’ visuality as injury, death and violence are invisible. The emphasis is on the legitimacy of the British soldiers, rather than the illegitimacy of the Taliban. Here, the British Army use high tech weaponry and vehicles against an unseen enemy, thereby conforming to legal rules and shared beliefs and norms about proportional warfare and the protection of civilians. The British Army also seemingly do so with the consent of the Afghan Army. However, through this visuality, Afghan civilians are marginalised and shown

in only two images; one of children and one of an old man. Moreover, despite this operation being led by the Afghan National Army, Afghan soldiers only appear in two images: in the background. Not only does this support an understanding of the people of Afghanistan as victims in need of protecting (Shepherd, 2006, p.2) but it also reifies 'clean war' through minimizing the presence and agency of Afghan civilians and rendering them as extras where 'our boys' are the main characters. Thus it is not only civilian casualties that we see disappearing in 'clean war', but also the disappearance of civilians themselves.

These representations also reveal interesting dynamics concerning emotions, and the 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.720) that the British Army are instilling in the visual media they share on Facebook. They focus on British Soldiers who are professional, well trained, and using technology in a cool, calm, and collected way in order to combat an unseen enemy. Coupled with the other images that concern the 'humanity' of British soldiers and focus on sports (15%) and ceremonies and awards (15%), they suggest an 'affective investment in and an attachment to a narrative that one must remain "good" and not "evil"' (Solomon, 2014, p.736). By playing upon emotions such as pride in soldiers who help old Afghan men and young Afghan girls, these images serve to claim legitimacy for the British Army's use of force by attracting the audience to invest emotionally in this narrative of virtue. This is, of course, not the only way to use images to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of a contrasting visuality whereby the suffering of civilians is placed centre stage.

A statement by the head of the British Joint Media Operations Centre during the time this operation took place is telling. During a conversation with a journalist in Helmand province, he comments on the journalists struggle to make a link between breast-feeding programmes in Afghanistan and the security of the British public, and he states ‘It’s not sexy... ...A guy with a rifle is sexy’ (“Faulkner” quoted in Hill, 2014, p.169). ‘Sexiness’, is perhaps a strange concept to use to promote military operations in the media, however, feminists have, for several years now, drawn attention to role of sex and gender in legitimising military force (Cohn, 1987; Elshtain, 1987). The next chapter builds upon this chapter by exploring what, aside from ‘sexiness’, might be driving the British Army’s legitimisation claims. However, before doing so it is important to take stock and summarise how the narrative and visual content discussed above is used to claim legitimacy for the use of force.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the British Army has used narratives and images on Facebook to claim legitimacy for the use of force. I began by placing the British Army’s use of Facebook in the context of military media management. The historical discussion at the start of this chapter explored the different ways the British Army has used visual media at important points in history, and I argued that the visual politics of legitimisation has always underpinned the British Army’s use of media. From the use of posters and paintings in the 1700’s, to the use of multimedia Combat Camera Teams today, the British Army has sought to use visual media in a variety of ways to claim legitimacy for its use of force. Not only has the British Army sought to manage the media, but it has also become a media actor itself, producing and circulating content on it’s own social media pages.

Understanding these contemporary and historical practices through an attention to the visual politics of legitimation enables researchers to make sense of different historical instances through a common conceptual lens. Of course, the context of the British Army using posters in the 1700's is radically different to that of them using Pinterest in 2016, but they are both fundamentally concerned with the Army claiming legitimacy for its *modus operandi*; the use of force. Therefore, the approach to the visual politics of legitimation set out in Chapter 3 provides an appropriate framework for looking at how the British Army has used visual media in a historical and contemporary context. As others have suggested, 'history weighs heavy on the British Army' (Stewart, 2014, p.25), and whilst my discussion did explore some of the major differences and commonalities of the British Army's historical use of visual media, there is a need for more extensive research into the historical development and trajectory of the British Army's legitimation claims. This chapter, however, sought not to provide such analysis. Instead, I explored how the British Army claims legitimacy for the use of force in the digital age.

In doing so I analysed the British Army's use of Facebook. Whilst there has been research into how the British Army manages and works with the media (Jensen, 2011; Maltby, 2012a), there has been no research into how they use Facebook in an official capacity.²⁷ Therefore this chapter provides an empirical contribution to knowledge as it focuses on a data source that has not been analysed by other researchers. In analysing the Facebook data, the core argument of this chapter was that the content of

²⁷ Sarah Maltby and others at the Defence Uncertainty and Now Media project have recently explored social media and the British Armed Forces. However their publications to date have focused on how the British Armed Forces attempt to manage their soldiers on social media, or on how people talk about the military on social media, and they have yet to publish work that explores the official military use of social media (See Maltby et al., 2015).

the British Army's Facebook serves to claim legitimacy for the use of force by depicting the British Army as a force for good that rarely actually uses force. Instead, the focus is often placed on an institution that spends most of its time playing sports, training, and conducting ceremonial activities. Such a representation, alongside the fact that when the use of force is visually depicted, it is devoid of any mention of death, destruction, injury or violence, constitutes a visuality of 'clean war'. In turn, the use of force is visually framed as legitimate as it is always conforming to legal rules and international law; it is deemed justifiable in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms; and other actors consent to it.

In regards to the first point, the images analysed here represent the use of force as legitimate and legal without ever explicitly invoking the language of legality – it is just presumed as being so, and reflected in the notion that the use of force is focused against insurgents and the Taliban. In this sense such representations 'construct a particular kind of world in which certain things are recognised as true' (Doty, 1993, p.306); a world where the use of force is constructed as truthfully legitimate. Further to this, the actions depicted are deemed to be justifiable in terms of shared values, beliefs and norms as they are conducted alongside ISAF and Afghan forces. This suggests that the use of force is consented to by other international actors, as well as the Afghan civilians who appear in several images. In being presented this way, these legitimisation claims serve to attract the audience to invest emotionally in a narrative of virtuosity. Understanding how affective investment links the producers of this content with audiences is the focus of the next chapter.

Whilst this chapter has provided an insight into the content of the British Army's legitimisation claims, it has not explored the contexts of production or interpretation. As I suggested in Chapter 3, it is vitally important to understand these dimensions if we are to gain a more rounded understanding of the visual politics of legitimisation. This is because the legitimisation process begins with a political actor making a claim to be legitimate, and it requires an audience to interpret and then consent to it. As Stuart Hall suggests, the sites of production and interpretation, or as he puts it encoding and decoding, are '*determinate* moments' (Hall, 2005, p.118, emphasis in original) in the cycle of communication. Therefore the next chapter builds upon this chapter by exploring the context of the British Army's visual media production, whilst also analysing how an audience of Facebook users interpret this content.

Chapter 5

Encoding and Decoding the British Army on Facebook

On 31 January 2015 the British media reported that the British Army were ‘creating a team of Facebook warriors’ (MacAskill, 2015) by forming a new brigade responsible for the fighting of non-lethal warfare in the information age (Sengupta, 2015). An Army spokesperson said that the 77th Brigade will attempt to use social media in order to influence behaviours ‘through the use of dynamic narratives’ (Army Spokesperson quoted in Channel 4 News, 2015). The use of social media is therefore something that the British Army and the MoD are taking very seriously. Not only is this implied by the formation of an entire brigade responsible for such activities (British Army, 2016), but is also explicitly stated in various MoD doctrine notes and recommendations that are now several years old (Ministry of Defence, 2009, 2012a, 2012b).

In light of such developments, the previous chapter analysed how the British Army have published narratives and images on their official Facebook Page in order to claim legitimacy for the use of force. Placing the politics of legitimation at the centre of the British Army’s use of social media, this chapter builds upon Chapter 4 by exploring how the British Army produced these legitimation claims. In order to do so I analyse MoD Joint Doctrine Publications and Notes on the topics of Media Operations and Strategic Communication that provide guidance for how the British

Army should produce and use visual media. This analysis is accompanied by the use of interviews and one focus group with thirteen British Army and MoD personnel who are involved in producing images and using social media. Here I draw attention to how these individuals conceptualise what they do, and I provide an insight into how the British Army produces legitimisation claims. The central argument here is that the production of legitimisation claims is driven by several factors that cannot be understood by looking at the content of narratives and images alone.

Whilst it is important to explore the context of production alongside the content of legitimisation claims, it is also important to understand how audiences interpret, respond to, and feel emotions about those claims. This is because legitimisation is a process that is reliant on the consent of an audience, and how audiences interpret and feel about media content is vital in understanding the political significance of that content (Hall, 2005; Rose, 2014; Solomon, 2014; Bleiker, 2015). Therefore the final section of this chapter analyses the most popular content published by the British Army during the period of analysis, before examining 286 comments made by Facebook users on a gallery of images depicting a combat operation. The central argument here is that the audience of the British Army's legitimisation claims on Facebook consented to and felt emotionally invested in the Army's claim to be legitimately using force.

This chapter contributes to studies of global politics by providing an insight into the production and reception of legitimisation claims, something that Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted as often being overlooked in both studies of legitimisation, and of visual global politics. Furthermore, this chapter provides an original empirical contribution

to knowledge by drawing upon original interview data as well as Facebook comments that have yet to be analysed by other researchers. Inspired by Stuart Hall, this chapter draws together the sites of visual media production (encoding) with that of audience interpretation (decoding), and furthers the analysis presented in Chapter 4 by going beyond an examination of the content of legitimisation claims. In doing so, I look at how ‘affective investment’ (Solomon, 2014, p.720) links both of these sites and provides an insight into the mechanism by which legitimisation takes place.

5.1 Encoding legitimisation: Strategic communication and military doctrine

It is important to explore the context of visual media production because this content is not produced in a vacuum; it is commissioned, produced, edited and then shared online for various reasons. In this section I aim not to uncover the underlying, ‘true’ intentions of the British Army, rather I recognise that all narratives require a narrator, and all images require a maker; therefore I explore the factors that shape the politics of the legitimisation claims analysed in Chapter 4. In order to do this, I engage with Ministry of Defence doctrine, before then drawing upon data collected in interviews.

When trying to place the military use of social media in context ‘one has to grapple with numerous technical terms’ (Jones and Baines, 2013, p.72) that include soft power (Nye, 2005), behavioural conflict (Mackay and Tatham, 2009), information operations (Wenham, 2009), media operations (Cole, 2014), strategic narrative (Freedman, 2006; Miskimmon et al., 2013), and of course, propaganda (Taylor, 1999; Piesing, 2012). The Ministry of Defence itself recognises the conceptual dynamism involved here, but chooses to use the term ‘strategic communication’ to refer to its activities on social, as well as traditional, media. The MoD succinctly defines

strategic communication as ‘advancing national interests by using all defence means of communication to influence the attitudes and behaviours of people’ (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.1–1). There are several MoD documents that provide an insight into understanding the dynamics behind the British Army’s use of social media. Moreover, these documents provide insights into the formation of narratives and the construction of visuality that is used to claim legitimacy for the use of force.

The first document of interest is *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1 Media Operations* (JDP 3-45.1). Whereas the MoD’s *Green Book* outlines how the MoD should work with media organisations (Ministry of Defence, 2010), *JDP-345.1* provides guidance for how the MoD and the British Armed Forces themselves should use media. It sets out the joint tactics, techniques and procedures of media operations and stands as the key document explaining the ends, ways and means of media operations across the British Armed Forces. As a Joint Doctrine Publication, *JDP 3-45.1* exists as formally promulgated, endorsed national doctrine and is supplemented by *Joint Doctrine Note 1/12 Strategic Communication: The Defence Contribution* (JDN 1/12). Joint Doctrine Notes seek to address urgent requirements for MoD doctrine and they ‘establish and disseminate best practice. They also establish the basis for further development and experimentation and provide a doctrinal basis for operations and exercises’ (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.iii). These two documents therefore provide an insight into not only what the British Army does in terms of media, but also how, when, where and why they do it. They stand as a relevant starting point for making sense of how the British Army produces legitimisation claims.

The first document, *JDP 3-451 Media Operations* states that the MoD needs to ‘act in a coordinated fashion to achieve the Government’s strategic aims. Critical to this is the maintenance of political and popular support for HMG’s strategic objectives and any military activity in support of it’ (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.v). These media operations are seen as vitally important for the MoD in the context of modern conflict ‘becoming increasingly complex’ (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–1) due to how, through the development of digital media technologies, virtually all conflicts and crises happen under the spotlight of the world (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–1). This recognition of the mediatisation of conflict, as discussed in Chapter 3, leads the MoD to iterate a need ‘to be proactive in ensuring that the presentation of our actions is positive, accurate and credible, whilst at the same time, countering the adversary’s or detractor’s attempts to undermine public support’ (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–1).

Through the use of media operations, the MoD aims to ‘provide factual information to a number of audiences via the media to support the aims of the UK Information Strategy’ (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–3). Thus, media operations are closely linked to information operations. However, these are distinct activities in the eyes of the MoD as the key aim of information operations is to influence others (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–2), whereas the main aim of media operations is to simply provide information and not to give the impression that the media is being manipulated in any way (JDP 3-45.1, 2007, p.1–3). In regards to this, Sarah Maltby has noted that ‘the ways in which this differentiation is maintained in practice, however, remains unclear both in written doctrine, and among military personnel’ (Maltby, 2012, p.22). Maltby moves on to show that some military members see the distinction of media and information operations as redundant and that ‘both are fundamentally orientated toward an intent

to inform, persuade and influence those who become recipients of the information distributed' (2012, p.22–23).

Developments since the publishing of Maltby's work further reify this point, most notably the formulation and publication of *JDN 1/12* in 2012 and the use of social media by the MoD. This collapse in the distinction between media and information operations emphasises the point that the MoD understands conflict to be mediated. Moreover, visual media is one of the main tools that they have deployed to support their narratives in the context of strategic communication. This is highlighted by the head of online engagement at the MoD, Pippa Norris's statement that British military social media content should be 'picture-led' (Norris quoted in Mediacor, 2013). Therefore, the visual politics of legitimation are of the utmost importance in the MoD's practice of strategic communication. *JDN 1/12* provides further insight into how the MoD and the British Army produce and project narratives and images on digital social media platforms.

According to the MoD in *JDN 1/12*, the shift to the concept of strategic communication was driven by 'the recent experience of our struggle to forge coherent strategies for our campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to communicate them to audiences in a compelling way against a backdrop of 24-hour and, increasingly pervasive, social media' (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.iii). As media technologies continue to develop, access to online information increases, and the speed in which information is transmitted grows ever faster, the MoD recognise that:

information flow is now so prevalent, potent and unavoidable that it forms as much a part of the strategic environment as the terrain or weather. Like the terrain or weather it can neither be ignored, nor controlled. Increasingly, information can be regarded as a strategic instrument in its own right, with influence being its desired product (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.iv).

What we see here is the complete collapse of any distinction between media operations as supposedly impartial information giving and information operations focusing on influence because the two become inextricably linked under the rubric of strategic communication. Whilst historically there has been some overlap between media and information operations, to have the distinction collapsed outright in doctrine is a novel development.

Strategic communication is used by the MoD to make a compelling and persuasive case to audiences through the alignment of ‘words, images and actions to influence key decision-makers and their people for strategic effect’ (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.v). With this in mind, it becomes apparent that the British military has recognised that contemporary conflict is mediatised, and it therefore seeks to use digital media technologies in order to communicate to and influence audiences. This is not a peripheral part of the British military’s approach to contemporary conflict; rather, it is right at the heart of it. This is because, as the JDN states, strategic communication ‘is *the key element* for Defence since it underpins our approach to delivering outputs – the alignment of words, images and actions to realise influence’ (JDN 1/12, 2012, p.1–3–4, emphasis added). Such a statement suggests that the visual politics of legitimisation are a fundamental aspect of contemporary British military

operations. Due to the importance placed on words and images, it also suggests that an aesthetic approach to global politics as outlined in Chapter 1 is not only appropriate, but also much needed if we are to research the British Army in the digital age.

Further information in *JDN 1/12* gives more insight into understanding the conditions under which the British Army construct their narratives and what narratives they produce. Above all, the MoD's narratives will reflect and align with the core messages of the government, however at times the MoD may need to act as a catalyst for the formulation of government strategy (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.1–7). The MoD note that it is the growing importance of population-focused warfare and public scrutiny (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–1), in a constantly evolving and ambiguous information environment that provide the *raison d'être* for strategic communication (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–3). Moreover, within the context of the contemporary media ecology, the MoD recognise a need to draw upon all forms of information outlets – from Loya Jirgas to YouTube videos – in order to inform and influence people (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–6). They recognise that the old media of newspapers, radio and TV are converging with the new media of blogs and social networks through both news gathering and output (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–7). They also place attention on how audiences understand information, something that they have explored in detail in *JDP 04: Understanding*. By considering understanding, the MoD place the focus on audiences and recognise that media can be used to target specific audiences (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–9).

To do this, they utilise narratives. Describing narratives as ‘compelling story lines which explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn’

(Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–10) the MoD put narrative at the heart of their activities; stating that ‘they should provide the *raison d’être* for our operations’ (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–10). They recognise that in the contemporary media environment there are competing narratives (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.2–11) and they note that ‘the power of the narrative – its ability to resonate with audiences – is more important than ownership or control or how the narrative is transmitted’ (JDN 1/12, 2012, p.2–11-12). In recognising that there are multiple narratives about the British military out there in the world, especially in a new media ecology with unprecedented scale, the MoD perceive a need to project their own narratives through strategic communication. *JDN 1/12* provides an insight into what narratives the MOD aim to project and one section is worth quoting in full:

At the centre is the UK national narrative; an enduring story which describes the nation's position as a parliamentary democracy, one of the top 10 economies in the world, leader of the commonwealth; and whose values of rule of law, democracy, free speech, tolerance and human rights are echoed in the national security strategy of 2010. This narrative will rarely change, and then only gradually over time. It is an important factor in how we are viewed by the rest of the world. Consequently, we value a long-term narrative which depicts the UK as competent, robustly inclusive, and conducting actions that are legitimate; this approach builds credibility and trust. (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.3–9)

Clearly, the MoD sees strategic communication as means to depict themselves and their actions as legitimate through the use of narratives. The overarching ‘national

narrative’ suggests that the MoD and the British Army are legitimate due to its adherence to democracy, law and values such as free speech, tolerance and human rights.

Underpinning these narratives are an affective investment in the values themselves, because, as Ty Solomon suggests, these narratives ‘are politically consequential precisely because they touch upon – or a re felt by audiences to touch upon – a deeper nerve or “essence” that such words are believed by audience members to express’ (2014, p.735). This is important as it also suggests how the content published on the British Army’s Facebook Page and analysed in Chapter 4 presented an affective investment in the narrative that the British military are a prestigious force for good in the world that abides by the rule of law and supports democracy across the globe. Further to this, the MoD states that it is ‘conducting actions that are legitimate’ (Ministry of Defence, 2012a, p.3–9). This again implies that the British Army’s Facebook Page is an important location for exploring the politics of legitimation, as the British Army claim legitimacy for themselves, their actions and their use of force through the use of narratives and images under the rubric of strategic communication.

In summary, doctrine provides an insight into how and why the British Army produce media content such as that which we see on Facebook. The development of this thinking has stemmed from the MoD’s view, as General Sir David Richards summarises, that ‘Conflict today, especially because so much of it is effectively fought through the medium of the Communications Revolution, is principally about and for people—hearts and minds on a mass scale’ (Richards quoted in Betz, 2011, p.614). After much reflection from the MoD over the importance of media in

contemporary conflicts, the use of media operations and strategic communication became enshrined in doctrine.²⁸

The British Army's use of Facebook falls into the remit of strategic communication and the doctrine discussed above thereby provides an insight into the context of production. It suggests that the British Army use Facebook in order to inform and therefore influence audiences. This is done through the projection of narratives; narratives that are often told through images. Chapter 4 provided an insight into the central themes and aspects of these narratives whilst also demonstrating a need to recognise the importance of visual media in researching how the British Army claims legitimacy for the use of force. According to doctrine, these narratives should relate to the broader context of the UK being a legitimate actor that behaves according to international norms and values.

Exactly how these narratives are produced and circulated is not, however, outlined in doctrine. Furthermore, whilst doctrine may provide authoritative statements, guidance and principles for the British Army, it does not reveal how such principles are implemented in practice. Therefore, in order to understand the underlying, day-to-day dynamics of the British Army's use of Facebook, I now turn to an analysis of data collected in interviews with British Army personnel involved in the production and circulation of media content. This is important because those who produce visual media do so by employing 'particular strategies, which will not be the only solutions that could have been adopted' (Lister and Wells, 2000, p.70), and therefore talking to

²⁸ See for example the work of serving personnel that argued for a greater understanding and implementation of media operations and strategic communication prior to the publication of *JDN 1/11* (Tatham, 2008; Mackay and Tatham, 2009; Rowland and Tatham, 2010; Wenham, 2009, 2009).

people involved in the production of legitimisation claims provides a way of understanding how and why those narratives and images look the way they do.

5.2 Encoding legitimisation: Interviews with British Army media personnel

As Steiner Kvale and Alan Brinkman state, ‘If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.xvii). Such a sentiment was highlighted in earlier chapters, and it underpins the following section of this chapter where I draw upon thirteen conversations with British Army personnel or MoD civil servants involved in media and information operations or strategic communication.²⁹ All individuals have been interviewed according to the method of semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008), and this method provides an insight into how individuals involved in the production of the British Army’s media content understand and conceptualise what they do. All interviewees were contacted via email, and then interviewed between August 2014 and November 2015. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Consent to use this material was then given verbally or in email correspondence. Therefore all of what is quoted below is ad verbatim from the interviewees. As such, the quotes do not represent the official view of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence, but rather give an insight into the views and lived experiences of those ‘on the ground’, making, producing and circulating the content that can be found on [Facebook.com/britisharmy](https://www.facebook.com/britisharmy).

²⁹ Due to the nature of this research, most interviewees have opted to remain anonymous and in order to maintain their privacy I cannot reveal their specific roles in the British Army or the MoD. However they have all been – or are still - involved in the British Army’s media management, production and circulation.

5.2.1 Contextualising the British Army's use of social media

As noted above, the British Army's use of social media seems to span a wide variety of operation types (including, media, information, strategic communication) and the opening question for many of the interviewees concerned where the use of social media sits in regards to operations. There was a widespread sense that the Army was playing 'catch up' and that their approach to social media was somewhat ad hoc and pragmatic. As one interviewee put it 'we were a bit slapdash' (BA Interview, 2015e). One interviewee commented:

The MoD was not an early adopter of social media. It was seen as a bit of a, this thing will pass type thing. And once we had the kind of social media explosion.... ...That requires a fundamental shift in our attitude towards information management (BA Interview 2014c).

This perhaps explains why much of the academic literature sees social media as opening up a space for challenging state and military narratives rather than enforcing them (Christensen, 2008; Kaempf, 2008), as at the time of this writing, militaries had yet to utilise social media in an effective way and much of the content that was leaked online – for example photos from Abu Gharib – did challenge military narratives. However, this has changed as military actors have begun to use, or 'arrest' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015), social media for their own purposes. As the analysis in Chapter 4 has shown, the British Army is now using social media sites such as Facebook to publish a lot of content in a thought-out, sophisticated way.

When asked where exactly this sits in regards to the operations - whether it is strategic communications, media operations or information operations - one

interviewee replied 'it straddles all of them' (BA Interview, 2014b). Another responded 'Psyops and social media go hand-in-glove... ..I think there is a danger the two worlds of Media Ops and Psyops will start to overlap' (BA Interview, 2014a). Other interviewees were also aware of the dangers of the Army's social media use being associated with psychological operations, but instead associated it with marketing and PR, stating that:

Social media is just another channel where you don't have to go through a third party, you can reach out directly to your friends, followers, people who have liked your page and say "this is us, this is what we're doing, comment on it if you wish". So yeah there is a purpose to it but I don't think its particularly – its not sinister in any way – you know, we're not trying to PsyOps people through what we do, we're just putting it out there (BA Interview, 2014c).

Similarly, other interviewees were quite adamant that what they did was for media purposes of informing rather than influencing, and they highlighted how there was an institutional gap between those responsible for British Army media operations and those responsible for psychological or information operations (BA Interview, 2015e). Others, however, noted that the content of social media served several purposes and could be created to inform, but would, in the end, serve to influence. As one interviewee put it to me, 'we've not put it out because it is strategic necessarily, we've put it out for these reasons, but it does that as well. Nothing's clear-cut in life is it?' (BA Interview, 2015a).

Interviewees noted that there are three types of British Army social media page - 'the official, the semi official, and the sponsored' (BA Interview, 2014c) - and that all

three serve different purposes. Official pages such as the one analysed in Chapter 4 are conceptualised as ‘pages where we can post our own stories... ..our own outlet of our own content’ (BA Interview, 2014c). Semi official pages refer to social media sites ran by the likes of Army units and battalions, and are aimed at members of these units and their families (BA Interview, 2014c). Further to this, sponsored accounts are run by personnel who are deemed to use social media well, ‘they’re just saying I love my job, here’s a couple of pictures, here’s the kind of thing I do. They’re held up as examples of good practice’ (BA Interview, 2014c). The British Army’s multilevel approach to the use of social media shows that militaries are now focusing more attention on how to utilise social media for official purposes in a structured and organised way. Even though there are these different types of British military social media sites, they are all concerned with the politics of legitimation. This is because all of these sites, and all of these media practices, whether they are media, information, or psychological operations, all involve the articulation of legitimacy claims.

The next major line of questioning concerned what the purposes of using official social media sites were. One interviewee was again aware of the ways in which media operations and information operations were conflated in the context of social media. When asked about the purposes behind the British Army Facebook Page he responded:

I think it is to inform and then to educate, because there are a lot of people out there who don’t know the first thing. I think by doing the inform piece and doing it well you cant help but influence peoples attitudes (Participant A in BA Focus Group, 2014).

This idea of using social media to inform was widely shared by interviewees. It was deemed to be important that the armed forces are publically funded, with one interviewee noting that:

I don't think there's any kind of purpose other than the fact that the MoD recognises that as an organisation it has to be outward facing. You know we spend taxpayers money, we need to explain to the taxpayer what it is that we do, why we do it, and in most cases how much it costs (Participant B in BA Focus Group, 2014).

This highlights how legitimisation underpins the British Army's use of social media as they attempt to convince the public that they are legitimately spending state funds.

Others saw social media as something that the Army simply needed to use because 'everyone is using it so you can't not use it' (BA Interview, 2014b), and one responded 'why not put what you're trying to get them to see where they're already looking?' (Participant C in BA Focus Group, 2014). Interviewees also saw an opportunity in being able to message audiences directly, with one stating that 'social media is a great way to deliver your message straight to the public' (BA Interview, 2014a). Others shared this sentiment, with one interviewee saying that 'if you use social media, you remove the middleman, you're engaging directly with your audience' (BA Interview, 2014c). This was highlighted by most interviewees who stated that social media 'gives us that reach, it gives us direct access to target audiences, and the message is unfettered... ..it's exactly as we want it, its crafted the

way we want it to resonate with that audience’ (Participant A in BA Focus Group, 2014).

As well as enabling the Army to communicate directly to audiences, interviewees saw other benefits with social media. One stated:

it’s a channel that is multifaceted and allows many more things to be – stories to be told – and it’s a combination of something that has visual imagery, as well as being able have sound, that enables people to gain an experience and an insight in a way that previously they would have had to imagine it (BA Interview, 2014c).

This attention to stories, images, and sound also highlights the importance of an aesthetic approach and a consideration of narrative and images in the articulation of legitimisation claims. The emphasis on informing and ‘providing insights’ rather than influencing and invoking emotions resonates with the professional, cool, calm, and collected visuality of war discussed in the last chapter. However, it stands in clear contrast to the context of production discussed in Chapter 7 where we shall see that the NSC aim to influence audiences through the invocation of emotions rather than the telling of facts.

Further to this, interviewees also saw the opportunities that social media offers for creating conversations as opposed to one-way communication. One commented ‘the clue’s in the title. It’s social media... ..if you want to get information out you’ve got to get it out embedded in a conversation’ (Participant C in BA Focus Group, 2014). Other interviewees shared the view that despite the importance of creating

conversations using social media, the Army was very much still in the mind-set of just creating content and ‘pushing it out’ (Participant E in BA Focus Group, 2014). One interviewee stated that ‘it’s really a broadcast tool... ..you’re using this as a means to just announce stuff’ (BA Interview, 2015c). Another common point was a focus on the opportunities for engaging with a large audience in a quick manner, as one interviewee commented: ‘it reaches such a vast audience... ..it’s so instant, it’s so there’ (BA Interview, 2014c). Others saw social media as having a benefit on morale as ‘British soldiers on operations place a high premium on the fact that people back home are kept informed about their work... ..in terms of morale, it plays a very important role’ (Participant B in BA Focus Group, 2014).

The key points here are that just as the British Army’s use of social media doesn’t sit neatly into one military doctrine, soldiers and personnel involved in creating and disseminating social media content are aware that it incorporates different elements of media operations, information operations, psychological operations and strategic communication. In light of this, many saw social media as a tool that was used to simply inform audiences. Nonetheless, there is a tension with the notion that ‘we inform to influence’ as in doctrine, influence activities are for adversaries. Or as one civil servant commented in a conversation at an MoD sponsored conference titled *Social Influence in The Information Age*; ‘we would never try to influence the home audience’.

Moreover, interviewees were asked about the difference between the use of social media and propaganda. Again, the role of informing as opposed to influencing was key. One interviewee noted that:

We just use it for what we are trying to achieve which is getting our message out there to predominantly the UK population to explain what it is we do and why we're doing it. It's not just propaganda for the sake of propaganda. It is, "this is what we do and this is how we're spending your money, we're trying to be responsible about it" (BA Interview, 2014c).

Interviewees noted that the information on the British Army's use of social media was truthful, and that propaganda involved some level of lying (BA Interview, 2015d). According to one interviewee, propaganda 'involves a distortion of the truth in order to serve your own ends' (BA Interview, 2014a) and although media operations focus on positive aspects and 'key messages' he noted that:

I think it's fair to say they would never go so far as to lie by omission. Sometimes the focus can be quite narrow, and some might say the failure to highlight the bigger picture is in itself a distortion, although I would disagree – I would describe it as a form of PR for military operations. It can be a fine line, admittedly, but propaganda it is not (BA Interview, 2014a).

Others were similarly adamant that the use of social media was not propaganda. One interviewee said 'We wouldn't lie. We have to be straight down the middle and show that we have nothing to hide' (BA Interview, 2015a). Central here was the notion of credibility, truthfulness and transparency. One interviewee commented 'people are savvy' (BA Interview, 2014b) and another thought that people would 'see through' (BA Interview, 2014c) propaganda. He went on and noted that:

People are wise to it. People know when they are being spun a lie, and if you do that, whether you do it well or badly, your credibility goes out the window. And the one thing we pride ourselves on is our credibility (BA Interview, 2014c).

The same interviewee noted that the British Army's use of social media may 'seem a bit Ministry of Information' (BA Interview, 2014c) but commented that 'media corporations are the ones with agendas. The idea of an unbiased and impartial news editor is a romantic fiction. Social media is the place to get real information' (BA Interview, 2014c). Only one interviewee thought that the use of media operations and social media might fall into the realm of propaganda. When asked about the content he created he said 'It's about the experience as we see it. We tried to equally cover the nice bits and the tough parts. I guess some of it is propaganda' (BA Interview, 2014b). Personnel involved in the British Army's use of social media thus place an emphasis on the fact that the content they publish may at times be narrowly focused, but always reflects truthful, real experiences.

This section has drawn attention to how those involved in the British Army's production of media content and the use of social media conceptualise what they do. I have highlighted how the use of social media sits across several types of operations, and serves several purposes. Despite no interviewee suggesting that the use of social media is specifically about legitimisation, we can see that these activities – whether labelled as propaganda, strategic communication, or media operations – are bound up with the politics of legitimisation. This is because they all involve the British Army

making claims to be a legitimate institution that conducts legitimate actions. As was outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, these legitimisation claims involve the projection of narratives. These narratives are deemed by interviewees to be factual and informative, not emotive or used to influence. The previous chapter examined the narratives of the British Army's Facebook page, and to build upon this I asked interviewees what stories they were trying to tell through social media. This is the focus of the following section and it helps to illuminate how social media content was encoded with meaning by those involved in its production.

5.2.2 The British Army's narratives of legitimisation

In examining how the British Army produce social media content, the first thing that is important to note is that the creation of this content is a structured, thought out, and strategic process. Or as one interviewee put it:

We don't just send the photographers out there on a whim, we say, just like any soldier or servicemen, "you're going out to do this, your mission is... the story we're trying to tell is... the audience we're trying to reach is..." (BA Interview, 2014c).

Despite this, there is still a level of individual decision-making involved in media production. Members of Combat Camera Teams spoke about how they had a relative level of autonomy in 'finding stories' and circulating them (BA Interview, 2015a), whilst others also recognised that photographers and other soldiers in media operations were encouraged to use a certain level of creativity in producing media content (BA Interview, 2015d). The process of social media production may be

structured and outlined in doctrine, but it has its own dynamics and politics, where certain stories are driven in a top down manner and others come from the bottom up.

When asked what the main message the British Army is trying to tell through social media, one interviewee responded ‘in the most general terms I think it is “this is your military, look how professional it is.” And from that professionalism stems the integrity, the values, the standards’ (BA Interview, 2014c). Others noted that the content they create and publish is intended to say ‘We are responsible, we are transparent, we are credible, we look after our people, we give them the best kit, we give them the best opportunities, we allow them to do this, we allow them to do that’ (BA Interview, 2014d). Underlying this is a desire to attract potential recruits and this was one of the central issues driving the types of stories being used. According to one interviewee the main theme here was ‘this sense of adventure. It’s the same things it’s always been – a sense of adventure, travel, meet interesting people, do interesting stuff’ (Participant B in BA Focus Group, 2014) and this is reflected in the Facebook content that depicts operations in Afghanistan (23.69% n=372), training (11.66% n=183), and sport (8.41% n=132) analysed in Chapter 4. Here such content serves to invite the audience to invest in values such as professionalism and emotions such as joy and happiness.

Alongside this was another central theme that relates to the legitimacy of the Army as a public institution. One interviewee said ‘we’re probably trying to tell the story of why we exist and why you’re paying taxes for us to exist and why you’re getting value for your money... ...that’s probably always there underlying everything’ (Participant A in BA Focus Group, 2014). This notion of the Army being value for

money arose in most interviews, and one interviewee commented ‘at the end of the day our wages are paid for by the taxpayer and we want to show where their money is being spent’ (BA Interview, 2015a). Further to this was the theme of professionalism and combat readiness. One interviewee noted that ‘we might be slightly smaller than we used to be, but we still maintain the same levels of readiness. We’re still prepared to do this, were still prepared to fight’ (Participant C in BA Focus Group, 2014). This theme also alludes to the notion of the Army’s role in the world changing with the end of operations in Afghanistan, the changes of the Strategic Defence and Security Review and Army 2020. One interviewee commented ‘the Army is coming back to the UK... ..we have to, if you like, re-establish the army within its home community’ (Participant B in BA Focus Group, 2014).

Across the board there was an awareness of how the Army is held in high regard and is perceived to be a legitimate actor, but struggles in legitimising its actions. One interviewee said ‘the population don’t trust our politicians who employ us but they do trust the soldiers and officers within the armed forces’ (Participant A in BA Focus Group, 2014). Other interviewees reflected on this in discussion:

Participant B: the Army’s got something like a 96% approval rating in society. There’s just no appetite to use us for anything. So maybe the brand awareness stuff is good...

Participant A: But nobody wants to join.

Participant B: But nobody wants to join. Yeah, nobody wants to join or use us, so the population doesn't want us to get involved in anything around the world and nobody wants to join us but they all think we're great (BA Focus Group, 2014).

The reasons for this were also speculated on, with one interviewing suggesting that the invasion of Iraq had major implications for what people perceive to be legitimate military operations. He said:

People love our soldiers but they don't want to see the consequences of us going to war. Particularly if the war is – as people said – a false war, a war that we shouldn't have got involved in because there was no weapons of mass destruction (BA Interview, 2015d).

Concerning the major stories told on social media, interviewees commented that there were various narratives 'slipping in at different times' (BA Interview, 2014b) and that 'there's all sorts of messages going out to all sorts of audiences' (BA Interview, 2014a). This points to the need to understand the British Army's use of social media in context as different narratives will be told at different times. These narratives will often be shaped by external events. For example, stories about reservists have become important as the Army's restructuring requires a large number of reservists (BA Interview, 2015b). Further to this, the Army will produce stories to offer alternatives to negative press. For instance, one soldier noted that 'in 2008/2009 there were lots of stories about how poor our equipment was... ...So a lot of the stuff we were producing in Afghanistan was about kit' (BA Interview, 2014c), and this explains the

relatively high level of content about equipment in Afghanistan (2.74% n=43) seen during the period of analysis. Underpinning these narratives are emotions such as pride in those soldiers who serve their country and the Army that supports them. These ‘affective underpinnings’ (Solomon, 2014, p.736) make the narratives and images resonate with audiences, and understanding how audiences feel about these legitimisation claims is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

In regards to the issue of responding to negative press, one interviewee noted that:

Bad news stories are always going to be there. And that’s part of the challenge of what we do, just offering that alternative, rather than countering it... ..give the audience that choice: who do you want to believe? The professional military guy who has integrity and standards, or a journalist? Your choice (BA Interview, 2014c).

When asked about the representation of combat there was a recognition that combat might appeal to potential recruits. In discussion interviewees recalled the first person footage of an IED explosion featured in the documentary *Our War*. They said:

Participant D: There was camera footage of a guy in a contact – a young guy – and him and his mate get blown up... ..it’s literally footage of an explosion, he comes down, his mate sticks his head over the crater and goes ‘are you alright?’ to which he goes [thumbs up] ‘I am’ and he carries on... ..I think it would scare the crap out of most parents “for my son to go and do that” but at the same time...

Participant A: A lot of young men would love that.

Participant B: The warrior generation, I mean every generation's got a warrior generation, and I think that's what instils the adventure spirit. I think that's the message (BA Focus Group, 2014).

Here it is suggested that combat is central - '*the message*' (Participant B in BA Focus Group, 2014) - to the British Army's media production. This is similarly alluded to in the naming of *Combat Camera Teams*, whose content, when it is published on Facebook, rarely seems to contain footage of actual combat. Moreover, soldiers noted that creating operational content was their preferred type of content to be producing, and this has implications for conceptualising 'clean war'. Much of the literature simply refers to 'clean war' as some kind of general cultural condition driven by black-boxed states and militaries (Der Derian, 2000; Owens, 2003; Stahl, 2010). Indeed, the analysis in Chapter 4 has shown that a visuality of 'clean war' is apparent on the British Army's Facebook Page. However this interview data suggests that those involved in producing this content are in fact somewhat opposed to the notion of 'clean war' and would in fact rather see more content about combat operations being produced and circulated as this is what appeals to 'the warrior generation'. The underlying affective investment here is that of excitement; where soldiers want audiences to feel exhilarated and joyful about the thrills of combat and the use of force.

One of the central aspects to telling all of these stories was an attention to the role of the visual, where seeing and showing were perceived to be equal to experience and knowing. When asked about the purpose of using social media, one interviewee responded that ‘It’s allowing that person to see – it’s the kind of Ross Kemp effect – you know, if it wasn’t for Ross Kemp, most people wouldn’t know what Helmand looked like’ (BA Interview, 2014c). When asked further about the role of the visual, the same interviewee said:

I think the image is now all important. Especially for us, because a lot of our audience either are provoked by the image and when we go overseas, a lot of the time we’re dealing with illiterate populations anyway, and they cant read, so you have to tell your story through an image (BA Interview, 2014c).

Further to this, another interviewee said that images are ‘everything’ (BA Interview, 2014a) and another noted that ‘we use imagery a lot. Everyone uses imagery’ (BA Interview, 2014b). The reasons behind this were that ‘a picture paints a thousand words’ (BA Interview, 2014b) as well as an understanding that visual information catches the audiences attention better than written text. One commented that ‘people don’t read any more, they see, they view, but they don’t read. So image is all important’ (BA Interview, 2014c). Such sentiments clearly highlight the importance of the visual politics of legitimation, and they suggest that scholars need to account for the role of images in their study of legitimation because actors who are the subject of our research place a high level of importance on projecting narratives through visual media.

The changing dynamics of social media platforms were considered to be a driving factor in the use of visual media. When asked whether there were preferred ways of projecting narratives, one interviewee responded:

It's all visual. It's all visual... ...the people looking at this stuff [social media] they want an image to be associated with a story. It doesn't work otherwise. I try now not to post if I haven't got an image to go with it. It's got to be visual (BA Interview, 2015c).

Moreover, there was an awareness of the need to use different types of visual multimedia to engage with audiences. Interviewees involved in producing media content were trained in both photographic and video production skills, and in a live chat with the public, one Army photographer commented 'The guys are really starting to get to grips with DSLR video. It's the future' (Jones quoted in British Army Photographers, 2015), whilst another Army photographer has stated that 'I try to use the best medium to tell the story' (Robinson quoted in British Army Photographers, 2015). One interviewee recognised that a lot of the Army's activities lent themselves to the creation of visual content, he stated 'the images are unique, they are in foreign countries, they are action pictures, and a lot of the stuff we have in terms of kit, equipment, people and activities is very photogenic' (BA Interview, 2014c).

The above discussion has highlighted several key points in regards to the way that the British Army's Facebook content is produced and encoded with meaning by those involved in the processes of making and sharing this content. First, the British Army's use of social media is somewhat pragmatic, guided by doctrine, but shaped by those

involved in the process. Second, the British Army uses different types of social media pages – official, semi-official and sponsored - to do different things. Third, according to those interviewed, the main purpose of using social media is to inform audiences about who the British Army is and what it does. What unites these factors is the politics of legitimation, as all of these sites and purposes involve the claiming of legitimacy.

Fourth, interviewees recognised several opportunities offered by social media that include the immediate dissemination of information to a large audience. Moreover, this information could be multimedia in form, it could be used to maintain troop morale, and it could help to create conversations between the Army and audiences online. Fifth, the Army's use of social media was seen to rest upon the telling of truthful stories. As such, interviewees aimed to tell stories that; related to professionalism, attracted recruits, had a sense of adventure, legitimised the Army as a public institution that spends taxpayers money and implied a sense of combat readiness. In addition, interviewees were aware of the tension of having publically popular armed forces, who have conducted unpopular missions. Sixth, online content is also shaped by external events and will change depending on context, examples here include stories about reservists and equipment. This suggests a need to be context specific when researching the visual politics of legitimation. All of these narratives concern legitimation, and the importance placed on them by interviewees provides an insight into why certain narratives were prominent in the analysis of the British Army's Facebook Page in Chapter 4.

Fifth, interviewees believed that their audiences were part of an increasingly visual culture where images are perceived to be truthful depictions of reality, and because of this, the British Army has to tell their stories through images. This is important as scholars have often overlooked the role of images in legitimation processes, and it supports the theoretical argument in Chapter 3 that the politics of legitimation is increasingly reliant on visual media. Finally, underpinning the telling of stories and the use of images was an emphasis on positive emotions such as happiness, pride, joy and excitement. Manifest in the narratives and images discussed in the previous chapter, and alluded to in the interview data discussed above, it is these positive emotions towards the Army, their use of force, and their values such as democracy, law, tolerance and human rights, that provide the ‘affective underpinnings’ (Solomon, 2014, p.736) that attract audiences to invest and consent to the legitimation claims made by the British Army. The above discussion has explored the context of production, and has provided an insight into how the British Army encodes their legitimation claims, and I have explored how and why the narratives and images apparent on the British Army’s Facebook Page look the way they do. Understanding how audiences interpret and feel towards these claims is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

5.3 Decoding legitimation: Facebook comments on the British Army’s Page

Having analysed how the British Army use Facebook to claim legitimacy for the use of force, and then having explored the context of production, I now analyse how this media is interpreted by an online audience of Facebook users. I do so because there is a need to understand how people actually interpret, understand and feel about legitimation claims. This is because, as I argued in Chapter 2, the consent of an

audience is a vital component of the legitimisation process. I argue that we can begin to understand how legitimisation claims are decoded, and we can explore how consent to these claims is expressed by analysing the comments people make on the British Army's Facebook Page.

Online comments present a rich source of material to research (Kozinets, 2009; Ampofo et al, 2013; Jeffares, 2014; Kennedy and Moss, 2015), but analysing them can be somewhat of a daunting task. For example, during the three year period of analysis there were a total of 1451945 likes, 102692 comments, and 87796 shares of posts on the British Army's Facebook timeline.³⁰ If Facebook 'likes' inherently mean that someone approves of something (Soar, 2011), and are in a sense the currency of online consent, then clearly people do consent to, and approve of, the content and the legitimisation claims on the British Army's Facebook Page. Whereas simply counting likes may indicate what content is most popular, engaging with the comments made by people gives us an insight into how they actually interpret and understand the legitimisation claims presented to them. Shares may also be a source of insight, and whilst sometimes the privacy settings of Facebook users make it possible to count the amount of shares, it is often impossible to see who has shared that content and what they have said about it. With this in mind, the following section proceeds in two parts. First, I explore what content was the most popular on the British Army's Facebook Page during 2009-2012. Second, I analyse the online comments made on the gallery of images concerning combat during Operation Omid Haft.

³⁰ These figures do not include the amount of likes, comments and shares on content that was not shared on the front page of the British Army timeline, nor does it include likes, comments and shares on comments made by individuals. For example, if a gallery of eight images was shared by the British Army, the likes, comments and shares for the gallery as a set of images were counted, but the likes, comments, and shares for each photograph in that gallery have not been included.

Only six of the top one hundred most popular posts published by the British Army on Facebook (in terms of overall audience engagement: total likes, comments, and shares) are not a photograph, gallery of photographs, infographic or a video. The most popular piece of content shared by the British Army during the period of analysis is a photograph of two soldiers sat in an armoured vehicle drinking tea surrounded by Union Jack bunting. The photograph depicts Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Helmand province and is shared from the UK Forces Afghanistan Facebook Page. The British Army caption the image; ‘Members of the King’s Royal Hussars would like to share this photo and thank everyone who sent out the bunting and flags!’. It refers to soldiers enjoying ‘an impromptu Diamond Jubilee tea party in Helmand Province in Afghanistan! This is a great picture so please share’. Such an invitation to ‘share’ further demonstrates that the British Armed Forces seek to promote their own content by drawing upon online audiences to circulate their content to their own social networks. The fact that this image was the most popular post published by the British Army during this time, also suggests that military attempts to make content go viral can be successful. This also counters suggestions that social media simply opens up a critical space for those who wish to challenge military narratives (Christensen, 2008; Kaempf, 2008). Comments on this photograph suggest that audiences are emotionally invested in the vision of nationalistic pride and joy presented by the ‘Britishness’ of the image, espoused by Union Jack bunting and smiling faces over tea.³¹

³¹ Unfortunately, the UK Forces Afghanistan Facebook Page where this image was originally posted was deleted after the original round of data collection. Subsequently, when the audience analysis was conducted, the image had been removed from Facebook, as had any comments made on it. Thus, no comments from this image are directly quoted and the point about ‘Britishness’ stems from my original research notes made during data collection.

The ten most popular posts also reveal several interesting things about audience engagement.³² Four of the ten most popular posts are about operations in Afghanistan, and one is about combat. At first, this would seem quite surprising due to the lack of support for British military operations in Afghanistan where approximately half of the British population believed that British troops should not be in Afghanistan (Park et al., 2012, p.138). However, these posts about Afghanistan and combat are all framed around the personal experiences of soldiers. As one interviewee put it ‘everyone loves a soldier’ (BA Interview, 2015e), and this is supported by the national attitudes survey finding that ‘nine out of ten people declare their support for Armed Service personnel who have recently served in Iraq or Afghanistan regardless of their opinions about the actual military deployment’ (Park et al., 2012, p.138).

Figure 3: ‘Diamond Jubilee Tea Party’ on facebook.com/britisharmy (Crown Copyright 2012)



³² See Appendix 1: Figure 7 for an overview of the top 10 post popular posts published on Facebook.com/britisharmy during the period of analysis.

The popularity of this content suggests that people consent to the British Army's legitimisation claims. Moreover, legitimisation claims that are articulated through visual media are the most popular with the audience of the British Army's Facebook Page. The popularity of this content, and its subsequent political significance as legitimisation claims that are consented to, is driven by the affective investments made by the audience in the narrative identity created by the British Army (Solomon, 2014, p.737). In order to further understand how people interpret and feel about the British Army's legitimisation claims, I now analyse the comments made on the gallery of images depicting Operation Omid Haft (see *Figure 2* in Chapter 4).³³

These comments have been chosen because it would be too time and resource consuming to analyse all of the comments made on the British Army's Facebook Page. By focusing on the comments from the Omid Haft gallery, I provide an insight into how people have engaged with the images used by the British Army to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The photographs of Omid Haft appear as a frame including four images on the British Army's Facebook timeline, and once clicked on, the whole gallery of seventeen images can be viewed. As a set of images, the gallery has received 1333 likes, 91 comments, and 12 likes. The seventeen individual photographs receive a further total of 872 likes and 195 comments. These 286 comments have been analysed and coded depending on what their content was about. Codes were determined as the comments were analysed and twenty-one different codes were used. These codes were not mutually exclusive. For example, the comment 'Stay safe! Proud of you all! Sort them all out before my 18 year old son

³³ The direct URL for this gallery of images is <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150629699870615.687272.318319690614&type=1>

gets there in March' has been coded as being about 'staying safe', 'pride', 'fighting' ('sort them all out'), and 'family'.³⁴

These comments are noteworthy for several reasons. First, the most common type of comment (n=56) included statements such as 'stay safe' and/or 'good luck'. The number of comments referring to 'stay safe' suggests that people are aware of the dangers of war and conflict. One such comment, 'Stay safe guys. Your family and friends are waiting for you to return home safely. As are we all xx <3<3' is indicative of how people comment in this way. Such comments are in some sense oppositional to the visuality of clean war presented by the British Army as people are – at some level – aware of the possibility of injury and death. However, the focus here is on the dangers to British soldiers and not the population of Afghanistan. One person comments 'British armed forces, the best in the world, you do a fantastic job. Keep safe and good luck' and another comments 'Good Luck Army. Give 'em Hell'. These comments serve to position the British Army as a legitimate actor worthy of luck, in contrast with an Other, deserving of hell. They imply what Stuart Hall refers to as a dominant-hegemonic reading of the content (Hall, 2005, p.125) and they thereby suggest consent to the legitimization claims of the British Army. They also suggest that these legitimization claims are successful as they tap into the audience's emotions. Clearly, the audience feel positive emotions such as pride and love for the soldiers, and this affective investment is what gives the legitimization claims their force as the audience are invested in seeing the British Army as good and virtuous (Solomon, 2014, p.735).

³⁴ See Appendix 1: Figure 8 for an overview of the themes that arose from the online comments, arranged in the order of frequency, with the column 'Individual Sources' indicating how many different images the comments were made on.

Second, fifty three comments discussed weapons or equipment in the images. These comments are indicative of ‘technofetishism’: a fascination with weapons and equipment (Stahl, 2010). On one image of a sniper, several people commented on the weapon shown in the image. One comments ‘L96A1’ followed by a love heart emoji, and another mentions ‘L96A1. I held one of them at a recruitment/careers day. Would love to be a sniper when I sign up’ followed by a smiley face emoji. Another person responds ‘I hate people who think they can name guns from games’, and their comment receives fifteen likes. Later, amid a flurry of random comments, a discussion unfolds:

Person A: Exactly. Snipers in the real world have to take into consideration wind speed and range. You cant just respawn if you miss your shot.

Person B: It looks like an Accuracy International L115.

Person C: Is that not the L115A1 as opposed to the L96 anyway?

Person B: It’s an L115 yeah. Well its definitely not an L96. Damn COD [*Call of Duty*] noobs.

Debate about the sniper rifle, its ammunition and computer games, continues for another thirty comments. The conversation comes to a close as one person says ‘mate get back to your Xbox’. Thirteen days later, someone comments ‘Somebody gonna get hurt real bad’. Naturally, they insert a smiley face emoji at the end. Such technofetishism is worrying, and whilst studies have demonstrated that militaries and

arms companies are often guilty of fetishizing high technology (Der Derian, 2000; Owens, 2003; Stahl, 2010; Bourke, 2014), the above comments show that people themselves are proactive in producing this when they comment on these images. As Joanna Bourke notes, military technologies and weapons ‘are curiously abstracted from wider, political relations. They exist independently of the military and political apparatus behind them. They are the legendary fetishized object’ (Bourke, 2014, p.38). The excitement of combat is the underpinning affective investment here as the audience are attracted to the thrill of high tech weaponry and a pride in the professionalism and expertise of the British Army.

Third, fifty one comments explicitly referred to how the British Army was doing a ‘great job’ and that they should ‘keep it up’. The number of comments referring to the great job, or the good work done by the army, shows an acceptance of the narrative that the British Army is a force for good in the world. One person notes that ‘Our forces always extend a hand to people who need it. Well done x x’ and others relate the combat depicted as being necessary for the security of British people. One person comments ‘Superb photos, thank you so much for keeping us safe’, directly linking a military operation in Central Helmand with their own security. Again, these comments discussing weapons and supporting the work of the British Army suggest the audience consents to their legitimation claims whilst also being invested in emotions such as pride.

Fourth, seventeen comments included a reference to fighting or violence. All of the comments that refer to this are supportive of the use of force. ‘Show them who’s boss’ suggests one individual, before signing off with a winking smiley face emoji.

Another remarks ‘Reach out and touch someone!!! Send it!!!’, someone else says ‘the boys in action: kicking ass’ and others exclaim ‘give em hell’. Such jingoistic comments imply an understanding that the use of force is the only legitimate way to deal with the Taliban, thereby serving to limit the possibility of dialogue or political means beyond the use of force. These comments also demonstrate that the audience feels positive emotions towards the British Army’s use of force, and it suggests they are invested in and attracted to the narrative identity of the British Army as a force for good in the world.

Fifth, and related to this point is the observation that critical comments are rare. Only eight comments were in any way critical of the content presented. Such comments include ‘That is an awesome photo. Shame about the circumstances it was taken in!’. During the discussion of weapons referred to above, a critical voice speaks out amidst the cacophony of technofetishism: ‘Listen to you kids. Being in the Army is not fun ... Never say “I’m gonna be a sniper”. Ya gotta look at what’s going on here and now, and that’s trying to keep yaself and ya men alive’. Another person ponders, ‘Why do we have wars? Return home safe x’. Despite these critical comments, the tide of sentiment is overwhelmingly accepting of the British Army’s legitimation claims. This is further demonstrated by thirty-four comments that make reference to the quality of the images, and seventeen comments that make jokes about the content of the photographs or include an attempt at being humorous.

Sixth, several comments reflect on the Army as a career choice. Not only do former soldiers comment on these images, currently serving soldiers also post about their experiences, as do children who want to be in the Army. Nineteen people talked about

the Army as a future career option. One young boy commented ‘I’ve been wanting to go in the army since I was eight. Stay safe boys and hope your coming back soon :)’. Such comments suggest that the Army is effectively engaging with potential recruits and successfully legitimising itself as an organisation in the eyes of an online audience. Further to this, comments about joining the Army often spur on others to comment that they are wanting to join. One of the most jarring comments comes from a young boy who states ‘I’m only 10 but I’m ready for war!’.

In exploring these online comments we can see people are extremely supportive of the British Army’s legitimisation claims on Facebook and they feel emotionally invested in what such content represents. This content reaches a large audience, as there are a total of 1,451,945 likes, 102,692 comments, and 87,796 shares of posts on the British Army’s Facebook Page during the three-year period of analysis. When engaging with the British Army’s Facebook Page, people are very favourable of the British Army and their actions. When focusing on 286 comments on images of combat, we see that people offer their support and luck, and they comment on how the British Army is doing a great job. At times they even encourage the use of force and violence. Further to this, people have discussed the weaponry and equipment used by British soldiers. They have engaged in debates about what model and make the guns are, and they have made fun of those who get it wrong, deeming them as ‘COD noobs’ (people who are new to the computer game *Call of Duty*) who should get back to playing computer games. Moreover, people discussed past, present and future careers in the Army. Out of these 286 comments only eight were in any way critical of the content depicted. Together, this suggests that the Facebook audience overwhelmingly consents to the British Army’s legitimisation claims.

The success of these legitimisation claims can be understood through the affective investments that connect the audience to the narratives and images on an emotional level. These legitimisation claims are successful not just because of their content, but because of what that content represents. As I discussed in the previous chapter and in the previous section on the context of production, the British Army's legitimisation claims emphasise positive emotions – invoking pride in soldiers, excitement and happiness in playing sports, training, and adventuring around the world, as well as demonstrating care for others such as Afghan civilians who need protecting. Indeed, the comments discussed above show that audiences are emotionally invested in feeling pride for the soldiers and they are excited by the weaponry. These two positive emotions – pride and excitement – serve as the 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.736) or the forces that give these legitimisation claims their appeal (Laclau, 2005, p.110). Therefore affect is one of the fundamental mechanisms that helps us to understand how legitimisation works. It provides us with an insight into how the contexts of encoding and decoding are connected through emotions. In this case they are positive emotions, however as we shall see in Chapter 7, legitimisation claims can also work through negative emotions such as sadness.

5.4 Conclusion

Whilst it was reported in early 2015 that with the creation of the 77th brigade the British Army were 'creating a team of Facebook warriors' (MacAskill, 2015), this chapter has shown that the British Army has had a team of 'Facebook warriors' for several years now. I began by demonstrating that recent developments in military thinking led to the military use of social media being enshrined in doctrine. As Mark

Sedwill, the Prime Minister's former Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, noted in October 2011;

2009 was probably the toughest year - insurgents had deepened their grip on the south and east, which had spread north and west. There was very clearly a sense that the momentum was with them. There was a spike in British casualties, especially in Sangin, as forces sought, in very overstretched circumstances, to secure Helmand. You started to really feel the human cost we were bearing (Sedwill quoted in Ministry of Defence, 2014).

And in this context, it is perhaps no coincidence that we see the British Army taking to social media in order to claim legitimacy for itself, and its actions in Afghanistan. Whilst examining doctrine can give us an insight into the production of the British Army's narratives and images, it can only tell us so much. As one interviewee commented 'the British Army writes the best doctrine in the world but nobody ever reads it' (Participant A in BA Focus Group, 2014), therefore going beyond what is written in doctrine, and actually talking to those individuals involved in producing social media content provides further insight into the day-to-day processes that shape the content we see on Facebook.

In conducting thirteen interviews, I sought to explore how those involved in such activities conceptualise what they do. I found that the British Army's use of social media is somewhat pragmatic, guided by doctrine, but shaped by everyday activities that are not enshrined in doctrine. I also explored how those involved attempted to use social media to inform audiences about who the British Army is and what it does, and

aimed to seize several opportunities afforded by social media. Central to this was the use of narratives. These narratives concerned professionalism, attracted recruits, had a sense of adventure, legitimised the Army as a public institution that spends taxpayers money, and implied a sense of combat readiness. Further to this, interviewees were adamant that these stories had to be told visually because they believed that ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’ and that visual media were popular with audiences. These factors were important in shaping the British Army’s legitimisation claims, and by drawing upon and analysing doctrine and interviews I have provided an insight that can not be gleaned through an analysis of the content of narratives or images.

Alongside engaging with the context of production, I explored the context of reception and found that comments were overwhelmingly approving of the British Army’s legitimisation claims. The content of the British Army’s Facebook Page received a large amount of online engagement, and in looking at the most popular posts shared during the three-year period of analysis it became clear that visual media was by far the most popular type of content. Analysing the content of 286 Facebook comments served to draw attention to the ways in which people interpret and feel about the legitimisation claims presented to them. In doing so I found that people focused on the dangers to British soldiers, often wishing them luck. They suggested that the British Army was doing a good job and that their actions in Afghanistan were important to their own security in the UK. People were often concerned with discussing the weaponry and equipment, arguing about brands and models, yet never talking about what those weapons actually do. Rarely were people critical of anything they saw on screen. Here, the audience were emotionally invested in the content, feeling pride for the soldiers and excitement towards the use of force. This connection

between the context of production and reception is what gives the legitimization claims their political significance as the audience felt invested in the identity presented to them by the British Army's visual media.

As I argued in Chapter 3, understanding how people interpret and consent to legitimization claims is fundamental to understanding processes of legitimation. Whilst this chapter has explored 286 Facebook comments, there is a need for further research into how audiences consent to the British Army's legitimization claims. Rather than providing an overview of how people have responded to all of the British Army's legitimization claims, the final section of this chapter provided an exploratory and focused engagement of how audiences consented to the combat operation of Omid Haft. Overall this chapter has demonstrated the value of my theoretical approach to the visual politics of legitimation as it has illuminated several issues that cannot be understood by just focusing on the content of legitimization claims. I now turn my focus to the next case study of this thesis, that of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and how their use of citizen journalism is bound up with the visual politics of legitimation. The next case study therefore builds upon the analysis of the British Army's military media management in Chapters 4 and 5 as it provides an insight into another important aspect of mediatized war and conflict.

Chapter 6

The Syrian Opposition on Facebook

Since 2011 over 200,000 people have died in the Syrian conflict (Yourish et al., 2015). There are now over four million refugees outside of Syria (UNHCR, 2015) and a further six and a half million internally displaced people inside of Syria (UNHCR, 2015). An additional four and a half million people inside of Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance (McHugo, 2015, p.25). Alongside such high levels of violence, displacement and humanitarian crisis, the conflict has also been ‘the most socially mediated civil conflict in history’ (Lynch et al., 2014, p.5). This is because almost all of ‘what the outside world knows—or thinks it knows—about Syria’s... ..conflict has come from videos, analysis, and commentary circulated through social networks’ (Lynch et al., 2014, p.5). Due to unprecedented levels of danger to journalists and external observers, the vast amount of information about what has happened in Syria has come from eyewitnesses to, or protagonists involved in, the conflict, who have documented events on cameras or phones, and then circulated it through digital social media.

In this context, this chapter seeks to understand how the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (NSC) has used narratives and images on Facebook to claim legitimacy for its use of force. This chapter builds upon earlier chapters by providing a case study that draws out earlier theoretical arguments, whilst

also providing an empirical contribution by analysing a political actor that has been given little attention by scholars.

I begin by situating the case study in the context of the Arab uprisings and the use of citizen journalism/eyewitness media. Doing so demonstrates how the creation and circulation of eyewitness media is bound up with the politics of legitimation. I then provide an analysis of the content uploaded to the NSC's English language Facebook Page. The analysis draws upon content posted between November 2012 - when the NSC created this official Facebook Page - and March 2015, and I examine 1174 posts published on Facebook by the NSC during this time. I begin by focusing on the narratives that have been used to claim legitimacy, before analysing the 528 sets of images posted during November 2012 – March 2015. I then specifically analyse the content of images of war and conflict. Here, I examine how this content is used to claim legitimacy for the use of force by analysing the major narrative themes, whilst also exploring the constituent parts of the narratives and images published on the NSC's Facebook Page. I argue that the NSC uses digital social media to engage directly with audiences, and in doing so they claim legitimacy for the use of force by making the violence of the Syrian conflict highly visible; emphasising how the Assad regime is the cause of this violence. This contrasts with the British Army who claimed legitimacy for the use of force by making warfare look 'clean'.

6.1 Eyewitness media: The case of the NSC

As I argued in Chapter 3, the mediatization of war has led to more actors creating and disseminating media about war and conflict. In light of this, this chapter explores how the NSC, as a non-state actor, has claimed legitimacy for its use of force through

the use of narratives and images on Facebook. Before examining this, it is worth placing the NSC's use of Facebook in the context of the rise of citizen journalism and eyewitness media, as well as in the context of the recent Arab uprisings. Doing so allows me to highlight the ways in which the use of eyewitness media in the Arab uprisings is bound up with the politics of legitimation.

The development and global proliferation of readily available, low cost communication technologies such as digital cameras, smartphones and personal computers, has given rise to the phenomenon of major events being documented and reported by 'ordinary' individuals rather than professional journalists. Saddam Hussein's execution, the death of Neda Agha-Soltan in the 2009 Iranian election protests, and the 2011 protests in Egypt's Tahir Square are just three examples of events in the Middle East that were documented by individuals who we could label as eyewitnesses, bystanders or perhaps as 'citizen journalists'. Stuart Allan defines citizen journalism as:

A type of first-person reportage in which ordinary individuals temporarily adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in newsmaking, often simultaneously during a time of crisis, accident, tragedy or disaster when they happen to be present on the scene (Allan, 2013, p.9).

This is not exactly a phenomenon specific to the digital age. For example, in 1963 Abraham Zapruder filmed the assassination of President John F Kennedy. Zapruder's recording, described as 'the most iconic example of citizen journalism' (Boaden, 2008), happened half a century before the advent of Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. However, recent developments in digital new media have led to dramatic shifts in

processes of 'citizen journalism' that in turn have had a large impact on the contemporary media ecology.

The proliferation of relatively cheap, hand held digital media technologies such as smartphones has led to an increase in the number of individuals who are not only able to document events around them, but also to instantly share that information on the internet. In 2014 there were 3.6 billion unique mobile phone users and over 1.5 billion mobile broadband subscriptions (Kemp, 2014), and it is estimated that by the end of 2016, smartphones will outnumber basic models and that 80% of mobile subscriptions will include mobile broadband (Ericsson Mobility Report, 2014). The first implication of this is the increase of mobile phones with cameras capable of taking photographs and video footage. Put simply, more people are now equipped with a camera than ever before. The second implication is that these mobile phones are also connected to the Internet, so not only are more people recording what happens to them, they are also sharing it instantaneously. These developments have had massive implications for traditional news reporting, journalism and photojournalism as 'an unprecedented landslide of visual information has emerged within a relatively short time span' (Mortensen, 2014, p.3).

Stuart Allan notes that the 2004 tsunami marked the point at which citizen journalism 'found its voice... ...[and] signalled its promise to dramatically recast journalism's familiar protocols in unanticipated ways' (Allan, 2006, p.10). Virtually all of the photographs and video footage of the 2004 tsunami were made by amateurs who were in the wrong place at the wrong time (Allan, 2006, p.7). This marks a shift away from the 'helicopter journalism... ...[of] the foreign correspondent who flies into a conflict

zone for an afternoon and gets most of his information from a taxi driver' (Schechter quoted in Allan, 2006, p.6). Instead, the proliferation of digital media technologies has enabled people caught up in various global events to document and share their experiences in a bottom-up style of accidental journalism that challenges 'what counts as 'news' and who can be a 'journalist' in ways that continue to reverberate today' (Allan, 2006, p.10).

The term 'citizen journalism' is however, problematic. It subsumes and simplifies various digital media practices whilst also implying the notion of a citizen subject of a nation state (Mortensen, 2014, p.27; Al-Ghazzi, 2014, pp.436–438). This notion of citizenship is not universal, and citizenship has contested meanings in different contexts such as those of the Arab world (Al-Ghazzi, 2014, p.445). In light of this, Omar Al-Ghazzi eschews the label of citizen journalism, and instead he suggests scholars need to focus on context and pay attention to 'the local level and the multiple antagonistic, affective, and violent, aspects implicated in digital media use' (Al-Ghazzi, 2014, p.449). I am sympathetic to Al-Ghazzi's point of view, and herein the term 'eyewitness media' (Wardle et al., 2014b) is used. This term provides a better concept for understanding the context of the NSC's use of social media. Wardle et al use this phrase and they use it because:

We're interested in the phenomenon of people who capture content with phones and cameras directly. That can be photographs, videos or audio. They could be an accidental journalist, someone who happens to be at a breaking news event and instinctively pulls out their phone; or they could be a citizen

journalist who intended to go out and capture events around them (Wardle et al., 2014b).

In this sense, 'eyewitness media' is broad enough to encapsulate a variety of digital media practices whilst being specific enough to be applicable to the situated localities of various contexts; in this case, that of the NSC. Moreover, it is devoid of the problematic connotations of citizenship as in terms such as citizen witnessing or citizen journalism (Allan, 2013) and 'citizen camera witnessing' (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013). Mette Moretensen suggests that the recent proliferation of eyewitness media has 'transformed the public's access to information about conflict' (Moretensen, 2014, p.2), and if, as Stuart Allan suggests, the 2004 tsunami was when citizen journalism, or eyewitness media, found its voice, then the Arab uprisings of 2011 and the subsequent conflict in Syria were when it came of age.

6.1.1 The Arab uprisings

The conflict in Syria must be situated in the context of the wider uprisings in the Middle East, which began on 17 December 2010 when Mohammed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian fruit seller, set himself on fire in protest of the Tunisian government. In doing so, 'he lit a flame that soon burned in capitals and cities across much of the Arab world' (Cottle, 2011, p.648). Within a month of Bouazizi's self-immolation in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, protests had broken out in almost every Arab country, and within the space of a year, three Arab leaders had fallen from power (Lynch, 2013, p.7). These Arab uprisings are characterised by 'an exceptionally rapid, intense, and nearly simultaneous explosion of popular protest across an Arab world united by a shared transnational media and bound by a common identity' (Lynch, 2013, p.9).

Here, digital social media and eyewitness images have been central to how protests, revolutions, and the use of force have been legitimated.

According to Marc Lynch, the uprisings began with ‘new information and communication technologies’ (2013, p.10) that served three roles. First, they challenged the authoritarian media systems of Arab regimes that had previously controlled the flow of ideas and news (Lynch, 2013, p.11). Second, they gave contemporary activists new expectations, skills and abilities (Lynch, 2013, p.11). Third, they served to unify the Arab political space by ‘bringing together all regional issues into a common narrative of a shared fate and struggle’ (Lynch, 2013, p.11). This is not to overstate the role of digital social media in a reductive way that labels complex political struggles as simply Twitter, Facebook or YouTube Revolutions. Rather, it is to recognise that new media had a structural impact on political communication in the Arab world (Lynch, 2013, p.11) and that this new media ecology has

played an integral and multifaceted part in building and mobilizing support, coordinating and defining the protests within different Arab societies and transnationalizing them across the Middle East, North Africa and to the wider world (Cottle, 2011, p.658).

Simon Cottle has suggested that one of the most important functions of media in the Arab uprisings has been the ways in which actors have used it to seek international recognition and legitimation where ‘the performative and dramaturgical nature of protests is in many respects premised upon this underlying political need to win wider

recognition, legitimacy and support' (2011, p.654). Unfortunately, due to the transition from peaceful protests to civil war in Syria, we are no longer looking at how actors seek to legitimate protests in Syria. Instead we have to explore how they seek to legitimate the use of force. Nonetheless, the role of digital eyewitness media in legitimation processes in Syria does indeed remain 'fertile ground for further research' (Cottle, 2011, p.654). This chapter contributes to these ongoing discussions about the role of eyewitness media in Syria by exploring how the NSC has used digital social media to claim legitimacy for the use of force.

6.1.2 Sighting Syria

In the context of the Arab uprisings, peaceful protests against Syria's Assad regime first took place in Damascus in February 2011. A 'day of rage', planned on Facebook and Twitter was scheduled to take place on 4 February 2011. However, nothing of note took place until 5 February when a few hundred protestors assembled in al-Hasakah (Lister, 2015, p.12). Further relatively small protests took place throughout February, yet they failed to gain sizeable numbers (Hokayem, 2013, p.42). The catalyst for the Syrian revolution came on 6 March in the city of Deraa, when fifteen young boys, aged between ten and fifteen, spray painted '*al-Shaab yureed eskaat al-nizaam*' (the people want to topple the regime) on their school wall (Lister, 2015, p.12). This slogan, adopted by activists across the Arab world, 'echoed from Tunis and Cairo to San'a and Tripoli' (McHugo, 2015, p.221) and led to the boys being arrested, taken to Damascus for interrogation, and subsequently tortured (McHugo, 2015, p.221). Initial protests from the boy's families gained traction as the Assad regime justified their arrest and torture. On 15 March, protestors organised through a Facebook Page titled 'The Syrian Revolution against Bashar al-Assad 2011' and

rallied together several hundred people in Damascus, who demanded the release of the boys, an end to corruption, and democratic reform in Syria (Lister, 2015, p.14). A similar protest in Deraa on 18 March saw the regime opening fire on protestors for the first time, and 'in an instant, the Syrian revolution was born' (Lister, 2015, p.15).

As protests spread, the regime attempted to clamp down with violence, and they also utilised media to denounce and delegitimise the protestors. Syrian media has traditionally been controlled by the Assad regime, and prior to the revolution, repressive state media practices included limited internet access, blocked access to social media platforms, censorship, alongside the monitoring of bloggers who faced intimidation and torture (Khamis et al., 2012, p.9). In the early months of the Syrian uprising these factors limited the ability of protestors to collaborate, develop digital social media expertise, plan, prepare and manage protests against the regime (Khamis et al., 2012, p.9). Furthermore, the regime attempted to delegitimise the uprising in its early days by using state media to disseminate a narrative that the uprisings were a conspiracy driven by external actors and implemented by criminal gangs (Hokayem, 2013, p.51).

In June 2012, Bashar al-Assad acknowledged that Syria was in a 'state of war' (Assad quoted in Hokayem, 2013, p.52). Here, the regime repeated 'ad nauseum its mantra that it was fighting extremist Islamist terrorism' (McHugo, 2015, p.226) that threatened the Alawite and Christian minorities of the Syrian state (Hokayem, 2013, p.54). They also attempted to alienate secular and minority elements of the opposition (McHugo, 2015, p.226). Tragically, this narrative was somewhat self fulfilling, as the Assad regime had previously played a role in facilitating the rise of radical Islamist

groups during the American occupation of Iraq (Lister, 2015, p.47), and in the eyes of some, the regime's narrative 'has been vindicated by the radicalisation of the opposition and the descent of the country into civil war' (Hokayem, 2013, p.63).

Obaida Fares has provided further insight into the media strategies of the Assad regime, and he suggests that state-run media in Syria reported false information, denied that demonstrations and protests were taking place, and it also questioned the credibility of other news sources such as the BBC and Al Jazeera (Fares, 2014, p.190). Further to this, they denounced external actors who were critical of the regime and they broadcast footage of pro-regime demonstrations, songs that glorified Bashar Assad, as well as interviews with 'ordinary' Syrian passers-by who were supportive of Assad (often they mysteriously appeared in multiple such interviews across Syria) (Fares, 2014, pp.190–191).

Whilst the Assad regime has sought to use traditional forms of state media - such as the SANA news agency and the Addounia television station - to claim legitimacy for its use of force, the opposition has been reliant on using digital media technologies. According to the journalist Stephen Starr, who, at the time of the revolution was working for the Syrian state media, 'for protestors, activists and eye-witnesses a camera phone and access to websites such as YouTube were vital' (Starr, 2012, p.55). Indeed, such eyewitness media was central to the opposition. At first, Facebook Pages were important for organising demonstrations, or 'days of rage' every Friday, where images of previous protests would be used to emphasise that people were protesting (Fares, 2014, p.192). Then, as the regime's violent response to the protests intensified, eyewitness media became central in disseminating news 'about beatings and killings

of protestors, as well as other military activities and operations around the country' (Starr, 2012, p.62). This eyewitness media was also utilised by mainstream global media outlets as the Syrian Ministry of Information stopped issuing visas to foreign journalists (Starr, 2012, p.65) and banned those already in the country from documenting the uprisings (Khamis et al., 2012, p.20).

Syria quickly became 'the world's most dangerous country for journalists' (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p.3), and in response to this the Syrian diaspora played a pivotal role in providing digital media equipment and training to individuals inside of Syria's borders (Khamis et al., 2012, p.10). Spurred on by the repression of the Syrian state, and armed with smartphones and social media accounts, protestors soon found themselves partaking in the production and circulation of eyewitness media. As Omar Alassad, a freelance Syrian journalist, has put it:

Once the Syrian people found themselves trapped in the dark under a media blackout imposed by the regime, what can only be described as a "popular collision" took place. Armed with first-hand experience of bloodshed on their streets, and seeing their reality yet again not reflected in the official propaganda, the people collided with the country's long history of censorship and disinformation... ...The real story of the Syrian revolution began the moment the country citizens became citizen-journalists (2014, p.113).

These factors are important for several reasons. First, the lack of - and hazards for - journalists in Syria led to the Syrian conflict being marked by 'patterns of media reliance on activist-generated online content' (Lynch et al, 2014, p.5). Second, the

importance of eyewitness media has been dependent on gatekeepers such as the Syrian diaspora. Such groups have enabled people in Syria to document events and share them to a global audience (Khamis et al., 2012), they have also interpreted eyewitness media (Sienkiewicz, 2014) and they have promoted this content to media outlets (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013). This suggests that visual eyewitness media has been central to the Syrian opposition's legitimisation claims. In the face of a well resourced, professional, regime backed Syrian media, the opposition has utilised visual media produced by eyewitnesses and disseminated this through digital social media platforms. This reflects how revolutionaries and activists across the Arab world used such technologies during uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (Lynch, 2013, p.241). In Syria, eyewitness media has been even more important than elsewhere due to the aforementioned dangers posed to journalists. Due to the widespread proliferation of eyewitness media there is such a vast amount of information from Syria circulating online that some commentators have spoken of 'the Syrian data glut' (Powers and O'Loughlin, 2015, p.3) because of 'unprecedented access to events on the ground, oftentimes in close to real-time' (Powers and O'Loughlin, 2015, p.3).

Due to this sheer volume of eyewitness media from the Syrian conflict, I now focus on one actor - the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces - in order to provide a focused analysis of how one Syrian opposition group has claimed legitimacy for the use of force. Speaking of a singular Syrian opposition is problematic, seeing as though Syria's opposition has involved many different groups from the start of the revolution. Characterised from the outset as 'a mostly disorganised group with limited capabilities' (Starr, 2012, p.x), the Syrian opposition is currently made up of over 200 armed opposition groups (Cafarella and Casagrande,

2015, pp.5–7). The NSC has therefore been chosen, as firstly, it is the de facto government body responsible for overseeing the majority of Syrian opposition groups, and secondly it produces and circulates a large amount of content in English on digital social media platforms.

Furthermore, whilst there has been an outpouring of media attention and scholarly research into the ISIS - interestingly characterised by Barack Obama as ‘a bunch of killers with good social media’ (Obama quoted in Fantz, 2015) - and their use of imagery on social media (Lister, 2015; Zelin, 2015), there has been little, if any, attention paid to other opposition groups, especially the NSC. There has been some research on images and the Syrian opposition broadly defined, however this research has been rather brief, and extremely general in its analysis of visual media (Stanton, 2012; Rich and Shamseddine, 2014; Bank, 2014). Therefore, by analysing the NSC’s use of Facebook I address a gap in the literature and contribute to discussions about the Syrian conflict by engaging with an actor who has not been the focus of scholarly research. Emile Hokayem has noted that within a few months of the beginning of the revolution, Syria transformed from ‘a significant regional player into an arena in which a multitude of local and foreign players compete’ (2013, p.11), and one important player is the NSC. I now explore how they have claimed legitimacy for the use of force through social media by analysing the content they published on their official English language Facebook Page.

6.2 The NSC on Facebook 2012-2015

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces has been described as ‘the main body of Syria’s perpetually-splintering exile opposition’

(Lund, 2014). Formed in November 2012, it brought together a variety of opposition groups ‘committed to a democratic, inclusive, and pluralistic Syria’ (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2015b).³⁵ Created in Doha, at a meeting organised by the Qatari government, the NSC has been recognised as the ‘sole legitimate representative’ (William Hauge quoted in Black, 2012) of the Syrian people by 120 states and organizations, including the UK, US, the EU, and the Arab League (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2015b). As such, the NSC was set up due to demand from ‘the US and the Gulf states, which have sidelined the original political body, the Syrian National Council, and urged that a broader and more representative group be established’ (Chulov, 2012). The NSC therefore incorporates more opposition groups, and serves to be more inclusive than the previously dominant Syrian National Council, which is now itself a part of the NSC (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

As the executive governing body of the Syrian opposition, the NSC is committed to ‘a Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future’ (UN Action Group For Syria, 2012) as outlined in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The NSC is committed to a political solution for the Syrian conflict and incorporates the interim government. Further to this, the NSC is responsible for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which operates ‘under the civilian

³⁵ These groups include ‘the Supreme Military Council representing the Free Syrian Army, Syrian National Council, the Democratic Bloc, the Revolutionary Movement, Syrian Revolution General Commission, Local Coordination Committees of Syria, and the Local Administrative Councils of Syria’ (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2015b)

authority of the Coalition through the Ministry of Defense' (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2015a).

In order to provide a focused analysis, this chapter explores how the NSC have used one digital media platform – Facebook – from the date they created an English language Page in November 2012 to the start of March 2015. This time and platform has been selected for several reasons. It provides for a large but manageable quantity of data - similar in size to that of the British Army case study - to be collected and analysed. This section includes an analysis of 1174 posts published on Facebook by the NSC between November 2012 and March 2015. I then examine the 528 sets of images (videos, individual photographs, galleries of photographs), before then focusing on the 279 sets of images of war and conflict shared during this time. Facebook has been selected as the medium of interest as it is the world's most popular social media platform and the NSC's official English language Facebook page is their most popular English language social media site. The Arabic language NSC Facebook page is more popular in terms of total overall followers (216,650 as opposed to the 49,441 on the English language SOC page³⁶), however the English language page has been chosen due to the difficulties of researching content in Arabic without sufficient language skills. Beyond this drawback, the English language Page is still significant due to how it is directed towards a global audience. Moreover, Facebook facilitates the publishing of many types of online content (text, image, audio) and one can publically see how audiences have engaged with this content.

³⁶ Figures as of April 13th 2015.

On 11 November 2012 the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces created an English language Facebook Page that represents the coalition in an official capacity.³⁷ Despite joining at this time, they do not publish any content until 6 March 2013, and over the next two years they publish 1174 posts. These posts consist of links to the official NSC website, links to the NSC's other social media pages (specifically Twitter), press releases and statements, as well as photographs, videos and infographics. The NSC also published links to a variety of other media sources, government and NGO websites.

The most common type of post published during this three-year period are posts that consist of individual photographs (36.97% n=434).³⁸ The second and third most common types of content are statements consisting of text (20.87% n=245), and links to traditional media outlets, such as regional and international media outlets (15.84% n=186), respectively. As over 36% (n=434) of the content published by the NSC includes a photograph it is clear that images are important to the NSC and therefore need to be taken into account when attempting to make sense of how they claim legitimacy for the use of force. Images also become increasingly important to the NSC's use of Facebook over the course of time. During their first month of publishing content on Facebook (March 2013) they post 41 items of content, of which eight are photographs, one is a cartoon, and one is an infographic. During February 2015 (the last month analysis) the NSC post 88 items of content, of which 78 are photographs, one is a video, and one is an infographic. Only eight posts made during this month contain no visual element. Not only does the NSC become increasingly prolific in

³⁷ See <https://www.facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en>

³⁸ See Appendix 2: Figure 1 for an overview of the type of content published on *Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en*

posting content on its Facebook page - more than doubling the amount of posts made - the majority of its most recent Facebook content has a fundamentally visual element. Therefore, if we are to understand how the NSC claim legitimacy for the use of force, we need to look at how they use images, not just narratives.

Throughout the period of analysis, the NSC publish 528 sets of images on their Facebook Page. These consist of photographs, infographics, galleries of photographs, cartoons, and videos. As noted above, the most frequent type of visual media that they publish are photographs. The second most common visual media are infographics: images that combine photographs with visualisations of data such as graphs or charts. In addition to this there are a further 78 photographs in the seventeen galleries shared. The videos published range in length from 31 seconds to 7 minutes and 29 seconds. In total the running time of the videos published during the period of analysis is 29 minutes and 59 seconds.

Figure 4: Type of image set on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Type of Image	Quantity of posts (total 528)	Percentage of all content (total 44.97%)
Photograph	434	36.97%
Video	9	0.77%
Cartoon	9	0.77%
Gallery	17	1.45%
Infographic	59	5.03%

This large quantity of visual media supports the theoretical position articulated in Chapter 3 that the politics of legitimation are visual, and in need of attention if we are to make sense of contemporary processes of legitimation. Whilst the role of narrative

is fundamental here, a cursory glance at the data makes it clear that the NSC projects narratives through images, and understanding the role of these images requires going beyond the narrative approaches to legitimation that we see in much of the literature (Beetham, 1991; Coicaud, 2002; Reus-Smit, 2007; Krebs, 2015).

Drawing from the theoretical framework and an approach to the visual politics of legitimation as outlined in Chapter 3, the next section of this chapter examines the narratives of the NSC's Facebook Page, before then analysing the images published there. The posts published by the NSC cover a wide variety of topics, and as with the material in the previous case study, the content published on Facebook by the NSC has been coded according to its main narrative theme. Narratives configure events into one meaningful whole and this whole is reducible to a theme (Ricoeur, 1984, p.67), and therefore exploring the narrativisation of events through a thematic analysis draws attention to the central aspects of emplotment that are used to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The next section begins by exploring these themes in order to make sense of the NSC's legitimation claims.

6.3 The narratives of the NSC on Facebook

During the three-year period of analysis 46.80% (n=549) of the content posted on Facebook by the NSC is explicitly about the use of force and suffering caused by armed violence. This includes many posts that have been coded with different individual themes pertaining to this broader theme. Of the content concerning the violence of war and the use of force, the most prominent individual narrative theme refers to regime atrocities and war crimes (21.31% n=250) where the NSC explicitly discuss various massacres and the human rights abuses of the Assad regime. There are

80 posts about Syrian refugees (6.82%), focusing on how Syrians have fled to neighbouring Jordan and Turkey, as well as being internally displaced inside of Syria. This focus on the victims of war stands in clear divergence to the visuality of war presented by the British Army, where conflict and the use of force was hardly mentioned.

A further 71 posts concern the humanitarian crisis in Syria where Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance (6.05%). 63 posts focus on the use of chemical weapons, blaming the Assad regime for their use (5.37%). There are 18 posts about FSA achievements that laud the FSA's military victories (1.53%). Interestingly, there are 16 posts concerning the threat of ISIS and the Assad regime as two sides of the same coin, often suggesting that the Assad regime is directly responsible for the rise and threat of ISIS (1.36%). Only one post mentions the threat of ISIS without mentioning the Assad regime (0.09%). Beyond this, 13 posts are focused on the arming of rebel forces by external actors such as the US and Qatar (1.11%). The themes of violence against women and the destruction of landmarks arise in 12 posts each (1.02%), whilst other narratives such as the death and remembrance of FSA fighters appear less frequently.³⁹

If we are interested in how the NSC claims legitimacy for the use of force then it is this content relating to war, the use of force and suffering that is the main focus of interest. However, the other content published is also relevant as it relates to legitimacy in a broader sense. With regard to this, during the analysis the theme of war and the use of force was the most prominent theme of all the content (46.80%

³⁹ See Appendix 2: Figure 2 for a breakdown of the main narrative theme of all content published on Facebook by the NSC.

n=549), and several other major, overarching themes were identified. The second major theme of interest concerned content that related to international support (13.64% n=160), where there was an emphasis on US support for the NSC (5.29% n=62), but the support of the UN and other regional and international actors were also mentioned alongside that of the Arab League and several celebrities.

A third theme consisted of content that explicitly requested action from the international community or general public (10.14% n=119). Here, the most prominent narrative themes included demands to the international community (3.32% n=39), direct requests to the public for help (3.07% n=36) and requests to visit or share content from the NSC's other social media pages (2.13% n=25). The fourth theme involved content that referred to hope for the revolution and future (7.25% n=85), where narratives concerned hopes of victory and peace (2.73% n=32), focused on demonstrations and the revolution (2.05% n=24) as well as other less frequent posts such as Islamic, Christian and Kurdish celebrations, the Syrian nonviolence movement and historical events such as Syrian independence. The fifth and final major theme suggested that the NSC is a capable and authoritative political actor (22.17% n=260). This theme involved narratives that focused on a political solution to the conflict (2.64% n=31), discussed the leadership of the NSC (2.13% n=25), alongside mentions of NSC appearances in the media (2.05% n=24). Many other narratives that occurred infrequently also fall into this theme and they include the NSC's condemnation of terrorist attacks in Russia and the USA, condemning Russia and Iran's support of the Assad regime, as well as denying that rebels are jihadists, condemning FSA atrocities, and talking about the training of the FSA who are said to uphold the laws of armed combat.

The significance of these themes is further elaborated in the next section where I discuss their relation to visual media. For now, the central points here are that first, the NSC claim legitimacy for the use of force by sharing content that concerns the violence and suffering caused by the Assad regime. Second, this type of legitimacy claim makes up almost half of what they publish on their Facebook Page, however the other content published is also important as it serves to claim legitimacy by depicting the NSC as a capable and authoritative actor that is leading a revolution that has, and also requires, support from the international community and general public. These narratives serve to attract the consent of audiences by making them feel upset and outraged at the actions of the Assad regime, whilst also making them feel assured that the NSC is capable of bringing about change in Syria. The emphasis on negative emotions such as sadness stands in opposition to how the British Army claimed legitimacy for the use of force, and it suggests that there is no singular way of claiming legitimacy for the use of force in the digital age. Third, much of this content is visual, consisting of photographs, infographics, videos and cartoons. Therefore, if we are to understand how the NSC uses social media to claim legitimacy for the use of force, we need to pay attention to the role of images and visuality.

6.4 The images of the NSC on Facebook

Over 44% (n=528) of what the NSC published on Facebook had a central visual element in that it was either a photograph, an infographic, a gallery of photographs, a cartoon or a video. I now turn to an analysis of these posts in order to explore how the NSC used images to claim legitimacy for the use of force. As with all of the content analysed, this visual content was coded according to the central narrative theme of the

image as well as the caption and any accompanying text.⁴⁰ Out of 528 visual posts, 53.03% (n=280) is related to war and conflict, and this is the most common theme of images on the NSC's Facebook page. This emphasis of conflict is oppositional to the British Army's focus on non-combat activities and their visuality of clean war. By emphasising the effects of Assad's use of force, the NSC are delegitimising the Assad regime and in turn attempting to legitimate themselves and their own use of force. The second most common theme is that of the NSC as a capable political actor, where 103 of the images posted (19.51%) concern this. Further to this, images support the other broad themes identified above. 59 images (11.17%) are related to international support, 32 images (6.06%) are used to request action from the international community and the general public, and 54 images (10.23%) are about hope for the revolution and future. In order to provide a focused analysis, and to understand how the NSC claim legitimacy for their use of force, I now explore the images of war and conflict.

These 280 sets of images of war and conflict consist of 198 photographs, 20 cover photographs, 43 infographics, 8 videos, 6 galleries of photographs (containing 26 photographs) and 5 cartoons. The narrative themes of these images are below in *Figure 5*. These images are explicitly about war and conflict due to how they either explicitly depict war, violence, death, injury or suffering, or how their captions make clear reference to these things. In line with the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 3, the visual content of these posts has been analysed in three ways; firstly by analysing who is in the image (agents), secondly, by the activity that is being done (acts, agency, purpose), and thirdly by what equipment is in the image (scene).

⁴⁰ See Appendix 2: Figure 3 for a breakdown of the main narrative theme of all visual content published on Facebook by the NSC.

Figure 5: Main narrative theme of visual content depicting war and conflict published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Narrative Theme	Quantity of Posts	Prominence as percentage of all visual content
Regime War Crimes	137	25.95%
Syrian Refugees	52	9.85%
Humanitarian Crisis in Syria	35	6.63%
Chemical Weapons	17	3.22%
FSA Achievements	12	2.27%
Threat of ISIS and Regime	8	1.52%
Violence Against Women	8	1.52%
Destruction of Landmarks	4	0.76%
Homs Prison Hunger Strike	3	0.57%
Arming of Rebels	2	0.38%
Remembrance of FSA soldiers	2	0.38%

The majority of the images feature unarmed Syrian adults (31% n=86) or Syrian children (34% n=92).⁴¹ 6% of the images feature NSC politicians (n=16), 3% contain Free Syrian Army soldiers (n=9) and 2% of the images show foreign politicians (n=6). Bashar Assad appears in 7% of the images of war (n=18) and 7% of the images show dead Syrian adults or children (n=20). Over 76 different activities were identified as taking place in these images. The most common activities all contributed to a visuality of suffering, and these images included people screaming and crying (n=13), people carrying belongings (n=12), walking on rubble (n=11), and carrying children (n=10). These images suggest a sense of suffering, loss and upheaval, whereas other common activities showed death explicitly. In these images people were seen carrying dead children (n=9), people were at funerals or mourning (n=8),

⁴¹ See Appendix 2: Figure 4 for a breakdown of people featured in images of war and conflict. Appendix 2: Figure 5 provides an overview of the activities depicted in images of war and conflict, and Appendix 2: Figure 6 outlines the equipment featured in images of war and conflict published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en

adults were lying dead (n=8) and children were are also shown lying dead on the ground (n=7). Another common activity in these images of war featured politicians or people talking at press conferences (n=13). The equipment in these images is also diverse, with 56 different ‘things’ featuring in the images of war and conflict. The most common objects in these images were rubble and damaged buildings (n=45), refugee camp tents (n=21), and medical equipment (n=10). By drawing upon the framework set out earlier I now explore the visual politics of legitimation apparent in this content on the NSC’s Facebook Page, and I assess the political significance of the content discussed above.

6.5 The visual politics of legitimation on the NSC’s Facebook Page

The above discussion has outlined the important narrative themes that are depicted through linguistic and visual media on the NSC’s Facebook Page. I also analysed the content of images concerning war and conflict on the NSC’s Facebook page, drawing attention to the people, activities, and equipment in these images. I now explore the significance of this by drawing upon the framework set out in Chapter 3 that focuses on the content of images in regards to:

1. Acts, scenes, characters, agency, purpose.
2. Technical aspects such as framing (relating to partiality and selectivity), depth of field, lighting and colour, as well as camera positioning.
3. Emplotment and the structure of the relationship between parts.
4. Emplotment and implied causality.

The first point of interest is that the use of force is highly visible in the NSC's legitimization claims. However, rarely is this use of force shown as being perpetrated by the armed groups aligned to the NSC; only 12 images relate to the FSA using weapons or being supplied arms. Instead, the high levels of violence and destruction that we do see in these images are attributed to the Assad regime. This shows that the NSC claim legitimacy for the use of force by making the extreme level of force and violence being used against the Syrian population highly visible. Such images constitute a visuality focused on 'the pain of others' (Sontag, 2004). They 'communicate meanings and construct collective feelings about distant disaster' (Hutchison, 2014, p.6), and by focusing so heavily on violence they 'show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired' (Sontag, 2004, p.64). Susan Sontag dedicates a whole book to discussing the ethics of these images, problematizing how they have often been used in the media, but she concludes by suggesting that we should:

Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget (2004, p.102).

The visuality of suffering, so prominently apparent on the NSC's Facebook Page, serves to claim legitimacy for the NSC by depicting the situation in Syria as awful and abhorrent, where the Assad regime is responsible for causing such high levels of

suffering. By attempting to show the world that the Assad regime has been capable of such violence, the NSC claim legitimacy for their own use of force in response.

Engaging with the representation of acts, scenes, agents, agency, and purpose in the content of these images of war and conflict, reveals further dynamics of the visual politics of legitimation. In regards to the people in the images – the agents or characters – the most frequent subjects are Syrian adults and children who are the focus of 65% (n=178) of the images. These images, where people are often seen to be in pain or severely upset, make the victims of armed violence in Syria highly visible. Further to this, there are 20 images of dead Syrian adults and children posted by the NSC during the period of analysis. The images draw upon the emotions of the audience and reflect the ways in which humanitarian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have often used photographs.

Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss suggest that graphic images have been vital in helping humanitarian NGOs gain money and support, and they note that ‘the more graphic the image and the more it screams “innocent victim,” the more effective it will be in mobilizing compassion, action, and money’ (Barnett and Weiss, 2013, p.119). They suggest that NGO’s think that ‘we need horror stories... ..Obscenity works – mobilizing action depends on the exploitation of the suffering of others’ (Barnett and Weiss, 2013, p.119). Such representations are, however, problematic as they imply that the people represented are too weak to support or help themselves, and they also imply that local capacities to help are insufficient (Barnett and Weiss, 2013, p.120). Nonetheless, we can see that the NSC use such images to claim legitimacy for themselves as an institution that has, and requires further international

support so that it can address this suffering through the use of force against the Assad regime.

Another important point in regards to the agents featured in these images of war is that there are a relatively large amount of images of Bashar al-Assad posted by the NSC (n=18). These images often juxtapose a photograph of Assad with a photograph of destroyed buildings or Syrians suffering, and they thus serve to personify the enemy and the perpetrators of the violence. Interestingly, there are twice as many photos of Assad as there are of FSA soldiers (n=9). This lack of attention to FSA soldiers directs the focus away from the associated armed groups of the NSC who are responsible for using force against Assad, and instead places attention on the victims of Assad's violence. It also plays upon the cult of personality that has been so important to the Assad regime (Omareen, 2014). Zaher Omareen has written of the ubiquitous nature of images of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad in Syria prior to the revolution. After spending a night in a hotel owned by the Syrian Army, Omareen noted that 'what is unbearable is the presence of a photograph of the eternal leader above the bed in all the rooms. It is not even possible to dream without the regime's surveillance' (2014, p.86). Accordingly, images of the Assad family have been described as 'the single symbol of the regime' (Omareen, 2014, p.98), and the NSC's use of them serves to appropriate this symbol and reframe it as that of an illegitimate, murderous actor.

The other people depicted in these images are involved in a wide variety of activities. Most frequently, people can be seen screaming and crying (n=13), and the same number of images depict NSC politicians talking at press conferences (n=13). On the

one hand, the images that feature politicians speaking in conference venues serve to depict the NSC as a legitimate and capable political actor whilst also, to a certain extent, sanitising the NSC's use of armed force. This is, however, the exception rather than the rule when it comes to activities depicted in the images of war and conflict, as other frequent activities include people carrying belongings (n=12), walking on rubble (n=11), and carrying children (n=10). Together, the visual representation of these activities suggests an attempt to be 'conducive to the collective acknowledgment of, and reckoning with, trauma' (Hutchison, 2014, p.6); a trauma that involves upheaval and displacement. Furthermore, this trauma inflicted on the Syrian population involves the loss of life, and several images depict death, with some showing people carrying dead children (n=9), and others showing people at funerals or mourning (n=8). There are also eight images of adults lying dead and seven images of children also lying dead on the ground. This suggests an overwhelmingly graphic representation of war that is intended to invoke emotions in the viewer. As such it serves to emphasise the desperation of the Syrian people and their need for the NSC to use force in response to the Assad regime.

This graphic representation of war, and the focus on suffering and pain is furthered by the equipment and settings of the images. For example, 28.66% (n=45) of the images feature rubble and damaged, or demolished buildings, and a further 2.55% (n=4) images show rubble and burning buildings. Another frequent feature of the images of war and conflict are tents and refugee camps, as 13.38% (n=21) images feature these. There are also five images of burnt out cars and vehicles. These images frame Syria as a place devastated by conflict where cities are literally crumbling to rubble. Other items appear relatively frequently; for example, medical equipment such as stretchers,

oxygen masks and bandages can be seen in ten images. This makes the human costs of conflict explicit, and shows that people in Syria require medical care and attention due to armed violence. Weapons such as AK-47's appear in the arms of FSA soldiers in seven images, and the old flag of the Syrian Republic under the French mandate, that has since been adopted by the NSC and other groups as the official flag of the Syrian opposition, appears in eight images. These representations serve to demonstrate that the NSC is responsible for an armed, national struggle against the Assad regime.

Stylistically, the images are generally somewhat amateur. Most have not been taken by professional photographers, and instead have been produced by eyewitnesses with no photographic or journalistic training. This has been the case for many images during the Syrian revolution and conflict where content 'may not possess a high degree of artistic merit... ...[but they have been produced] under super-fast, high-pressure conditions' (Omareen, 2014, p.99). Technical aspects such as framing, depth of field and focus, lighting, colour, and camera positioning, are varied and inconsistent throughout the NSC's use of Facebook. Such images are symptomatic of the citizen journalist 'style' which typically involves 'inconsistent framing, handheld cameras and pixilation... ...[where it is] difficult to trace the specific characteristics of origin, authorship and authenticity' (Maier-Rothe et al., 2014, p.75). This style of activist imagery or 'art of resistance' (Tripp, 2013, p.260) has been prominent in uprisings across the Middle East and such images have become 'the new aesthetic of authenticity' (Khatib, 2012, p.143). Therefore, these images can be seen to claim legitimacy as they invoke a notion that what is depicted has happened, and they reflect contemporary conventions of eyewitness media that reflect the realism of news

reportage. In addition to this, the use of infographics and other images that clearly require digital editing (such as those that superimpose Assad over an image of destruction) demonstrate a certain level of skill and professionalism.

The visual framing of war focused on suffering contrasts with the visuality of clean war discussed in Chapter 4. Whereas the British Army focused on their own soldiers, the NSC make the victims of war and conflict in Syria highly visible, and as they do so they also show how the Assad regime - personified by images of Bashar al-Assad - is the cause of this suffering. The people in these images are seen crying, screaming, and carrying children through scenes depicting rubble, destroyed buildings and refugee camps. As such these images serve to claim legitimacy for the NSC by emphasising how the Assad regime does not conform to legal rules and commits war crimes. In doing so, these images resonate with the shared belief that state actors have a responsibility to protect their own citizens. Consent is sought by the images of Syrians who purportedly support the NSC, an institution that also has international support. The high visibility of victims and the Assad regime demonstrate that the NSC claim legitimacy for their use of force by emphasising *the illegitimacy of their enemy and their actions*. Rarely do we see FSA soldiers or other combatants associated with the NSC. Whereas the British Army claimed legitimacy for the use of force by focusing on the soldiers and the equipment used to enact force, the NSC claim legitimacy for themselves and their own use of force by focusing on the negative effects of force perpetrated by the Assad regime.

Although focusing on the broad aspects of this content provides an insight into the important components of the NSC's legitimisation claims, engaging in a more focused

way with a singular set of images provides for further insight into the ways in which the NSC used visual media to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The central aspects of this visual representation involve the injury, suffering and death of Syrian adults and children, the destruction of Syrian cities; all of which has been caused by the Syrian regime, led by and visually personified by Bashar al-Assad. A sustained engagement with all 280 of the NSC's images of war and conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, I now engage with one set of images in order to provide a focused understanding of the visual politics of legitimation in this case.

The image analysed here depicts the chemical weapon attack that occurred on 21 August 2013 in the opposition-controlled area of Ghouta, Damascus. In these attacks between 281-1300 people were killed (BBC, 2013) and despite the denial of the Assad regime, a UN report insinuates that the chemical weapons were launched from an army base held by Assad's republican guard (Lyons, 2013). These attacks marked a crossing of Barack Obama's 'red line' (Hersh, 2014) and led to the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2118 ordering the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons. The image analysed here is an infographic published by the NSC three days after the fact on 24 August 2013. The image consists of a black and yellow background containing one large photograph - of a man carrying a lifeless child - which is set above four smaller photographs of dead children. Needless to say, the image is distressing. Further to the photographs, the image contains capitalised text that confronts the viewer, and tells them to 'stop watching Syrians die' whilst also asking 'are these Assad's terrorists?'. Below the photographs, further capitalised text states 'more than 1300 killed in one day', and 'Assad committed a chemical massacre in rural Damascus on 21/08/2013'. Next to this is a logo reminiscent of a hazardous

materials symbol with the outline of Syria in the middle with ‘chemical massacre in Syria’ and placed opposite is the text ‘#chemical_massacre’.

*Figure 6: ‘Stop watching Syrians die’ on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en
(Copyright National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces 2013)*

<https://www.facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en/>

The content of this image is significant for several reasons. As we can see in *Figure 6* the people depicted are mainly Syrian children, all of whom appear to be dead. The only adult appears in the main image. He is dressed in plain clothes (not in military uniform) whilst holding a lifeless child in his arms. His face is contorted in an expression of anguish and pain. This is important, as ‘putting a human face to suffering is seen as a key factor in gaining viewers’ attention which is, in turn, essential to trigger not only some form of empathetic affective response but also a willingness to act’ (Bleiker et al., 2013, p.408). A similar point is made by Jenny Edkins who notes that ‘we do much more than read experience or emotion into the face – the face, or in some cases just its still image, can prompt or generate action: it moves us both literally as well as metaphorically’ (Edkins, 2013, p.415). In this image of the aftermath of chemical weapons, our attention is drawn to the centre of the image where we see the face of the Syrian man crying in anguish, and below we see images of children, their eyes closed as if asleep, their faces blank and lifeless. Such a startling visual representation has political effects, and suggests an attempt on the behalf of the NSC to claim legitimacy by making the victims of the chemical weapons attack visible and emphasising how they are innocent children.

This is furthered by the inclusion of text in the body of the image. The question posed directly above the main photograph asks viewers ‘are these Assad’s terrorists?’. Juxtaposed with the photographs of dead children and a clearly distraught man, the insinuated answer is that clearly they are not, thus challenging the Assad regime’s narrative that they are only at war with, and targeting, terrorist factions inside of Syria (Hokayem, 2013, p.51). The framing of the event as a ‘chemical massacre’ also serves to suggest that many innocent people were killed, with the statement ‘more than 1300

killed in one day' emphasising the impact of the chemical weapons. The responsibility for using these chemical weapons is clearly placed on the Assad regime – 'Assad committed a chemical massacre in rural Damascus on 21/08/2013' – and whilst there is no definitive proof of who fired these weapons, various experts have concluded that only the Assad regime could be responsible (Lister, 2015, p.163). By clearly placing the responsibility for the chemical weapons attack on the Assad regime, the NSC is claiming legitimacy for its use of force in response to an enemy who is willing to break international law by using chemical weapons and targeting civilians. Here, the NSC is confronted with an enemy that murders innocent children and is therefore illegitimate because they do not conform to legal rules and shared beliefs. This focus on the enemy contrasts sharply with the legitimisation claims made by the British Army where the emphasis was on the legitimacy of the Army itself rather than the illegitimacy of their enemies.

Further to these points, the colours used in the background of this image are important. Recent interventions suggest that colour is central to issues of security, especially when considering the role of images and visibility (Andersen et al., 2015; Guillaume et al., 2015). Rune Andersen, Xavier Guillaume and Juha Vuori argue that colour is a 'central and efficient semiotic vehicle in many systems of signification that participate in the classification, hierarchization and marking of individuals, groups, ideas, values, and so on, into specific symbolic categories' (Andersen et al., 2015, p.2). In the image above, the colours of black and yellow are important as they signify something hazardous and are often used in the design of warning signs (Edworthy, 1996, p.86). By using these colours, the hazard and danger of the Assad regime's violence towards Syrian people is subtly emphasised.

The visual framing in this image, and also in many others that feature war and conflict on the NSC's Facebook Page, constitute a visuality of suffering. According to Susan Sontag, such images of suffering emphasise

how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world... ...Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it's like. This is what war *does*... ...War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins* (Sontag, 2004, p.7, emphasis in original).

In the images used by the NSC the suffering of Syrian victims of war, their injuries and their deaths are extremely visible. The graphic images are disturbing, sad and painful to view. When looking at the image above, the viewer is paradoxically told to 'stop watching Syrians die'. This is done not to simply make the viewer turn away, but to explicitly link the viewing of these images with then doing something about them. In stopping watching Syrians die, we are instead supposed to do something about the conflict in Syria, however we are not told exactly what that should be.

Fundamental to this visual representation are emotions and 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.720). The content of the images shared by the NSC are clearly emotive, intended to invoke sadness and outrage. They focus on Syrian men, women, and children, and they highlight how their lives have been affected, ruined, and even ended by the ongoing conflict. In doing so, they attempt to attract the viewer to be emotionally invested and attached to a narrative that the NSC is good and facing an evil, barbaric enemy. Rather than imbuing positive emotions like we saw in the British Army case study, these images emphasise negative emotions such as sadness

and pity towards Syrian civilians, anger towards the Assad regime, and disgust that the international community isn't doing more to stop the conflict. These images claim legitimacy for the NSC's use of force by inviting the audience to emotionally invest in the plight of the Syrian people and the narrative that the NSC is the appropriate agent to protect them.

Hannah Arendt warns that 'history tells us that it is by no means a matter of course for the spectacle of misery to move men to pity' (2009, p.70), and other scholars have warned against the problematic visual 'politics of pity' where images of the suffering of others are used to invoke a response in those who view them (Chouliaraki, 2006; Boltanski, 2008; Hutchison, 2014). For Arendt, pity is just a sentiment and is not enough to invoke people to action, instead she suggests that solidarity 'is a principle that can inspire and guide action' (2009, p.89). Building on Arendt's thinking, Luc Boltanski suggests that a politics of pity involves those who view images of suffering still being removed, and unaffected by what they see (2008). In a similar vein Susan Sontag states that 'shock can become familiar. Shock can wear off. Even if it doesn't, one can *not* look. People have means to defend themselves against what is upsetting... ... one can become habituated to the horror of certain images' (2004, p.73 emphasis in original). In the case of the images above, understanding whether audiences are emotionally invested in, and moved by, these images of suffering is reserved for the next chapter. However here it is worth noting that the emphasis on suffering that we see on the NSC's Facebook Page is used to claim legitimacy for their use of force by making those affected, uprooted, injured, and killed by conflict in Syria highly visible.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to ongoing discussions surrounding the role of eyewitness media in contemporary war by analysing the content circulated by a major actor in the Syrian conflict. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, contemporary war and conflict are mediatized, and this has meant that more and more actors can utilise media to claim legitimacy for their use of force. This chapter began by highlighting how the use of eyewitness media in the Syrian revolution and conflict is bound up with the politics of legitimation, as revolutionary actors sought to use visual media online in order to claim legitimacy for themselves and their actions. This was driven in response to several factors that included the oppressive media restrictions of the Assad regime, the dangers posed to foreign journalists, and a Syrian diaspora that supported citizen journalists inside of Syria by providing equipment, training and funding.

Due to the vast amount of media about the conflict being created by people inside of Syria there is a need to explore how actors have utilised eyewitness media to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Whilst there has been research into ISIS and their use of digital and visual media (Lister, 2015; Zelin, 2015; Berger, 2015), there has been little work on other groups opposed to the Assad regime. To date, there has been limited scholarship on the NSC, and there has been no research into their use of narratives and images. This chapter therefore addresses this gap by analysing the content published on their Facebook Page. I have argued that the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces claims legitimacy for the use of force by using narratives. These narratives emphasise the high level of violence and suffering in Syria caused by the Assad regime; over half of the NSC's Facebook posts concern

this theme. Other narratives depict the NSC as a capable, authoritative political actor who has the support of the international community in representing the Syrian population. The NSC used these narratives to claim legitimacy for their use of force and themselves as a political institution.

Importantly, these narratives were often projected through visual media. 45% (n=528) of the NSC's Facebook posts consisted of visual media. This supports the theoretical argument made earlier in this thesis that visual media are a fundamental aspect of the politics of legitimation. As I also argued in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, visual media require research that is attuned to analysing their specificities. The theoretical approach to the visual politics of legitimation formulated earlier is thereby pertinent for making sense of the NSC's use of Facebook. As we saw in this chapter, the NSC has used Facebook to project legitimation claims that construct a visuality that emphasises the suffering of the Syrian people. This representation is often quite graphic, as death and destruction are made extremely visible. In turn, the NSC's use of force is visually framed as legitimate as it is in response to the Assad regime which breaks legal rules and international law. The NSC's use of force is thus deemed justifiable in terms of a shared belief that state actors should not persecute and kill their own civilians. Furthermore, as the NSC has often made clear, other actors consent to their use of force, and this was implied by the content concerning international support for the NSC.

By engaging in detail with an image from the August 2013 chemical weapons attack, I highlighted how these features were important. The image I analysed featured dead children and an adult male crying in anguish, and it served to provoke the viewer by

invoking an emotive response. This was further emphasised by the framing of the people in the image as victims of the Assad regime's breach of international law. I also noted how the colours used functioned as a signifier of danger. These visual legitimisation claims work by attracting the audience to feel emotions such as sadness and pity towards Syrian people, and anger and disgust towards the Assad regime. All of these features would have been lost in a study that did not pay attention to visual media, and their importance again demonstrates the utility and need of research into the visual politics of legitimisation.

If, as Elizabeth Dauphinée suggests 'images of the body in pain are the prime medium through which we come to know war' (2007, p.139), then the images on the NSC's Facebook Page tell us an awful lot about the violence of the conflict in Syria. However, these images on the NSC's Facebook Page were not put there by accident. They were taken, edited and uploaded for specific purposes. Understanding what drives the production of these images cannot be gained by looking only at the images themselves. Neither can we gain an understanding of how other people have interpreted and felt about the images. As I suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, these sites are of utmost importance in processes of legitimisation, and due to this, the next chapter explores the contexts of production (encoding) and interpretation (decoding) in detail. I engage with the context of production by drawing upon interviews with NSC media officers and other Syrian media activists responsible for producing eyewitness media. I then explore how people have interpreted and emotionally invested in the NSC's legitimisation claims by analysing comments made by Facebook users on images published by the NSC.

Chapter 7

Encoding and Decoding The Syrian Opposition on Facebook

In 2011 Jon Rich suggested that the Syrian citizen journalist ‘writes history with his own blood, body, and nerves’ (Rich, 2011). According to Rich, ‘it is for these reasons that the victory of the Syrian revolution is imminent... ..the world has had no choice but to side with the repressed’ (Rich, 2011). With the benefit of hindsight, such sentiments seem somewhat misplaced. Five years on, it seems that the victory of the Syrian revolution is far from imminent. The world has not entirely sided with the repressed. In the face of this, this chapter builds upon the previous chapter and contributes to studies of global politics by addressing a shortcoming of Rich’s analysis, as well as that of others who have written about images and the Syrian revolution (Stanton, 2012; Rich and Shamseddine, 2014; Bank, 2014). This shortcoming involves a failure to explore either how and why images have been produced, or how audiences have interpreted and felt emotions towards them. This chapter addresses this shortcoming by analysing the contexts of production and audience reception of the NSC’s legitimacy claims.

As we saw in earlier chapters of this thesis, the process of legitimation involves the articulation of legitimation claims by actors who seek to influence others. By using narratives and images, these actors claim legitimacy for themselves and their use of force. Rather than simply floating in the ether, these legitimation claims are seen and

interpreted by audiences who accept or contest them. As I argued earlier, if we are to understand the politics of legitimation we need to go beyond analysing the content of legitimation claims, and we need to explore their contexts of production and interpretation. The previous chapter analysed the narratives and images used by the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces to claim legitimacy for the use of force. This chapter builds upon this analysis by engaging with the production (encoding) and interpretation (decoding) of these legitimation claims.

Structured in two parts, I begin this chapter by drawing upon interviews with twelve individuals either involved in the production of the NSC's media content, or with citizen journalism in the Syrian revolution more broadly. The second section explores how people have responded to and felt emotions about the NSC's legitimation claims by analysing 545 Facebook comments. In doing so, this chapter contributes towards understanding the politics of legitimation beyond the level of narrative and visual content, in particular I draw attention to what factors have shaped the production of the NSC's legitimation claims whilst also exploring how these have been interpreted by an online audience of Facebook users. Here I analyse how 'affective investment' (Solomon, 2014, p.720) links these sites and helps us to understand the mechanism by which legitimation takes place.

7.1 Encoding legitimation: Interviews with NSC citizen journalists

The NSC has a media office that produces content for the their Facebook Page by communicating 'with those inside Syria through various revolutionary groups and activists on the ground' (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2015c). Taking this information, the media office then produces and circulates

content to the traditional press and broadcast media and it also shares this content online through their own digital social media channels. Based in Istanbul, the NSC's media office often focuses on Arabic media, however a small group of Syrians based in North America maintain the NSC's English language social media presence. Two individuals – Bayan Khatib and Mariam Hamou - are responsible for producing and circulating English language content for the NSC. They, alongside ten other individuals who have worked as eyewitnesses, citizen journalists or media activists for the Syrian opposition have been interviewed according to the method of semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). Of these individuals, one – Abu Eljood – is the main coordinator of the NSC's multimedia team, working primarily on Arabic multimedia, and two – Sinan Hatahet and Obai Sukar – formerly worked for the NSC's media team and for a radio station set up by the NSC. The other individuals interviewed have all been involved in producing eyewitness media during the Syrian revolution and conflict, and although they are not officially affiliated with the NSC, they are all broadly sympathetic to their goals and those of the revolution (even though they are at times critical of the NSC itself).⁴²

As the NSC draws upon the work of eyewitnesses inside of Syria to produce its social media content, these individuals provide an insight into the everyday dynamics of media production during the Syrian revolution and conflict. Together with those who do work, or have worked, for the NSC directly, their comments help to illustrate how the legitimization claims made by the NSC are produced and circulated. All interviewees were approached via Twitter or email, and all interviews were conducted via Skype between March and December 2015. Interviews were recorded and then

⁴² The names and roles of these individuals are outlined in Appendix 3.

transcribed, therefore what is quoted below is *ad verbatim* from the interviewees themselves. Interviews were conducted according to the semi-structured method and they help to illuminate the ways in which individuals involved in the formation and circulation of the NSC's legitimation claims understand and conceptualise what they do (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008, p.27).

7.1.1 The NSC's use of social media and citizen journalism

In 2008 social media was banned in Syria, but in February 2011 social media sites were made accessible by the Assad regime. In what may have been a positive attempt at opening up the Syrian media ecology, such a move made little difference to young Syrians who were already adept at using proxies and false IP addresses to circumnavigate the regime's censorship (Starr, 2012, p.62). Moreover, this move was seen as a cynical attempt by the regime to monitor social media sites as they then intimidated Syrians who shared content that was critical of the Assad regime on social media (Starr, 2012, p.62). In light of this, interviews began with a discussion of the role social media played in the Syrian revolution, and interviewees were adamant that social media was fundamental to the Syrian revolution.

Bayan Khatib, the NSC's North American Public Relations manager, said:

It's very important... ..Social media is the only outlet... ..its not like journalists on the ground in Syria can report freely, so social media is very, very important (Interview with Khatib, 2015).

The idea that social media was important because it opened up a space for Syrians to circulate news outside of the confines of the regime's limits on journalistic expression was widely held. Susan Ahmad, a former journalist for the English language magazine *Syria Today*, told me that she left her job as the revolution broke out, and when asked about the importance of social media during the revolution, she suggested that:

People had no tool or channel to send their news other than social media. Having a Facebook account and Twitter would give you access to that other world, the external world, you can report what you see, what you hear what you experience... ..It was vital in reporting the revolutions, and it played an important role in what people think and what they feel (Interview with Ahmad, 2015).

In this sense, social media is understood as connecting the Syrian revolution with an external audience outside of Syria. According to interviewees, these audiences would be unable to access information about what was happening in Syria due to regime censorship. As Ola Albarazi, a citizen journalist from Hama, noted; 'since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, it [social media] was the most important tool to reach out to international media, and to inform the outside world about daily events on the ground' (Interview with Albarazi, 2015). Social media therefore provided an important space for the Syrian opposition to articulate their claims to be legitimate.

However, this was not the only function that social media served during the revolution. According to Obaida Fares, social media was important because it

provided Syrians with a free platform to present their ideas, and it also enabled them to communicate to each other across large geographical areas where they could ‘share their ideas without the need to sit next to each other’ (Interview with Fares, 2015). Social media therefore not only functioned to inform audiences, it also served a more practical role in enabling people to come together and coordinate activities. These three functions of social media: 1) to organise protests; 2) to inform other Syrian’s about the revolution; and 3) to inform people outside of Syria about the revolution, were prominent in most interviews. These factors intersect with the politics of legitimisation as they concern individuals inside of Syria attempting to legitimate their revolution to internal and external audiences, and they were widely viewed as being of central importance to the Syrian opposition.

Regardless of the opportunities social media provided to Syrians, using social media to claim legitimacy for the revolution could prove dangerous. Susan Ahmad commented that ‘Many young people got arrested for what they posted, and we found their faces in the pictures released by Caesar.⁴³ They’d been tortured and died in prisons’ (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). As the revolution in Syria progressed into an armed conflict, the use and importance of social media changed according to some interviewees. Ghias Aljundi said that social media had been used at the beginning of the revolution ‘to mobilise people, to spread news, for comments, to reach out to people’ (Interview with Aljundi, 2015). However, when ‘the revolution changed into an armed struggle and fighting, social media kind of lost its soul and the gun became

⁴³ Caesar is the pseudonym of a former Syrian Army soldier who was responsible for photographing victims of the regime’s military operations and prisons. Caesar defected and leaked the photographs online.

more important. Anybody who has a gun - better than anyone who has Facebook Page' (Interview with Aljundi, 2015).

Despite this, social media was still perceived to be essential to many individuals involved in the Syrian opposition, particularly for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Those who worked for the NSC noted that 'for the Syrian coalition it's [social media] very important because it is the space where people who care about Syria exist, and it is the way that we communicate with those on the ground' (Interview with Khatib, 2015). Others involved in the NSC suggested that social media was not just an afterthought, instead it was seen as 'probably one of our most important tools' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). Mariam Hamou went as far as stating that social media was the home of the Syrian revolution and the NSC. She said:

We're in exile so our place is the Internet. We found a place, and our home is social media, this is how we get our messages out there, we don't have a white house, we don't have a real place where we can do this... ..We just have this.

We only have social media (Interview with Hamou, 2015).

Therefore, the use of social media is seen as fundamental to the NSC. This is because, in the absence of a government or base inside of Syria, the NSC finds itself in exile and 'homed' on social media. From this 'home', the NSC communicates with people inside of Syria and with audiences outside of Syria.

Others agreed that social media was often the only media outlet available to the NSC (Interview with Fares, 2015). In the context of Syrian media being controlled by the regime, members of the NSC suggested that Syrian people often paid little attention to traditional Syrian media. Abu Eljood, the multimedia coordinator for the NSC summed this up when he said ‘as a Syrian, I don’t watch TV. I get the news from Twitter and Facebook so I rarely watch TV. Social media is the main source of information’ (Interview with Eljood, 2015). Not only was digital social media seen as the primary source of information for Syrian people, it was also seen as a tool that enabled ordinary Syrian people to share their own experiences. In this sense, the use of digital social media and the subsequent legitimization claims of the NSC were explicitly reliant on eyewitness media, or what most interviewees called ‘citizen journalism’.

The majority of the interviewees had no prior experience working as journalists, and had learnt their skills ‘on the job’ (Interview with Fares, 2015) during the revolution. Eyewitness media and citizen journalism were understood to be important due to two reasons; first, because the regime restricted foreign journalists from entering Syria, and second, because the regime controlled what Syrian journalists could report. With regard to the first point, when asked about the role of eyewitness media in the revolution, Ola Albarazi suggested that ‘hundreds of Syrian civilians became “citizen journalists” because the regime didn't allow any reporters to enter Syria’ (Interview with Albarazi, 2015). This notion was common with other interviewees, and Susan Ahmad noted that ‘we’re dependent on citizen journalists’ (Interview with Ahmad, 2015).

Alongside this recognition that Syria was difficult, if not almost impossible, for foreign journalists to report from, there was an understanding that ‘citizen journalism’ grew as a reaction to the restrictive state media in Syria. Interviewees commented that social media enabled Syrians to express themselves freely after 50 years of press restriction by the Assad regime (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). During the revolution, the regime prevented journalists from established Syrian media outlets documenting protests, ‘so people started taking pictures and videos using their own cellphones; then they would send the images and videos to their family members or friends abroad for further dissemination’ (Interview with Albarazi, 2015). Others have commented that ‘the real story of the Syrian revolution began the moment the country’s citizens became citizen–journalists’ (Alassad, 2014, p.113) and the visual documentation of events by activists on the ground in Syria serves to challenge regime propaganda and to shape public opinion (Alassad, 2014, p.112). The practice of producing eyewitness media - deemed as being so important to the Syrian opposition - is thereby bound up with the politics of legitimation as individuals sought to use images to claim legitimacy for their revolutionary protests.

Although eyewitness media during the revolution may have begun in this amateur way where people circulated content to their friends and families, it soon progressed, becoming both more professional and formalised, as well as being vital to international media outlets. Adnan Hadad noted that during his time as an independent media activist ‘I was doing public relations with many journalists for CNN, Washington Post, BBC, al Jazeera – we were facilitating their trip and helping them interview the people’ (Interview with Hadad, 2015). Not only did this assist the international media, but it also served to benefit Syrian citizen journalists. Adnan

continued, ‘from there we learned a lot – photography, interviewing, asking the right questions – things got really exciting for us and we started seeing more and more media activists’ (Interview with Hadad, 2015). Despite the ways in which citizen journalism became critical to the revolution and the international media, citizen journalists still faced danger. Susan Ahmad left Syria in 2013 after being targeted by the regime. She feared that ‘I will be the news, not just a reporter of the news, I will be that piece of news’ (Interview with Ahmad, 2015).

Even in the face of such danger, eyewitness media still plays an important role to the Syrian opposition and to the NSC. Abu Eljood, the multimedia manager for the NSC, suggested that they are reliant on ‘citizen journalists’ to produce their multimedia content. When asked how the NSC produced their content, he said that ‘we have a team of monitors and activists, citizen journalists who are on the ground. We get our information from them... ..what they see and what they hear’ (Interview with Abu Eljood, 2015). Others also said that the NSC was reliant on eyewitness media. Obaida Fares noted that ‘since 2011 there are many non-formal media groups formed by youths who produce content daily on big Facebook Pages... ..The coalition depends on these in order to get their content’ (Interview with Fares, 2015).

The discussion here supports the notion that in the context of mediatised war, it is important to understand how political actors use visual media for their own purposes. Here, eyewitness media is perceived to be of vital importance to the NSC, and consequentially it is central to how they claim legitimacy for their use of force. The major factors in the rise of eyewitness media in Syria were understood to have been the regime’s restrictions on allowing foreign journalists to enter Syria, the regime’s

restrictions on Syrian journalists, and the subsequent way that international media outlets were reliant on people inside of Syria for their news reporting. Further to this, eyewitness media is understood as playing a fundamental role in the operations of the NSC who, in exile, rely upon eyewitnesses to create multimedia content. These factors are significant for this thesis as they draw attention to how the content of the NSC's Facebook Page, as analysed in Chapter 6, is shaped by context. Eyewitnesses, or what interviewees referred to as 'citizen journalists', produce this content and they attempt to claim legitimacy for the Syrian opposition to the wider world. In light of this, the next section addresses exactly what interviewees believed their goals were when they were producing digital social media content.

7.1.2 The aims of the NSC's use of social media

As I argued in Chapter 3, when analysing the process of legitimisation, it is important to explore the aims and goals of political actors. With this in mind, interviewees were asked what their primary aims were when they used digital social media. According to Bayan Kahtib, the NSC Facebook Page served to 'express the opinions and positions of the Syrian Coalition, because the Syrian coalition represents the Syrian opposition and it's our job to put out statements with our positions on everything that's happening' (Interview with Khatib, 2015). In this sense, the NSC used Facebook to inform people of their position because they were representative of the Syrian people. Sharing this sentiment, Abu Eljood agreed that 'we are trying to deliver the message because we are responsible for the Syrian people. We are the voice of those people' (Interview with Abu Eljood, 2015). This highlights how the NSC claims legitimacy by suggesting that they, and not the Assad regime, represent the Syrian people.

Alongside being the voice of the Syrian people, interviewees were open that the NSC's use of social media was intended to influence others. Bayan Khatib said that social media was used in order to 'actively try to influence the narrative out there about what's happening in Syria and to reach the general public as well, to help shape their opinion about what's happening' (Interview with Khatib, 2015). This focus on gaining support was also reiterated by other members of the NSC who said 'we're trying to get as much support and help for the revolution, for the goals of the Syrian people which is freedom, democracy, the right to self govern' (Interview with Hamou, 2015).

The NSC aimed to influence several key audiences. The first audience was the general public inside of Syria, and in this sense the NSC aimed to be 'the voice' of those people, and they wanted to mobilise the Syrian population to support the revolution and the NSC. A former media representative of the NSC commented that the primary goal of the NSC using social media was 'mostly to promote the idea of the revolution itself' (Interview with Hatahet, 2015). This was aimed at the Syrian population in order to

break the fear that was in all of Syrians – most Syrians know the regime is corrupt and bloody, and not a democracy, and at fault. But fear is a major problem. So what we tried to do was break this cycle of fear through social media, with messages of hope, encouragement and trying to reach them through a – you know – emotional level (Interview with Hatahet, 2015).

Here the NSC's legitimization claims are fundamentally about emotions and getting the audience to invest in the narrative that the NSC is leading the revolution and is therefore legitimate. Interestingly, contra to the emotions apparent in the representations discussed in Chapter 6, the emotions deemed to be important is hope, not sadness or anger. This diverges from the British Army's understanding that they were focusing on 'facts' rather than emotions in order to inform audiences. Instead it explicitly places emotions at the heart of the NSC's legitimization claims.

Further to addressing the Syrian public, the use of social media was also directed at 'western public opinion' (Interview with Ziadeh, 2015). Susan Ahmad felt that most citizen journalists and the NSC 'wanted to let the world know what's going on in Syria' (Interview with Ahmad, 2015) and those working for the NSC suggested that 'as a coalition we have two target audiences. The people, the Syrians, we are their voice, trying to convey their message, the other is addressed to countries and the outside world' (Interview with Abu Eljood, 2015). Speaking from the United States of America, Mariam Hamou suggested that the NSC wanted to 'create a relatability between us and a common soccer mom in the US... ...so we have to create these stories around a North American, relatable paradigm if you will' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). The aim here was to influence the 'Western' audience by making the experience of Syrians relatable. In this way, the NSC attempted to legitimate the use of force by emphasising how the Syrian people were 'just like' people elsewhere who might be viewing the NSC's Facebook Page. For Bayan Khatib this involved attempting to influence 'Western' governments and their publics (Interview with Khatib, 2015).

Alongside this audience of governments and their populations, the NSC aimed to influence the international media. Mariam Hamou explained that the media often used content from the NSC's social media sites when reporting about Syria. She said 'I guess it's a two-pronged approach, we want to go straight to the end user but as well we want the mainstream media to pick it up and to report on it' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). In addition, the NSC was also trying to influence human rights organisations by documenting human rights violations. Adnan Hadad suggested that citizen journalists played 'a major role documenting human rights violations taking place in Syria' (Interview with Hadad, 2015). The purpose of this documentation was not only to influence human rights organisations in the here and now, but to also collate information in order to provide evidence because 'at one stage there will be an international court, so they have to document everything to be prepared for that moment' (interview with Fares, 2015). Further to these motivations, interviewees noted that what the NSC did on Facebook was driven in response to other actor's use of social media, specifically the regime and ISIS (Interview with Fares, 2015). Interviewees said that the regime and ISIS both invested large resources into their own social media campaigns whereas the NSC was limited by a lack of resources (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). Another motivation behind the use of social media was simply that 'sometimes it's just letting off steam and venting frustration' (Interview with Fares, 2015).

Interviewees suggested that influence could be gained by telling truthful stories. Mariam Hamou said that 'there are so many different stories out there, so many different interests and politics that you really have to focus on what the truth really is, and get it out there so people can react' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). Other

interviewees were also concerned with this, noting that citizen journalists wanted ‘to report the reality’ (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). When asked about how she produced media content, Ola Albarazi abruptly responded that ‘we don't produce; we report on what's happening on the ground. We send messages to reach out to people who care about the truth. We try to make sure that the international audience sees the reality’ (Interview with Albarazi, 2015).

The above discussion has highlighted that the NSC used social media in order to give a voice to the Syrian people, to influence ‘western’ governments and their populations, whilst also influencing the international media and human rights organisations. Other motivations included responding to and countering the social media of other actors in Syria such as the Assad regime and ISIS, alongside simply ‘letting off steam’. Such aims are all inherently concerned with legitimisation; whether that is in claiming that the NSC is the representative of the Syrian population, whether it is in claiming legitimacy in the eyes of the ‘West’, or whether it is attempting to delegitimise the Assad regime and ISIS. The above discussion provides an insight into what drives the NSC’s legitimisation claims, and it suggests that the Facebook content of the NSC is encoded with these aims in mind. Here, it is important to note that whilst these aims were underpinned by the notion of telling the truth about what was happening in Syria, they were also explicitly about engaging with people on an emotional level in order to gain their support.

7.1.3 The Syrian opposition’s narratives of legitimisation

As I argued in Chapter 3, claims to legitimacy are articulated through narratives. In Chapter 6 I analysed the narrative content of the NSC’s legitimisation claims, and in

order to understand how these narratives were encoded with meaning I asked interviewees what stories they were trying to tell in order to reach their aims of influencing people. The following section shows that interviewees thought that the most important narratives concerned the revolution for freedom and democracy, the crimes of the Assad regime, the threat of extremist groups, and the credibility of the NSC as a political and military actor.

Summing it up rather succinctly, Bayan Khatib suggested that the most important narrative was ‘this is a peoples revolution, this is everyday people on the street asking for their freedom, asking to bring down this dictatorship’ (Interview with Khatib, 2015). Her colleague Mariam Hamou concurred, stating that ‘the narrative will always be the struggle, right? The struggle for freedom, that’s the main - the number one - people want their freedom’ (Interview with Hamou, 2015). When asked about the most important stories for the Syrian opposition, Ola Albarazi responded that they were ‘stories of real people who dream of a free, democratic country... ..stories of Syrians who believe that one day they will have a country that protects their rights and allows them to live in dignity’ (Interview with Albarazi, 2015). This narrative pertains to the notion that democracy and freedom are shared, universal norms, and these were of utmost importance in claiming legitimacy for the revolution and the NSC. This type of content also invites audiences to emotionally invest in these values, and suggests that positive emotions and affect are a fundamental aspect of legitimation here.

The analysis of the narratives presented in Chapter 6 does not support the notion that positive stories about freedom and revolution are the main type of narrative used by

the NSC. This is because only 7.25% (n=85) of the content posted by the NSC during the period of analysis concerns hopes for the revolution. One explanation here is perhaps that the NSC was formed in November 2012, long after the revolution in Syria had turned into a violent armed struggle. To this extent the NSC was no longer attempting to claim legitimacy for protests, freedom and revolution, instead it was claiming legitimacy for the use of force in response to the Assad regime. Ghias Aljundi's insights are relevant here; he commented that 'after the mess started – I call it the mess – in Syria, the guns and fighting, social media was used very unwisely, it began to be used more for propaganda rather than mobilising people or spreading the news. The language changed on it' (interview with Aljundi, 2015). With this change came a focus on more negative emotions such as sadness and anger that were used to engage the audience and provoke them into action in support of the Syrian people and the NSC.

Other interviewees noted that as the revolution progressed, and as conflict spread, the narratives projected by the Syrian opposition developed and transformed. Bayan Khatib said that 'the narrative has changed as the revolution progressed... ..things got much more complicated and we had to do a lot of work to bring awareness to the crimes of the regime' (Interview with Khatib, 2015). This theme of war crimes was also deemed to be very important by other interviewees. Mariam Hamou suggested that, following from the central theme that the Syrian people wanted freedom, 'the secondary messages will be the loss, so the loss of home, the loss of family, the loss of safety, the loss of food, what people are paying in order to achieve the goal of freedom and democracy' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). As noted in the previous chapter, this theme was the most prominent on the NSC's Facebook Page. 46.8%

(n=549) of their content concerned war and suffering, with 21.31% (n=250) of their content relating explicitly to the war crimes and atrocities committed by the Assad regime. The interviewees' affirmation that such themes were central to their use of Facebook, support the suggestion that the NSC was reliant on using narratives of suffering in order to claim legitimacy for their use of force in response to the cause of that suffering – the Assad regime. This theme is underpinned by emotions such as sadness, and by providing such an 'affective underpinning' (Solomon, 2014, p.736) the NSC are attempting to make the narratives and images resonate with audiences. In the next section of the chapter I explore how audiences felt about these legitimisation claims.

In addition, several other interviewees also suggested there had been a temporal shift in the narratives produced by the Syrian opposition and the NSC. Sinan Hatahet said that 'in the beginning it was mostly the facts, the number of people detained by the regime, telling people to speak about their experiences with the regime... ...with the advance of the conflict, there was this militarisation' (Interview with Hatahet, 2015). This 'militarisation' led to an added layer of complexity in the projection of legitimisation claims. For example, Obai Sukar said:

In 2013 we started to have two enemies, ISIS and the regime, and it isn't easy to address your message now you're dealing with two different enemies – things just aren't black or white anymore. Even some of the opposition might have done atrocities, the message got harder... ...Moods changed through the war (Interview with Sukar, 2015).

According to interviewees, the rise of extremist groups in Syria seemed to vindicate the legitimisation claims made by the Assad regime, and this made things difficult for the NSC. Sinan Hatahet commented that ‘the regime narrative has the credit of being simple, clear, and constant. They haven’t changed, since day one, they’ve said “we are facing terrorists”’ (Interview with Hatahet, 2015). In response to this, the NSC and other members of the Syrian opposition were at pains to highlight how ‘the root cause of rising terrorism is the dictatorship’ (Interview with Hadad, 2015). This led to the emergence of another prominent narrative that emphasised how the Assad regime is the fundamental causal factor in the growth of extremist groups such as ISIS. As Bayan Khatib commented, ‘an important part of our messaging is that the Assad regime comes hand in hand with the extremists... ..he kind of gave birth to the extremists in Syria... ..they have this symbiotic relationship between them’ (Interview with Khatib, 2015). Here it seems that fear is the emotional underpinning of the content, and it serves to attract audiences to the narrative that the NSC are confronting a threat that the world is afraid of.

In light of this it is interesting that only 1.45% (n=17) of the posts analysed in Chapter 6 mentioned ISIS at all. Such a figure seems startling when considering the importance placed on this narrative by many interviewees, but it is perhaps best understood as an example of the NSC wanting to emphasise that Assad, and not ISIS, is the main threat to the people of Syria. As Ghias Aljundi put it ‘The head of the snake in Syria is Assad’ (Interview with Aljundi, 2015). Mariam Hamou also emphasised this point when she suggested that ‘if you want to solve the situation then get rid of Assad. It’s so simple’ (Interview with Hamou, 2015). Here, as I argued in Chapter 6, the NSC’s legitimisation claims are focused on delegitimising the Assad

regime and depicting themselves as the only other organisation with any legitimate claim to represent the Syrian people.

Further to these narratives, interviewees regarded several others as important. Some interviewees underscored the political credibility of the NSC as being significant. For example, Obaida Fares highlighted the importance of ‘the political stories of the coalition interacting with the international context and the regional context’ (Interview with Fares, 2015). Another significant narrative was the notion that the NSC, as the governing body in charge of the FSA, was successful militarily. These types of stories are reflected in the data discussed in Chapter 6, where 22.17% (n=260) of the NSC’s Facebook content concerns them as a capable and authoritative political actor that also wields international support, as demonstrated by 13.64% (n=160) of their Facebook content regarding this topic. Through these narratives, the NSC attempts to legitimate itself as a widely supported organisation that uses force responsibly.

Moreover, interviewees suggested that narratives about ‘victories and military progress, that we are doing well, reporting the defeats of the regime and their allies’ (Interview with Fares, 2015) were vital to the NSC. For Abu Eljood, ‘victory, posts about victory, about the advance of the FSA’ (Interview with Abu Eljood, 2015) were the most important types of stories as ‘they encourage more people to react and to get involved with the posts’ (Interview with Abu Eljood, 2015). Despite this view, only 3.07% (n=36) of the NSC’s Facebook content engages with FSA victories, or battles, or their armament by external actors. Although some interviewees deemed these narratives to be important, their low prominence in the data analysed in the previous

chapter suggests that they were not as central to the NSC's use of social media as some thought.

7.1.4 The importance of visual media to the Syrian opposition

In Chapter 6 I demonstrated how visual media were central to the way that the NSC projected claims to be legitimate. Many interviewees also held this opinion, thereby further supporting the theoretical claim I made in Chapter 3 that images are fundamental to contemporary processes of legitimation. Radwan Ziadeh said that 'photographs and videos were crucial in sending messages out' (Interview with Ziadeh, 2015), and according to others it was important to use visual media to support the narratives discussed above. Susan Ahmad suggested that

they [images] are really important, you know? I can tell you whatever you want and you don't have to believe me. But when I show you a picture or video, you can check they are authentic and tell that I'm telling the truth (Interview with Ahmad, 2015).

The production of visual media was often understood as being fundamental to documenting reality, and it was perceived to be central to citizen journalists in Syria. Ola Albarazi noted that once the Assad regime stopped reporters from covering revolutionary protests 'the images we were able to broadcast were often the only means of documenting events on the ground' (Interview with Albarazi, 2015).

This highlights how images on digital social media sites were understood to not only be important in documenting the revolution, but were at times perceived to be the

only means of communication available to the Syrian opposition. Interviewees often suggested that this was due to the images seemingly infallible relationship with truth and reality. Further to this, visual media were understood as being more engaging for audiences, as well as being able to communicate more information than written text. Abu Eljood noted that ‘informative posts with pictures are ten times more followed and read than posts without pictures’ (Interview with Eljood, 2015).

Those interviewees who worked for the NSC suggested that infographics were one of the most important types of visual media that they used, and again this was due to how they were understood to be able to communicate lots of information whilst being ‘shareable’ with audiences. Bayan Khatib said that infographics ‘condense a whole lot of information into one shareable image that is easy for people to understand and appeals to them visually, so it’s a tool that we often use’ (Interview with Khatib, 2015). Abu Eljood agreed, and he said: ‘We have statistics about dead people... ..We can write this in an eight-page report, or we can take eight bits and we can design an infographic and this can present the information in a very attractive way’ (Interview with Eljood, 2015). Further to this, others suggested that still images were more important than moving images such as videos. Mariam Hamou said that she tried to use still images that were ‘really poignant, cutting, emotional, trying to get a reaction out of people... ..a powerful image, I think that’s the biggest bang for your buck’ (Interview with Hamou, 2015). Again, this highlights how the emotional and affective dimensions of images are important in legitimisation processes.

When asked what exactly made for a powerful image, Mariam responded; ‘I guess it’s different across cultures, for me it’s looking at the despair on someone’s face; with

something behind them that looks like loss. I think that right there is such a powerful image' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). This understanding of audiences belonging to different visual cultures and being affectively invested in images was an important one that resonated through several interviews. Mariam elaborated on this, suggesting that images of loss were important for the North American audience, however she said that 'in the Middle East it's blood and guts; it's just too extreme, here it's very sanitised, but it's thought provoking and emotionally provoking, so to me that's a powerful image' (Interview with Hamou, 2015).

Susan Ahmad suggested that Syrians shared graphic images at the start of the revolution because 'people were shocked. And they wanted the world to be shocked with them' (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). However, Susan found that 'people couldn't handle the very ugly images... ...There was no sympathy. People were like "its ok you can just die silently"' (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). This led to a change in the way that images were used by the Syrian opposition, where 'instead of sending pieces of bodies, they'd post pictures of a father who lost all his family members, crying, thinking what his life is going to be without his family' (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). Susan concluded that 'it's not always good to send pictures of dead people and blood. Its important to show that we are human beings, we are people like you' (Interview with Ahmad, 2015). The emphasis on loss and sadness highlights how the NSC sought to engage the audience on an emotional level to support their legitimisation claims.

According to other interviewees there was also a distinct disparity in the types of images different audiences were receptive to, and this suggested that there was a

difference in how the NSC claimed legitimacy with Arabic and English speaking audiences. When talking about the relationship between the Arabic and English language media teams of the NSC, Mariam Hamou suggested that ‘the images they produce in Arabic really, really can’t be shown in the English media’ (Interview with Hamou, 2015). She continued and said:

It’s like why are you putting out pictures of dead children? Nobody wants to see that. You can’t put that out there, no soccer mom wants to look at that. You’re gonna get disgust before you get a heartfelt reaction. It’s just a different way that they think there than we think here, they think we’re gonna be horrified into action, I’m like “you horrify people here into disgust” (Interview with Hamou, 2015).

This suggests that the NSC has attempted to strike a balance between using images that depict loss and suffering with images that may be too graphic for ‘Western’ audiences. This explains why there is such a high prominence of images of war and conflict on the NSC’s Facebook Page, and it suggests that the twenty images of dead Syrian adults and children must have been used in exceptional circumstances. Ultimately, the visual politics of legitimation on the NSC’s Facebook Page were driven by a need to use images to support their narratives by emphasising how their stories were real and truthful. Visual media were understood as being both more shareable and more emotive than non-visual content, and interviewees suggested that the NSC used images in different ways with different audiences. This highlights a need to understand the visual politics of legitimation in context, and I found that the

NSC aimed to claim legitimacy with English speaking audiences by using images of loss and sadness rather than graphic images of death.

7.1.4 Summarising the encoding of the NSC's legitimisation claims

This section summarises and elaborates on the above discussion, and I argue that the sustained engagement with the thoughts and lived experiences of these interviewees is important as it illuminates several themes that have shaped the NSC's visual politics of legitimisation. First, it demonstrates that the Syrian opposition's use of social media initially developed in response to the Assad regime's constraints on free speech as well as restrictions on media access to Syria. Social media provided a space for the Syrian opposition to organise protests, to communicate with other Syrians, and to inform external audiences about the revolution, and later, the conflict. In this sense, social media enabled the Syrian opposition - and after its formation in November 2012, the NSC - to claim legitimacy for the use of force by projecting narratives to audiences based inside and outside of Syria. Second, social media was seen by interviewees as being one of the most important tools available to the NSC, and some even suggested that social media was the 'home' of the NSC. In light of this, understanding the ways in which the NSC use social media is of paramount concern for those who want to understand the NSC as an organisation.

Third, the use of social media was reliant on eyewitness media, or what most interviewees referred to as 'citizen journalism'. Prior to the revolution, few interviewees had any experience with journalism, however they soon found themselves part of a broader phenomenon that involved 'ordinary' Syrians documenting the events around them. Information provided by eyewitnesses is now

the main source of the content on the NSC's Facebook Page and is thus fundamental to how they claim legitimacy.

Fourth, in using social media the NSC aims to: 1) represent the voice of the Syrian people; 2) influence the Syrian general public; 3) influence 'western' governments and public opinion; 4) influence international media outlets; 5) influence human rights organisations. This was driven in part by the actions of other actors in the Syrian conflict such as the Assad regime and ISIS. Significantly, this demonstrates the importance of legitimisation, as each aim is inherently about legitimating the NSC and its actions to different audiences.

Fifth, these aims were underscored by the notion of telling truthful narratives. These narratives concerned: 1) the revolution for freedom; 2) the war crimes of the Assad regime; 3) how the Assad regime is responsible for the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS in Syria; 4) the credibility and authority of the NSC; 5) the military success of the FSA. Interviewees suggested that narratives concerning these themes were the most important for the NSC, and the interviews thus help to understand how the NSC claims legitimacy for its use of force by being a credible political actor that has some success in fighting for freedom against a regime that commits war crimes and is responsible for terrorism.

Sixth, interviewees were adamant that these stories had to be told through visual media. This was because of the image's perceived relationship with objective truths and the ways in which they can communicate information about events in a supposedly direct manner whilst engaging with people on an emotional level. Images

were seen as central to the rise of citizen journalism in Syria, and were deemed to be as important as social media by many interviewees. Representatives of the NSC believed that infographics were one of the best ways of communicating information to audiences. Interviewees also believed that the NSC had to find a balance between communicating loss and suffering without using images that were too graphic, and would alienate ‘Western’ audiences who were understood to be too sensitive to act in response to such images. These deliberations demonstrate that much thought and effort goes into the visual politics of legitimation apparent on the NSC’s Facebook Page, and therefore these interviews provide an insight into the considerations that have shaped the content analysed in Chapter 6.

Finally it must be noted that the Facebook content of the NSC was underpinned by negative emotions such as sadness, anger, horror, and disgust. These emotions were apparent in the content discussed in the last chapter and were discussed in the interviews above. It is the emotions of sadness and pity for Syrians, as well as anger, horror, and disgust towards the Assad regime that provide the ‘affective underpinnings’ (Solomon, 2014, p.736) that attract audiences to invest and consent to the legitimation claims made by the NSC. I have drawn attention to these emotions in the context of the Facebook content and its production. In order to understand how audiences feel about this content, and to see whether they are in fact emotionally invested in the plight of the Syrian people, I now turn to an analysis of Facebook comments.

7.2 Decoding legitimization: Facebook comments on the NSC's Page

The above discussion has served to illuminate how the context of production is important in shaping the NSC's legitimization claims. However, because 'no one can prescribe the reactions of individual browsers or gawpers who stare at photographs of awful events' (Taylor, 1998, p2), it is important to try and understand how audiences have actually interpreted and engaged with the NSC's visual legitimization claims. I now explore how people have decoded these legitimization claims by analysing 545 Facebook comments made by individual Facebook users on an image shared by the NSC. During the period of analysis, Facebook users provided 176802 likes, 4304 comments, and 53467 shares of posts by the NSC on Facebook. Such a high number of audience engagement far surpasses the number of people who actually 'like' the NSC on Facebook, and it therefore suggests that the NSC have communicated their narratives and images to people beyond whom would normally consent to their legitimization claims. Analysing such a large volume of content would go beyond the logistical constraints of this research, however, by focusing on 545 comments on one image, I provide an illustrative analysis of how Facebook users have responded to the legitimization claims made by the NSC. The following section of this chapter proceeds in two parts; I begin by briefly exploring the most popular content on the NSC's Facebook Page during 2012-2015. I then analyse the comments made on the most popular post shared by the NSC during the period of analysis.

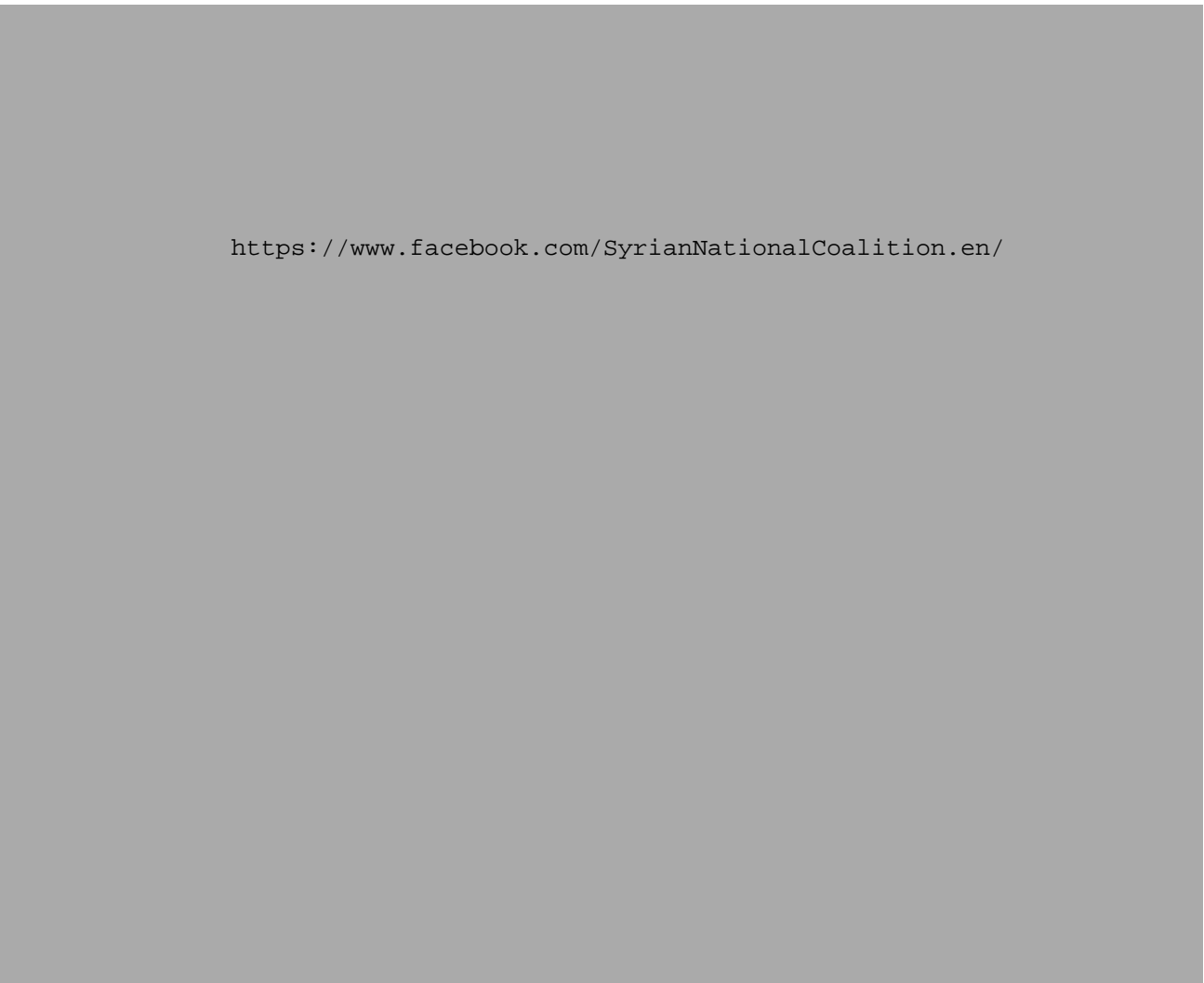
Nine out of the ten most popular posts published by the NSC consisted of a still image, and one post was a link to a YouTube video.⁴⁴ Two of the still images were infographics, prominently featuring statistics, and the other seven were photographs.

⁴⁴ See Appendix 2: Figure 7 for an overview of what content was the most popular on the NSC's Facebook Page during the period of analysis.

The most popular piece of content shared during this time consists of two images juxtaposed together; the top half of the image features a computer graphic of a football stadium with text overlaid saying ‘3.5 billion people watching #worldcup’. The bottom half is a photograph of two children holding hands and crying in front of a burnt out car and a dust cloud. The text overlaid on top of this image reads ‘Anyone? #Syria’. The image was shared on 19 June 2014, and received 101569 likes, 750 comments, and 21813 shares.

This image was by far the most popular of the NSC’s posts published during the period of analysis, and in total it received over 120000 more likes, comments, or shares than the next most popular post. This level of popularity demonstrates that the English language content produced by the NSC has at times gone ‘viral’ despite the difficulties that the opposition faces in terms of lacking media resources, organisation and capability (Fares, 2014). This post, together with the other most popular posts, reveal interesting things about how the audience engages with and feels about the NSC’s legitimisation claims.

*Figure 7: 'Is anyone watching Syria?' on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en
(Copyright National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces 2014)*



<https://www.facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en/>

First, as the majority of the most popular posts are images, it is clear that visual media is often the most popular with audiences on Facebook. This further supports the claim that those of us who wish to understand contemporary processes of legitimation need to pay attention to the role of visual media. Second, four of the most popular posts concern the theme of international inaction, where the NSC is explicitly drawing attention to the failures of the international community to do anything about the Syrian conflict. The popularity of these posts suggests that the audience of the NSC's

English language Facebook Page share this sentiment. Here, the audience appears to be emotionally invested in a feeling of anger towards the international community. Third, another four of the most popular posts concern the theme of regime war crimes. The popularity of these posts shows that people are consenting to the NSC's legitimisation claims made in response to the actions of the Assad regime. Two of the other most popular posts concern the theme of the revolution, and a request to the general public to support a petition. The popularity of these posts again demonstrates that the audience are attracted to the narrative identity constructed by the NSC's Facebook content. They are emotionally invested in feeling sadness and anger, and they thereby consent to the NSC's legitimisation claims.

In order to provide a more focused analysis of how audiences decode the NSC's legitimisation claims I now engage with 545 comments made on the NSC's most popular post during the period of analysis. These comments have been chosen as they present a large yet manageable quantity of data and they provide an insight into how people have interpreted and decoded the legitimisation claims made by the NSC. As noted above, this image consists of a top half featuring a computer graphic football stadium and a bottom half featuring a photograph of Syrian children. Using Google's image search function, I found that the image of the football stadium is a screen grab taken from the *FIFA World Cup 2014* computer game. The image of the Syrian children was taken by a photographer named Saad Abobrahim on 29 January 2014 in the Dahret Awwad neighbourhood of Aleppo after a barrel bomb was dropped there.⁴⁵ Neither image is credited to its original maker, but regardless of this the composite image made by the NSC gains 101569 likes, 750 comments, and 21813 shares.

⁴⁵ The original image is available at <http://www.corbisimages.com/Search#pg=saad+abobrahim&p=1&sort=2>

Despite there supposedly being 750 comments on this image, only 545 comments can actually be viewed on Facebook. These 545 comments have been analysed and coded depending on their content. Codes were determined as the content was analysed and a total of 18 codes were used.⁴⁶ These were not mutually exclusive, and a comment such as ‘All my Muslim brothers and sisters, please du'a to our brothers and sisters where there country on war especially in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. All enemies of Islam may kill us all, but they never kill Islam’ has been coded as concerning ‘other conflicts’, ‘praying/religion’ and ‘calling on Muslim community’.

Comments are made in ten different languages, including Arabic, German, Hindi, Malay and Spanish, but the majority are in English. Comments in foreign languages were translated using online translation tools (either those available on Facebook or via Google translate), but even with these translation tools eight comments remained untranslatable. The large variety of languages used to make comments demonstrate that the NSC was successful in projecting legitimisation claims to a global audience; something that interviewees often suggested was the main purpose of the NSC using Facebook. Further to this, the NSC has 49441 Facebook followers, however this image received over 122000 likes, comments or shares, demonstrating that the NSC has, at least in this instance, managed to communicate to audiences beyond those who follow them on Facebook. The comments made by Facebook users suggest several important points concerning how they decoded and felt about the NSC’s legitimisation claims.

⁴⁶ See Appendix 2: Figure 8 for an overview of the themes of Facebook comments and their frequency.

First the most prominent type of comment referred to praying, prayers, or other religious support (n=181). People often commented that they would be praying for Syria with comments like 'Hopefully we don't forget about them in our prayers'. Others suggested that they could do nothing but pray for Syria, as one individual put it 'It breaks my heart watching but we can't do anything for Syria except du'a'. Further, there were 154 mentions of Allah during the period of analysis. People would often ask Allah for help; 'May Allah help those people who are in need ameeeeeeen', and others would - in response to the question posed by the NSC - suggest that 'Allah is watching inshallah Allah soon he will solve all the Muslim problems'.

Thirteen comments also featured the Takbir of 'Allahuakhbar', and another thirteen individuals posted comments that called on the Muslim community to take action. This involved comments asking other Muslims to pray; 'All my Muslim brothers and sisters, please du'a to our brothers and sisters'. One individual also asked for Muslims to come together to peacefully resolve the conflict, they said 'United you can face any problem. Divided you are bound to be lose. I appeal to all Muslims irrespective of sects, to unite and Allah willing you will have a peaceful solution'. The prominence of comments that refer to other Muslims and praying to Allah demonstrate that the NSC has some success in engaging with Muslims across the world, and that this audience is consenting to the NSC's legitimation claims. Furthermore these comments signal positive emotions felt towards Syrian people such as care and love for them as part of the family, but they also demonstrate a level of sadness and upset as these Facebook users have had their 'hearts broken' by what they have seen. The audience do have an affective investment in this content, however it seems that this sense of

sadness can, at times, lead to a 'politics of pity' (Boltanski, 2008) where the audience feel that they are hopeless to do anything but pray.

The second most prominent type of comment demonstrates support for the NSC and the Syrian revolution (n=130). Some people simply respond to the NSC's question – is anyone watching Syria? – saying things such as 'I'm watching Syria' or 'I am. Lots of people have not forgotten Syria. We support your democratic people and wish of all our hearts that ISIS and Assad soon are gone. Long live the revolution'. Others were also supportive of the NSC and its activities against the Assad regime and ISIS, stating that they 'hope stability will come to this place soon and that a new prosperity will arise for these people, when Assad and ISIS will be gone'. Some singled out the Assad regime as the enemy of the NSC, commenting that 'Syria in my heart. And the criminal Bashar and his regime will lose their match against Syrian civilians in the end'. Such comments suggest feelings of care for the Syrian people, and they also demonstrate that the audience is angry with the Assad regime.

Other Facebook users highlighted that ISIS was a reason people weren't watching or doing anything about Syria, suggesting that 'they're too busy hyperventilating about ISIS, a problem that could have been avoided'. Support was also demonstrated through single word comments such as 'sad', 'Syria', 'true', and 30 comments that either featured or consisted wholly of emojis depicting sad and crying faces. These comments express a feeling of sadness and an emotional investment in the plight of the Syrian people. In addition, some people responded to the NSC suggesting 'don't just watch, help'. This understanding that viewing images of Syria wasn't enough was also picked up by another individual who said 'we don't watch Syria. We help'. The

support demonstrated by these individuals shows that they are accepting of the NSC's legitimisation claims, often perceiving them to be the solution to the 'problems' of the Assad regime and ISIS.

A relatively large amount of individuals (n=39) make reference to other conflicts when commenting on the NSC's 'is anyone watching Syria?' image. One of the earliest comments on the image suggests that 'You can also add Iraq, Ukraine, Nigeria to the list'. This comment receives a further 20 likes by other individuals, implying that the audience perceives Syria to be one of many conflicts that people pay little attention to. One commentator diagnosed this lack of attention as being caused by a society where 'Nobody gives a shit. It's me, me, me, and fuck the rest'. They continued, suggesting that 'judgement day will teach each one of us a lesson. Free Syria, free Palestine and free Iraq, inshallah!!'. The Israel-Palestine conflict was often mentioned in Facebook comments. There were 20 mentions of Gaza, 18 mentions of Palestine, and 23 mentions of Israel. In contrast there were 66 mentions of Syria. On the one hand, comments such as 'Free Syria and Palestine!' imply an understanding of a shared struggle between the people of Syria and Palestine in the face of oppression. Or, as one person put it 'I give a fuck about Syria! Same applies to the bloody Gaza zone!'. However, on the other hand, people often make references to Palestine and Gaza whilst not mentioning Syria at all. Comments such as 'I do think of Palestine day and night, my thoughts are always with Palestine', 'Pray4Gaza ya Allah help them!' and 'We are so sorry Gaza... From Malaysia', make no mention of Syria.

These comments, and the frequent mention of Palestine and Gaza, perhaps stem from the fact that conflict between Hamas and Israel was taking place during the summer of

2014. They also suggest that the content of the image is more important than written text in engaging with audiences. Despite the image featuring the hashtag Syria and being posted by the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it seems that some individuals understand the image to be from Palestine. In this regard, there are thirteen anti-Israel comments, which are, more often than not, phrased as 'fuck Israel'. Again, this is probably due to the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in Operation Protective Edge, which received worldwide condemnation from citizens in places like the US and in Europe, even whilst their politicians supported Israel (Haaretz, 2014). These comments that reflect on and mention other comments suggest an underpinning emotion of anger, signified by expletives, and an emotion of sadness that is suggested by apologies and prayers.

Another common theme apparent in the Facebook comments analysed was a discussion of global indifference for the events in Syria (n=35). One individual rather poetically commented 'sleeping world, senseless'. Moreover, people reiterated the narrative presented by the NSC, stating that 'the picture says it all they are all busy watching World Cup shit like idiots', and they expressed frustration that the World Cup was so popular whereas no one paid attention to events in Syria. Someone commented 'I hate that people get so worked up about a bunch of men running around, kicking a ball. As if it actually matters in the grand scheme of things. Nobody sees what's going on in the rest of the world'. In addition, people expressed frustration with the media for not covering Syria, they suggested that 'No one can watch it if "they" don't show it!' and others noted that 'Syria is not on our local TV. Sorry!'. Once more it seems that sadness and anger underpin the audience's affective response to the image, and it suggests that they are consenting to the NSC's legitimisation claims

because they are attracted to the NSC's narrative identity that positions the Assad regime as an evil actor.

Further to this, people noted that whilst they were watching, and were aware of what was happening in Syria, they were unable to do anything about it. Someone said 'We've been watching it for years now. It's been on the news for years. Everyone knows what is happening there'. Another succinctly stated that despite their viewing they were impotent to act. As they put it 'I watched Syria. I couldn't do jack'. In a similar vein, people felt powerless to do something because they were merely civilians, and only their governments could do something. One person said 'I am sorry but not everyone can help. Get governments involved not people who can't do anything anyway'. Another suggested that 'a lot are watching but they are civilians, they can do nothing except pray'. Such comments illustrate that part of the audience felt helpless to do anything about the situation in Syria, and it suggests that whilst being sympathetic to the NSC's legitimisation claims these people were not moved to action as the NSC perhaps desired.

Thirty-seven comments were critical of the NSC or of the narrative presented by them in this Facebook post. Some asked 'what would watching Syria do exactly?' whilst others found the comparison of the World Cup and Syria problematic. One commented 'I know its kinda sick that more people care about football but I'm getting kind of tired of people who keep going on about those poor kids and humans but guess what, we cant do anything'. Others suggested that the World Cup was a positive distraction as it 'keeps us in a good mood. No one wants to keep looking at men, women and children in horrible conditions. We don't like remembering things that

make us feel bad'. Another added 'Watch sport and be happy or watch a war torn country and be depressed... I think I'll choose the first one'. Others made poor attempts at humour, asking 'What channel can I watch it on? Nickelodeon?' and several individuals were rather blunt in their dismissal of the NSC, saying things like 'the World Cup is more important', 'NOBODY CARES', and 'who cares, not our problem'.

These comments critiqued and challenged the narrative presented by the NSC and reveal that people were not entirely accepting of their legitimisation claims. Whilst some writers have argued that images from Syria confront viewers with 'no choice but to side with the repressed' (Rich, 2011), the analysis here shows that that is not quite the case. This is because the comments analysed show that some people are doubtful as to the benefits of viewing images from Syria, they often challenge the narratives of the NSC, and rather tragically they simply do not care about what is happening in Syria. This is perhaps a consequence of the affective investment in sadness and anger, that may, as Hannah Arendt argues, fail to mobilise audiences and instead will leave them feeling helpless to anything, or uninterested in the subject matter (2009, p.70).

On the whole, the analysis of these comments suggests that commenters on Facebook are supportive of the NSC's legitimisation claims. This image has reached a large audience, and this audience has engaged with the image through 101569 likes, 750 comments, and 21813 shares. Further to this, the content of the NSC's Facebook Page has received 176802 likes, 4304 comments, and 53467 during the period of analysis. The comments analysed above show that people are largely consenting to the NSC's

legitimation claims. This is demonstrated through 181 comments that speak of praying and religious support for the NSC, as well as 130 other comments that show support for the NSC and the Syrian revolution more broadly. 39 comments place the image in the context of other conflicts, and 35 comments reflect on the global indifference seemingly shown to the Syrian conflict. 37 comments are critical of the NSC, and therefore, whilst not everyone supports the NSC's legitimation claims, a large proportion of those who do comment on this image approve of the NSC and what they do.

By paying attention to 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.720) we can begin to understand the mechanism by which legitimation claims are consented to by audiences. Doing so also helps us to explore how the context of production is connected with the context of reception as we can see a resonance between the two sites of interest. In the previous chapter and in my discussion of the context of production I demonstrated how the NSC's legitimation claims accentuate negative emotions such as sadness and pity for Syrian people, and anger and disgust for the Assad regime. The above comments show that the audience are emotionally invested in feeling such emotions, and it is sadness and anger that serve as the 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.736) that give these legitimation claims their appeal. Subsequently, the legitimation claims of the NSC do not have an impact simply because of their content, but because of how audiences are emotionally connected to that content through feelings of sadness and anger (Solomon, 2014; Laclau, 2005). People feel pity for the Syrian people, and their feelings of anger are directed towards the Assad regime and the international community. This contrasts with the previous case study that found that the audience of the British Army's Facebook Page feel

emotions towards the Army itself rather than the people they are protecting or fighting. Further research is needed in order to unpack and compare in more detail the affective responses of audiences to the legitimisation claims made by political actors such as those studied here..

7.3 Conclusion

The production of the NSC's legitimisation claims is a complex process driven by various internal and external factors. Similarly, audiences interpret the NSC's legitimisation claims in a plethora of ways, and undoubtedly these interpretations are shaped by a variety of other factors. This chapter has illuminated some of the issues involved in the contexts of production and audience interpretation of the NSC's legitimisation claims. I have done so by drawing upon twelve interviews with individuals involved in the NSC's media production, whilst also analysing 545 comments made by individuals on the NSC's Facebook Page.

With regards to the context of production I found that individuals believed that social media has provided a space for the Syrian opposition to organise protests, to communicate with other Syrians, and to inform external audiences about the revolution and conflict. Social media enabled the NSC to claim legitimacy for the use of force by projecting narratives to audiences based inside and outside of Syria. Interviewees were adamant that social media was one of the most important tools available to the NSC, alongside eyewitness media, or what most interviewees referred to as 'citizen journalism'. In using media produced by citizen journalists on social media, the NSC aims to; 1) represent the voice of the Syrian people; 2) influence the Syrian general public; 3) influence 'western' governments and public opinion; 4)

influence international media outlets; 5) influence human rights organisations. These aims demonstrate that the politics of legitimisation are at the heart of what the NSC does, and they also provide an insight into what the NSC is trying to do through their projection of narratives. According to interviewees, it was important to tell stories that spoke of; 1) the revolution for freedom; 2) the war crimes of the Assad regime; 3) how the Assad regime is responsible for the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS in Syria; 4) the credibility and authority of the NSC; 5) the military success of the FSA. Most importantly, the telling of these narratives was deemed to be reliant on visual media, because images were understood to have a supposedly objective relationship with truth whilst also being more popular with online audiences.

In addition to this, the second section of this chapter explored how people interpreted and felt emotions about the NSC's legitimisation claims by analysing 545 Facebook comments. The analysis of these comments suggested that people on Facebook are largely supportive of the NSC's legitimisation claims. The most prominent theme amongst the comments concerned religion and praying for Syria. Through these comments people were supportive of the NSC and held them in their prayers. Other people showed support without mentioning prayer or religion, whilst others reflected on the high level of global indifference that was seemingly shown by people and states across the world. These comments reaffirmed the NSC's narrative, and suggested support for their legitimisation claims. There were also comments made that were critical of the NSC, and these implied that whilst the majority of people supported the NSC's legitimisation claims, there were several individuals who did not, and who were openly challenging their narratives. On the whole, the Facebook audience were emotionally invested in the legitimisation claims. They felt pity for

Syrians and they felt anger for the Assad regime, and this is by and large how the producers of these legitimisation claims wanted them to feel. This ‘affective investment’ (Solomon, 2014, p.720) connects the contexts of production and reception as the audience were attracted to the identity presented to them and they subsequently consented to the NSC’s legitimisation claims.

This chapter has contributed to discussions surrounding the role of eyewitness media and ‘citizen journalism’ in Syria by actually talking to those who are involved in the everyday practice of making and circulating eyewitness media content. Further to this, I have also contributed by looking at how people have interpreted and responded to this content. Doing so, I have supported the theoretical arguments in earlier chapters and drawn attention to how the NSC’s politics of legitimisation is shaped by the context of production, whilst also drawing attention to what themes arise in the context of interpretation.

Understanding such matters is imperative because legitimisation processes are central to shaping the conditions of possibility - what actors can and cannot do - in political and military terms. Whilst the content of narratives and images - the substances that make up legitimisation claims - are undoubtedly important here, it is vital to understand how these are produced and interpreted. This is because a lot goes in to producing, circulating and interpreting these legitimisation claims, and to focus on their content alone oversimplifies the process of legitimisation and ignores the serious work that literally shapes what they look like and how they are interpreted. To state that this is a matter of life or death seems somewhat hyperbolic, however those involved in the production of these legitimisation claims see it as so. Mariam Hamou noted that ‘we

only have this... ...We don't have the luxury of not doing a good job. We have to be on top of it. It's bigger than us. People are dying daily. It's pretty serious' (Interview with Hamou, 2015). Therefore in the context of the Syrian conflict there is a need to explore the politics of legitimation and the contexts of production and reception, and this chapter has gone some way in doing so in the case of the NSC.

Conclusion

We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine (Sontag, 2004, p.110).

This thesis has argued that visual media are fundamental to the ways in which political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force in the digital age. Such an argument is articulated in response to literatures on legitimacy and legitimation (Clark and Reus-Smit, 2007; Reus-Smit, 2007; Clark, 2007; Krebs, 2015a, 2015b), as well as that of narrative in global politics (Suganami, 1997; Campbell, 1998; Chan, 2003; Moore, 2010; Wibben, 2010; Miskimmon et al., 2013), that do not provide a satisfactory account of how claims to legitimacy, or narratives about global politics more generally, are articulated through visual media. This thesis has addressed this gap and I have contributed to the discipline of International Relations by theorising the role of visual media in processes of legitimation and empirically exploring how such a visual politics of legitimation is prominent in the cases of the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. This conclusion draws together the previous chapters of this thesis and begins with a reinstatement of the theoretical framework presented earlier. I then discuss findings across both of the case studies in order to demonstrate the utility of my theoretical approach as well as the central conclusions concerning the visual politics of legitimation. I then outline the core contributions of this thesis and I discuss directions for future research on the visual politics of legitimation before finally concluding.

Reinstating the theoretical framework: The visual politics of legitimation

The theoretical framework put forward in the first three chapters of this thesis suggests that visual media are important in global politics as they are a central aspect of contemporary communication, they seemingly naturalise what they show as being the truth, and they have political effects by shaping the conditions of possibility for what can be thought, said, and done. Indeed, in both case studies visual media account for approximately half of the content published by both political actors, and this visual media therefore needs to be taken into account when studying the politics of legitimation in the digital age. These images also served to naturalise their content as being truthful, where in the case of the British Army war was depicted as clean, humanitarian, and hygienic, and in the case of the NSC, war was represented as brutal, violent, and the cause of much suffering. Both of these representations have political effects as they are constitutive of legitimation claims whereby each political actor claims that they are legitimately using force.

In Chapter 1, I also critiqued the ways in which the aesthetic turn has approached images by drawing upon the field of visual culture to suggest that; first, the contexts of image production and reception are as important as the content of images themselves. Second, there is a need to look beyond iconic images and to account for images published in places other than print media. Third, in the digital age we need to account for visual multimedia, rather than studying still or moving images separately. Taking these points in reverse order, the mix of still and moving images observed in both case studies clearly demonstrates that an approach to one or the other type of media would fail to account for all of the media content published. In addition to this, the majority of the images studied were not iconic, and they were not published in

print. Instead, they were vernacular, and did not reach the type of iconic status of other images that have been the focus of IR scholars, such as those of Abu Gharib (Hansen, 2011) and 9/11 (Möller, 2007). Social media images are ‘the new dominant cultural visual form of the 2010s’ (Hochman, 2014, p.1) and have often been ignored in IR, yet both of these case studies, and the simple fact that the respective political actors are engaged in the production and circulation of social media images, highlights how they are an important site of study for scholars of global politics.

By conducting semi-structured interviews, as well as analysing Facebook comments in each case study, I also demonstrated how the contexts of production and reception are important. In both cases, the interview data provided an insight into ‘what practitioners do’ (Adler and Pouliot, 2011, p.1), and illuminated what processes, ideas, aims and intentions are involved in the production of visual media; all of which matter when we study visual global politics (Bleiker, 2015; Rose, 2014). Further to this, the analysis of Facebook comments demonstrated how audiences interpreted and felt about the visual media content that they viewed. This is again important if we are to understand the political significance of images (Bleiker, 2015; Rose, 2014).

Building upon recent work on legitimation as a linguistic (Beetham, 1991; Reus-Smit, 2007) and narrative process (Goddard and Krebs, 2015; Krebs, 2015a, 2015b), I argued that we need to pay more attention to *how* narratives are projected in the contemporary media ecology where visual media are prominent. Chapter 3 thereby provided an original contribution to discussions of legitimacy and narrative by suggesting that the politics of legitimation are not only reliant on narrative, but are increasingly reliant on visual media. Here I demonstrated that whilst scholars in IR’s

visual turn often suggest that images are important for the production of legitimacy, they do not provide an account of why or how this is so. By drawing together the insights of the literatures on legitimacy, narrative, and visual politics, this chapter addressed this gap, and provided a framework for analysing the visual politics of legitimation. Such an approach is required because visual media work in different ways to language, and these specificities need to be explored if we want to gain a thorough understanding of how actors claim legitimacy for the use of force.

The framework presented in Chapter 3 first recognises that legitimation takes place through narratives, and narratives are often told through visual media. Subsequently we need to explore how political actors use images to project narratives in order to claim legitimacy for their use of force. Second, when visual media are used to claim legitimacy they cannot be reduced to their accompanying captions and written words, or to dialogue and spoken words that feature alongside them. Consequently we require visual research methods that are attuned to analysing the content of images. When we study the content of visual legitimation claims, we need to analyse the content of images in terms of actions, setting, characters, agency, and purpose, as well as exploring how these aspects are structured through emplotment. Further to this, technical aspects such as composition, framing, depth of field and focus, lighting and colour, and camera positioning also need to be taken into account. When researching the visual politics of legitimation we need to consider how this content relates to the three dimensions of legitimacy outlined in Chapter 2. These dimensions are: 1) a conformity with legal rules, 2) justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, values and norms, and 3) seeking consent from/consent being expressed by others.

In accordance with a critical visual methodology, when researching the visual politics of legitimation we also need to explore the contexts of image production and reception. The context of image production is worthy of study due to the complex processes involved in the production and the articulation of visual legitimacy claims. According to Stuart Hall, when studying the context of production, or what he calls encoding, we need to account for 'knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, [and] assumptions about the audience' (Hall, 2005, p.118). The articulation of legitimacy claims is not arbitrary, and we need to analyse the factors that shape how political actors create and use images to claim legitimacy for their use of force.

In addition to the content of images, and the context of their production, the context of image reception is important because the acceptance or rejection of legitimacy claims is fundamental in determining what political actors can actually do. As Stuart Hall argues, images only have effects when they are meaningfully interpreted by audiences (Hall, 2005 [1973], p.119). Therefore, when studying the visual politics of legitimation we need to analyse how audiences interpret and engage with images. In doing so we need to pay attention to the discursive, but also the emotive responses of audiences as the consent to legitimation claims can only be understood by recognising 'the affective investments by audiences in narrative identities constructed by [legitimation claims]' (Solomon, 2014, p.737). By taking into account the content of images, the context of production, and the context of reception, the overall theoretical contribution of this thesis is an analytical framework that addresses the role of visual media in legitimation processes.

The visual politics of legitimation: Findings across cases

The theoretical framework for researching the visual politics of legitimation was explored through two empirical case studies focusing on the ways in which actors involved in conflicts have used images on digital social media sites to claim legitimacy for their use of force. These case studies serve as examples to draw out the theoretical arguments, and they both provide original empirical contributions to knowledge in their own right. The first case study focused on the British Army, and the second case study explored the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. As we saw in each case study, these actors claim legitimacy for the use of force in radically different ways. On the one hand, the British Army represents warfare as clean, where the actual use of force, and the enemy is never shown. On the other hand, the NSC represents warfare as violent and the cause of suffering, where the use of force, attributed to the enemy of the Assad regime, is made highly visible. This section reflects on how the visual politics of legitimation work by discussing the findings across both of the case studies, drawing attention to major similarities and differences. I begin by discussing the radically different visual representations of the use of force. I then examine the context of production and the different institutional constraints on each political actor, before then considering the context of reception and the ‘affective investments’ (Solomon, 2014, p.722) made by audiences.

Visually representing the use of force

This thesis set out to ask how do political actors use visual media to claim legitimacy for the use of force? And in answering this through the analysis of two case studies, I found that the visual legitimation claims presented by the political actors studied stand

in stark contrast. Only 2% of the British Army's visual Facebook content showed the use of force, whereas 53% of the NSC's visual Facebook content depicted the use of force and the suffering caused by armed violence. In this sense, the British Army claims legitimacy for their use of force by representing warfare as 'clean', where the use of force is rarely made visible. The NSC, however, claims legitimacy for their use of force by making violence and suffering highly visible. These two visual representations stand diametrically opposed, and such different visual representations suggest that there is no singular way of representing warfare in order to claim legitimacy for the use of force. The findings of this thesis do however suggest that two contrasting visualities of warfare are important for the visual politics of legitimation as they appear to resonate with how other political actors use visual media. The British Army's focus on activities other than combat is exemplary of a visuality of 'clean war' (Stahl, 2010) where conflict is seen as bloodless and humanitarian. This finding has also been noted in other studies into the use of visual media by 'western' military forces such as the USA (Forte, 2014) and Israel (Stein and Kunstman). In contrast to this, the NSC's visuality focused on 'the pain of others' (Sontag, 2004) and emphasised how warfare was the source of suffering, injury and death. This visual representation echoes how NGO's use visual media (Barnett and Weiss, 2013, p.119) as well as how other political actors involved in revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East use images (Khatib, 2012).

These two framings of war are significant for the visual politics of legitimation as they demonstrate that the focus on agents (who is in the image), activities (what is being done in the image), and equipment/setting (what else is in the image) is radically different across cases. In terms of agents featured in the British Army's

images of combat, 65% of the images included British soldiers, 29% featured Afghan security forces, and only 6% had Afghan civilians in them. None of the images represented the enemy of the Taliban. In contrast, 65% of the NSC's images of war featured civilian Syrian adults and children, 7% contained dead Syrian adults and children, 2% depicted NSC politicians, and 3% had FSA soldiers in them. 7% of the images featured Bashar Assad. Here, the British Army focused on their soldiers who were responsible for using force against an unseen enemy. In contrast, the NSC placed the emphasis on Syrian civilians who had suffered in response to the use of force perpetrated by the Assad regime. In terms of activities, the British Army focused on soldiers patrolling and aiming weapons, whereas the NSC featured Syrians screaming and crying as well as carrying children and belongings. The equipment featured was also very different, with the British Army's images containing weapons and military vehicles – the equipment used to enact force. In contrast, the NSC's images featured rubble and damaged buildings, refugee camps, and medical equipment – the equipment associated with the effects of force being used.

The intersections of these visual representations with the three dimensions of legitimacy provide further insight into the visual politics of legitimation. On the one hand, the British Army's visual legitimation claims imply a conformity with legal rules as the focus is on British soldiers who use high technology in order to direct force against an unseen enemy. This is justifiable in terms of the shared belief that military actors such as the British Army observe the laws of armed combat, using force only when necessary, and when they do so they do not cause harm to civilians. The NSC's visual legitimation claims operate in a different way. They emphasise how their enemy does not conform with legal rules, as they make the victims of Assad's

violence highly visible. In turn, this visual representation suggests that the NSC's use of force is justifiable in terms of the shared belief and norm that states should not harm their own civilians. These contrasting ways of visually claiming legitimacy are significant as they demonstrate that one way of claiming legitimacy for the use of force is to visually emphasise the legitimacy of oneself and ones actions, and another way is to visually emphasise the illegitimacy of ones enemies, their actions and the effects of their actions. In order to provide further insight into the reasons for such different visual legitimisation claims it is worth considering the context of production and the institutional constraints of both political actors studied in this thesis.

The context of production: Institutional constraints

Another central difference across the case studies concerns the context of production and the institutional constraints placed on the political actors. The British Army is a longstanding military force that serves a liberal democratic state actor that is a member of the United Nations Security Council. The NSC is a new political actor that represents a fledgling, revolutionary non-state coalition and leads an armed resistance against an authoritarian state. These two different contexts of production shape the visual legitimisation claims made. As the historical discussion of the British Army's use of visual media in Chapter 4 demonstrated, they are a political actor that has long used visual media to represent warfare as 'clean' (see for example Sontag, 2004) in order to claim legitimacy for their use of force. The NSC on the other hand has arisen in the context of a revolution where Syrian civilians documented atrocities and shared graphic images online in order to claim legitimacy for their revolution and armed struggle. In this case, the British Army is constrained by its institutional context, where a history of professionalism, credibility and a desire to attract support are all

factors that shape how they claim legitimacy for the use of force. Being such a new political actor, the NSC is not hampered by such historical factors. Whereas the British Army has doctrine that guides how it produces media content, the NSC has no such limitations and thus has more freedom in producing media content. The semi-structured interviews with the producers of each political actors media content provide further insights into the institutional constraints on each actor.

In the British Army case study, interviewees sought to use social media to *inform* audiences about what the British Army is and what it does. Those interviewed in the NSC case study instead suggested that they used social media in order to *influence* audiences to support the NSC. This difference stems from the British Army's desire to distance itself from the notion of propaganda, which has negative connotations in contemporary 'Western' democratic societies (Taylor, 1999). The NSC's openness about their desire to influence audiences was driven by their desire to counter the propaganda of the Assad regime. These factors influence each actor's visual politics of legitimation as the desire to *inform* audiences led the British Army to focus on making their use of force look professional, high-tech, and hygienic. The NSC's desire to *influence* led them to visually represent the use of force in a more emotional, brutal, and tragic way. This intersects with the third dimension of legitimacy – the seeking of consent. For the British Army, interviewees felt that they could gain consent for their legitimation claims by presenting informative narratives that concerned professionalism, had a sense of adventure, legitimised the Army as a public institution that spends taxpayers money, implied a sense of combat readiness, and attracted recruits. The NSC sought to influence audiences to consent to their legitimation claims by telling stories about the revolution for freedom, the war crimes

of the Assad regime, the Assad regime's responsibility for the rise of extremist groups, the credibility and authority of the NSC, and the military success of the FSA. These different types of legitimation claims that are driven by a desire to provide information on the one hand, and a desire to appeal to emotion on the other, suggest that the context of production and institutional constraints are important as they affect how political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force.

As we saw in the interviews in the British Army case study, interviewees felt that they couldn't produce emotive content that might be seen as an overt attempt to influence people as audiences would 'see through it', and reject the legitimation claim. In the NSC case study, interviewees were adamant that whilst they also had to present 'the facts', they had to present these in an emotive way in order to influence audiences to consent to their legitimation claims. The implications of this for the visual politics of legitimation are that it is important to study the context of production, not to reveal 'true' intentions, but instead to understand how a political actor's institutional constraints, history, understandings of self-identity and the identities of others, as well as assumptions about the audience, shape the content of visual legitimation claims. The major finding across the cases, here is that the British Army's institutional context as an Army of a liberal democratic state led to it wanting to inform audiences, and therefore it produced visual legitimation claims that sought consent by making the Army look professional, and making the use of force look 'clean'. In contrast, the NSC, as a revolutionary non-state actor, wanted to influence audiences by producing visual legitimation claims that sought consent from audiences by appealing to emotions and making the Assad regime's use of force look like a tragic injustice and cause of much suffering and death. Beyond these major differences, one similarity

stands out, and that concerns how both political actors felt that they needed to use visual media to communicate their legitimization claims. Both did so because they believed that audiences were part of an increasingly visual culture. So as to make sense of the effectiveness of these visual legitimization claims, I now turn to a discussion of the context of reception, paying particular attention to how legitimization operates through the ‘affective investments’ (Solomon, 2014, p.722) made by the audiences in each case study.

The context of reception: Affective investments

One major finding and difference across the cases concerns the role of emotions and ‘affective investments’ (Solomon, 2014, p.720) made by audiences in the legitimization claims presented to them by each political actor. In the British Army case study we saw that the narratives and images invoked positive emotions such as pride in the soldiers, excitement in the high tech weaponry of war fighting, and joy in playing sports, training and adventuring around the world. The overwhelming focus of the images was on British Soldiers who do good deeds, and this implied an ‘affective investment in and an attachment to a narrative that one must remain “good” and not “evil”’ (Solomon, 2014, p.736). This narrative was appealing to audiences who spoke about their pride, care and love of soldiers whilst also discussing the excitement of high tech weaponry. Pride and excitement were found to be the two major ‘affective investments’ (Solomon, 2014, p.736) that gave the British Army’s legitimization claims their appeal. These emotions linked the sites of encoding and decoding and demonstrate that legitimization works when narratives and images appeal to the positive emotions of audience members.

In contrast, the NSC invoked emotions such as sadness and pity for Syrian people, as well as anger and disgust for the Assad regime and their actions. The focus of the NSC's images were Syrian victims of war and Bashar al-Assad, and this again invited the audience to commit to a narrative of good versus evil. However, here it was the evil of the enemy that was emphasised over the good qualities of the NSC. This narrative appealed to audiences who showed their sadness for the Syrian people and their anger at the Assad regime. These two emotions were found to be the important 'affective investments' (Solomon, 2014, p.736) that gave the NSC's legitimisation claims their appeal. However they also implied a sense of helplessness, as people felt that they were unable to do anything to support the Syrian people. Nevertheless, these emotions connected the sites of encoding and decoding and they demonstrate that legitimisation also works when narratives and images appeal to the negative emotions of audience members.

As Ty Solomon has recently suggested:

words [and images] alone often cannot carry the power that they often have — the force of affect is needed to explain how words [and images] resonate with audiences and have political effects beyond their mere verbal [and visual] utterance as such (2014, p.729).

Therefore, these emotions felt by the audiences help us to understand the mechanism by which legitimisation claims are consented to. As we saw in the British Army case study, there is little evidence that people are critical of, or dissenting to the legitimisation claims made by the British Army on Facebook. The same can be said of

the NSC, where although there were a higher number of dissenting comments, most commenters felt supportive of the NSC. With regard to the politics of legitimation this suggests that legitimation claims can be successful when they rely upon *positive feelings towards the legitimating actor* and their use of force (as we saw in the British Army case study). But, legitimation claims can also succeed when they rely upon audiences investing in negative emotions such as sadness towards the victims of conflict and anger *towards the enemy of the legitimating actor*. As I discussed earlier, there are limitations with studying Facebook comments as evidence of legitimation, especially when paying attention to affect and emotions. Nevertheless, this thesis has demonstrated how such factors are important, and there is a need for further research to explore the site of audience interpretation and emotion in more depth.

Contribution

This thesis has made several contributions to the discipline of International Relations. First and foremost, I have provided a theoretical framework for analysing the visual politics of legitimation. The primary contribution here is the bringing together of conceptual insights from various literatures within and outside of the discipline of IR. Despite the increased visibility of global politics in an age of digital media, literatures on both legitimacy and legitimation, and that of narrative in global politics, have only had limited engagement with visual media. Contra to this, literature on the role of visual media in global politics has paid lip service to legitimacy and legitimation, but has never provided a sufficient framework for understanding how images are involved in processes of legitimation. By drawing upon these bodies of work, alongside that of visual culture, I have provided a framework for understanding the visual politics of legitimation.

In articulating this conceptual framework I have provided the first detailed empirical analysis of how the visual politics of legitimation plays out in two case studies. Doing so not only empirically grounds the theoretical arguments, but also provides an original insight into the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Whilst some scholars have explored the British Army's media operations in a general sense (Maltby, 2012a, 2012b; Maltby et al., 2015), this thesis is the first detailed study of the content they upload to Facebook. Likewise, whilst other scholars have touched upon the importance of narratives and images to the Syrian revolution (Rich, 2011; Stanton, 2012; Rich and Shamseddine, 2014; Halasa et al., 2014) this is the first study of how the NSC - as the internationally recognised representative of the Syrian opposition - has used narratives and images on Facebook. These empirical cases speak to broader discussions surrounding military media management and citizen journalism, providing empirical insights into how war is represented by each actor.

In choosing social media as the site of analysis, I have contributed by analysing a new site of visibility that has been overlooked by the visual turn in IR. As a discipline, International Relations has been slow to recognise the importance of digital social media technologies (Carpenter and Drezner, 2010), and the work on visual global politics has been no different. Most analyses have focused on print media and iconic images, and have failed to account for the almost ubiquitous, vernacular role of visual media online. Instead of looking at iconic images in print media, I have analysed almost 1000 images that have been circulated on social media. By discussing the implications of theorising and analysing digital visual media I have contributed to addressing a blind spot in IR's visual turn.

To this end, each case study also draws upon interviews with individuals involved in producing or circulating the content analysed in the first chapters of each case study. These interviews provide a first hand insight into the underlying dynamics that shape how each actor produces their claims to legitimacy. Further to this, each case study involves an analysis of Facebook comments as a way to explore how audiences interpret and feel emotions towards the legitimisation claims made by each actor. Whilst both of these factors provide an original contribution in offering an analysis of previously unstudied source material, they also contribute by providing a more holistic approach to images than has been afforded by most scholars in IR's visual turn.

Despite suggestions that 'it makes no sense whatsoever to make claims about power and security based on the study of *either* media, or security policy, or the everyday life of audiences-cum-citizens' (Gillespie et al., 2010, p.273 emphasis in original), it seems that most of the literature on images and global politics is concerned with the content of images. Through the case studies I have gone beyond simply looking at the content of narratives and images. By drawing upon Stuart Hall's notion of encoding/decoding (2005) I have offered an account of how legitimisation claims have been produced, as well as how they have been interpreted, alongside analysing their content. In doing so I have heeded calls to make sense of images and their role in global politics by utilising different methods at different locales (O'Loughlin, 2011; Bleiker, 2015) and I have demonstrated how the contexts of production and interpretation are important in the visual politics of legitimisation. This is because the content of legitimisation claims is shaped by a variety of factors during their

production, and the audience interpretation and response to legitimization claims is crucial in attributing legitimacy to the actions of political actors.

Future research on the visual politics of legitimization

Despite these contributions, this research inevitably has a number of limitations and there is much scope for future research. First, I only focus on two empirical case studies that have been analysed during a limited time frame and with limited resources. I have not aimed to make generalizable claims about how political actors always claim legitimacy for the use of force, and whilst the two case studies are illustrative of the visual politics of legitimization in these specific contexts, there is a need for more research into how the visual politics of legitimization plays out with other actors and in different contexts. I have focused on a state actor and an actor that claims to represent a state, and of course there are many more types of actors involved in global politics. Explorations of how actors such as NGO's, terrorist groups, political leaders, arms companies, private military companies, media actors, and producers of popular cultural media (such as fictional cinema and television) use visual media to claim legitimacy for the use of force would no doubt provide important insights.

Further to this, there is scope for the use of other research methods when researching the visual politics of legitimization. An ethnography or participant observation of the daily lives of those who produce images would no doubt be illuminating, however in the context of both case studies this was not plausible within the confines of this project. Similar methods could also be used to make sense of the context of reception, as could surveys, focus groups and photo-elicitation methods. However, I chose to

analyse Facebook comments as it provides an insight into how an actual audience have interpreted and responded to actual legitimisation claims. Even so, the use of different methods to explore the visual politics of legitimisation would be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Related to this, in the context of the digital age there are several important issues that need to be taken into account, not only for studies of the visual politics of legitimisation, but for the discipline of IR more generally. First, we require a reflection on the importance of platforms such as Facebook and the ways in which they limit what researchers can actually do on them. Facebook is notoriously inaccessible to researchers who do not work for Facebook, and Twitter charges large amounts for access to historical tweets. Therefore, despite there being various exciting digital data analysis tools (see Ampofo et al, 2013), the content of these platforms is often out of reach for most researchers. Further to this, most social media platforms keep their algorithms secret so it is difficult for anyone to say exactly who sees content, or how and why it is made visible to them. Finally, the digital realm requires digital methods and it requires scholars with the right kinds of expertise to be able to make sense of these. This expertise is often not taught in IR departments. Therefore future research into the visual politics of legitimisation in the digital age requires truly interdisciplinary skills and a further consideration on the role of algorithms and what some have called ‘algorithmic power’ (Bucher, 2012) as well as ‘the politics of platforms’ (Gillespie, 2010) that inevitably play a role in the visual politics of legitimisation.

Ultimately, this thesis has contributed towards a conceptual understanding of the role of visual media in processes of legitimisation, and I have explored this in the context of

two case studies focusing on the British Army and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Whilst Susan Sontag was doubtful that images of conflict could truly convey the realities of war and was therefore adamant that only those who have experienced war first-hand could talk about it (Sontag, 2004; See also Chan, 2010), this thesis has demonstrated that the visual politics of legitimisation are fundamental to contemporary conflicts, and as viewers of these images we have a responsibility to understand them and their political significance. Therefore, this research presents the beginning of a theoretically informed and empirically driven discussion of the visual politics of legitimisation.

Appendix 1: The British Army

Figure 1: Type of post on Facebook.com/British Army

(28th October 2009 – 1st August 2012)

Type of Post	Quantity of posts	Percentage of all posts
Link to Army website	611	38.92%
Gallery of 2 or more photographs	235	14.97%
Photograph	182	11.59%
Link to Army blog	176	11.21%
Link to YouTube	62	3.95%
Video	59	3.76%
Link to other Army Facebook Page	48	3.06%
Link to media outlet	40	2.55%
Status: statement	39	2.48%
Link to Flickr	23	1.46%
Link to miscellaneous website	23	1.46%
Link to Army Audioboo	15	0.96%
Link to British Forces Broadcasting Service	13	0.83%
Status: event	13	0.83%
Link to Armed Forces Day Website	6	0.38%
Link to the Ministry of Defence Website	6	0.38%
Share of Notes	5	0.32%
Status: Question	4	0.25%
Link to Vimeo	3	0.19%
Painting	2	0.13%
Infographic	2	0.13%
Link to Army Twitter	1	0.06%
Link to Web Survey	1	0.06%
Joins Facebook	1	0.06%

Figure 2: The main narrative theme of all content (text, image, audio) published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 1st August 2012)

Main Narrative Theme	Quantity of Posts	Percentage of all posts
Operations in Afghanistan	205	13.06%
Training	183	11.66%
Sport	132	8.41%
Ceremony	94	5.99%
Medals and Awards	88	5.61%
Army Jobs/Careers	83	5.29%
Army NSCial Media	80	5.10%
Music	61	3.89%
Army Event	57	3.63%
Return from Afghanistan	55	3.50%
Combat Operation	54	3.44%
Charity Fundraising	50	3.18%
Equipment in Afghan	43	2.74%
Deployment	34	2.17%
Army Photographers	33	2.10%
Remembrance	32	2.04%
TV Programmes	32	2.04%
Injured Troops Rehabilitation	31	1.97%
Armed Forces Day	30	1.91%
Afghan Forces Capability	28	1.78%
Civil Assistance in UK	26	1.66%
Civil Assistance: Afghan	25	1.59%
Royal Family	23	1.46%
Patrol in Afghanistan	14	0.89%
Army Benefits	11	0.70%
Equipment	10	0.64%
Seasonal Celebration:	7	0.45%
Army Changes (SDSR)	4	0.25%
Military History	4	0.25%
Online Safety	4	0.25%
Radio Programmes	4	0.25%
IED Explosion	3	0.19%
Offer/Competition	3	0.19%
Soldier Welfare	3	0.19%
Civil Assistance: Foreign	2	0.13%
Death of a Soldier	2	0.13%
Defence Spending	2	0.13%
Public Information	2	0.13%
World Event	2	0.13%
No Narrative Theme	2	0.13%
Army Diversity	1	0.06%
Bloody Sunday Report	1	0.06%
Civil-Military Relations	1	0.06%
Information for Soldiers	1	0.06%
Iraq Forces Capability	1	0.06%
Leaving the Army	1	0.06%
Miss World Competition	1	0.06%
Other Forces: Navy & RAF	1	0.06%
Peacekeeping with UN	1	0.06%
PR Award	1	0.06%
Repatriation	1	0.06%
War Artists	1	0.06%

Figure 3: Main narrative theme of all visual content published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 1st August 2012)

Main Narrative Theme	Quantity of visual posts	Percentage of all visual posts
Sport	72	15.00%
Training	66	13.75%
Operations in Afghanistan	56	11.67%
Ceremony	51	10.63%
Medals and Awards	24	5.00%
Army Event	24	5.00%
Music	21	4.38%
Return from Afghanistan	20	4.17%
Injured Troops Rehabilitation	18	3.75%
Charity Fundraising	18	3.75%
Remembrance	15	3.13%
Armed Forces Day	13	2.71%
Equipment in Afghan	11	2.29%
Combat Operation	11	2.29%
Civil Assistance: Afghan	10	2.08%
Civil Assistance in UK	10	2.08%
Royal Family	7	1.46%
Seasonal Celebration: Xmas	6	1.25%
Army Jobs/Careers	6	1.25%
Army Photographers	5	1.04%
Afghan Forces Capability	5	1.04%
Deployment	3	0.63%
TV Programmes	2	0.42%
War Artists	1	0.21%
Soldier Welfare	1	0.21%
Patrol in Afghanistan	1	0.21%
Online Safety	1	0.21%
No Narrative (Cover photo)	1	0.21%
Equipment	1	0.21%

Figure 4: People in images of combat operations published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 31st August 2012)

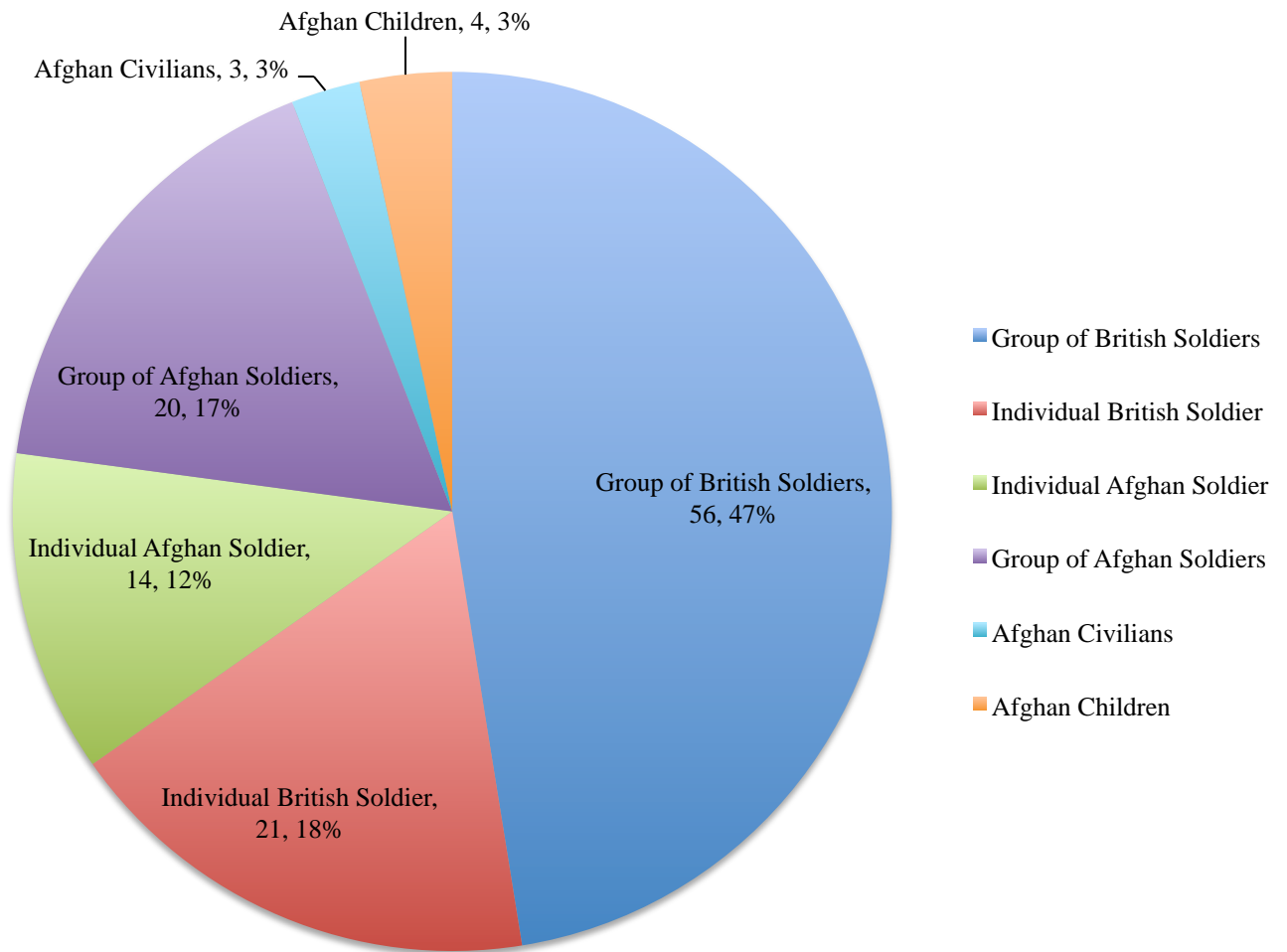


Figure 5: Activities depicted in images of combat operations published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 31st August 2012)

Activity	Number of images depicting the activity	Prominence as percentage of images
Patrolling	28	29%
Talking to afghan soldiers	12	13%
Crouching	9	9%
Aiming weapon	7	7%
Talking to Afghan civilians	4	4%
Posing: individual	4	4%
Using equipment: non weaponry	4	4%
Firing weapon	4	4%
Crouching next to wall	3	3%
Boarding helicopter	3	3%
Sat in helicopter	3	3%
Posing: group shot	3	3%
Sat on floor	3	3%
Mounted machine gun	2	2%
Waiting for helicopter	2	2%
Sleeping	2	2%
Driving	1	1%
Leaving Helicopter	1	1%
Running	1	1%

Figure 6: Equipment in images of combat operations published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 31st August 2012)

Equipment	Number of images featuring the equipment	Prominence as percentage of images
Weapons	45	54%
Armoured vehicles	16	19%
Helicopters	7	8%
Afghan police truck	5	6%
Radio	2	2%
Signalling smoke	1	1%
Pen and paper	1	1%
Convoy of trucks	1	1%
IEDS	1	1%
Bullet bandolier	1	1%
Afghan village	1	1%
Handcuffs	1	1%
Broken eyewear	1	1%

Figure 7: Top 10 posts in terms of audience engagement (total likes, comments and shares) published on Facebook.com/britisharmy (28th October 2009 – 1st August 2012)

Rank	Date	Type of Post	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Audience Engagement	Content	Main Narrative Theme
1	01/06/12	Photograph (Share)	20858	452	659	21969	Soldiers inside a tank having a tea party with union jack bunting	Operations in Afghanistan
2	16/07/12	Photograph	15192	1300	2095	18587	Female soldier sat on ground with back against HESCO barriers	Operations in Afghanistan
3	01/08/12	Photograph	14563	410	3145	18118	Soldiers cheering, waving union jack flags	Sport - Olympics
4	01/08/12	Photograph	11794	804	1321	13919	Female rowers	Sport - Olympics
5	30/06/12	Photograph (Share)	10824	321	2355	13500	Soldiers posing with AFD flag	Armed Forces Day
6	26/06/12	Photograph (Share)	10197	167	1923	12287	Soldiers posing with AFD flag outside wellington barracks	Armed Forces Day
7	06/08/12	Photograph	9426	516	896	10838	Soldiers sat in Afghan countryside	Operations in Afghanistan
8	07/08/12	Photograph	8813	366	1483	10662	Soldier feeding squirrel	Civil Assistance in UK
9	25/12/11	Gallery: 10	8383	1432	458	10273	Soldiers singing carols, wearing Christmas gear, in Santa's grotto	Operations in Afghanistan
10	17/07/12	Photograph	7703	913	1323	9939	Soldier with broken eyewear and cut on cheek posing for camera	Combat Operation

Figure 8: Content of comments on Operation OMID HAFT Images

Code of Comments	Frequency
Stay Safe & Good Luck	56
Discussing Weapons and Equipment	53
Great Job & Keep It Up	51
Quality of Images	34
Future Career	19
Fighting	17
Jokes and Humour	17
Family	14
Pride	14
Computer Games	13
God & Praying	11
Prestige & Army as The Best	11
Courage & Braveness	9
Critical	8
Former Soldier	7
Random	5
Reference to Other Media	5
Thanks	5
Current Soldier	4
Heroes	3
History	1

Appendix 2: The Syrian Opposition

Figure 1: Type of post on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en
(11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Type	Quantity of posts	Percentage of all posts (100.00%)
Photograph	434	36.97%
Status: Statement	245	20.87%
Link: Media Outlet	186	15.84%
Link: NSC YouTube	71	6.05%
Infographic	59	5.03%
Link: NSC Web	57	4.86%
Link: Miscellaneous ⁴⁷	33	2.81%
Status: Quote	18	1.53%
Gallery	17	1.45%
Link: US Government	14	1.19%
Event	13	1.11%
Cartoon	9	0.77%
Video	9	0.77%
Link: NGO	8	0.68%
Joins Facebook	1	0.09%

⁴⁷ Miscellaneous refers to 22 websites that were linked to in three or less Facebook posts. Such websites include the NSC's twitter page, the UN website, StopAssad.com, Flickr and Google+.

Figure 2: The main narrative theme of all content (text, image, audio) published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Main Narrative Theme	Quantity of Posts	Percentage of all posts	Quantity of Posts (for broad themes)	Percentage of all posts (for broad themes)
War and Suffering			549	46.80%
Regime War Crimes	250	21.31%		
Syrian Refugees	80	6.82%		
Humanitarian Crisis in Syria	71	6.05%		
Chemical Weapons	63	5.37%		
FSA Achievements	18	1.53%		
Threat of ISIS and Regime	16	1.36%		
Arming of Rebels	13	1.11%		
Violence Against Women	12	1.02%		
Destruction of Landmarks	12	1.02%		
FSA fighting Assad regime	5	0.43%		
Homs Prison Hunger Strike	3	0.26%		
Death	1	0.09%		
Field Hospital	1	0.09%		
Fighting ISIS	1	0.09%		
FSA Fighting al Qaeda	1	0.09%		
Remembrance of FSA soldiers	1	0.09%		
Turkish Border Attack	1	0.09%		
International Support			160	13.64%
US Support of NSC	62	5.29%		
International Support for NSC	32	2.73%		
UN Support of NSC	9	0.77%		
Arab League Meeting	6	0.51%		
Celebrity support for NSC	5	0.43%		
NSC Meeting G8	2	0.17%		
NSC US Offices	2	0.17%		
EU ending of Oil Embargo	1	0.09%		
International Day of Peace	1	0.09%		
NGO Report	1	0.09%		
NSC Delegation in US	1	0.09%		
NSC Meeting with UNSC	1	0.09%		
NSC Thanking Germany	1	0.09%		
Syrian relations with Turkish People	1	0.09%		
US Denying coordination with Assad	1	0.09%		
Regional Support for NSC	17	1.45%		
NSC Delegation at UN	12	1.02%		
Friends of Syria Conference	2	0.17%		
NSC Embassy Opening	3	0.26%		

Request for Help/Action			119	10.14%
Demands to International Community	39	3.32%		
Request for Help from Public	36	3.07%		
NSC Social Media	25	2.13%		
International Inaction	10	0.85%		
Charity Campaign	2	0.17%		
NSC Request to UN	2	0.17%		
Message to Obama	1	0.09%		
No Fly Zone in Syria	1	0.09%		
NSC Response to UN	2	0.17%		
Syria Advocacy Day	1	0.09%		
Hope for Revolution and Future			85	7.25%
Hope for Victory/Freedom/Peace	32	2.73%		
Revolution	24	2.05%		
Anniversary of Syrian Independence	5	0.43%		
Islamic Celebration	4	0.34%		
Revolution Anniversary	4	0.34%		
Syrian Media Activists	4	0.34%		
Doctors Saving Syrian Lives	3	0.26%		
2004 Uprising	1	0.09%		
Christian Celebration	1	0.09%		
Festival of Martyrs	1	0.09%		
Global Day of Solidarity with Syrian Revolution	1	0.09%		
Kurdish New Year	1	0.09%		
Syrian Activists Protesting	1	0.09%		
Syrian Non-Violence Movement	1	0.09%		
Thanking activists, volunteers and others in Syrian Revolution	1	0.09%		
White Helmets	1	0.09%		
Capable Authoritative Actor			260	22.17%
Political Solution	31	2.64%		
NSC Leadership	25	2.13%		
NSC Media Appearance	24	2.05%		
Condemning ISIS	22	1.88%		
NSC Meeting	14	1.19%		
Regime Lies	10	0.85%		
Condemning Russian support of Regime	7	0.60%		
Condemning Terror Attacks	7	0.60%		
Removal of Assad	7	0.60%		
NSC Guiding Principles	7	0.60%		
Hezbollah in Syria	6	0.51%		

Training FSA	6	0.51%		
NSC Politicians Visit to Syria	5	0.43%		
Condemning Iran	4	0.34%		
Condemning Rebel Activity	4	0.34%		
Iranian Support for Regime	4	0.34%		
NSC/ACU Aid to Syria	4	0.34%		
FSA Respect of LOAC/ LoW	3	0.26%		
Iranian Support of Regime	3	0.26%		
Regime Corruption	3	0.26%		
NSC Meeting	3	0.26%		
Syrians in Egypt	3	0.26%		
Condemning Terror Attacks	2	0.17%		
Condemning Israel	2	0.17%		
Democratic Elections	2	0.17%		
Denial that Rebels are Jihadists	2	0.17%		
Disputing Media Claims about Rebels	2	0.17%		
Extremists Stealing Revolution	2	0.17%		
Geneva Conference	2	0.17%		
Logo	2	0.17%		
Regime as root cause of ISIS	2	0.17%		
Syrian Economy	2	0.17%		
Condemning Arab Lawyers Association	1	0.09%		
Condemning Chinese / Russian support of regime	1	0.09%		
Condemning UN	1	0.09%		
Condemning US	1	0.09%		
Condolences for Boston Bombing	1	0.09%		
Denial of Rebels being in video, assertion that it's Assad propaganda	1	0.09%		
Denouncing Regime Political Solution	1	0.09%		
Development of NSC	1	0.09%		
Dissolution of Supreme Military Council	1	0.09%		
Documentary Showing	1	0.09%		
Formation of Interim Government	1	0.09%		
Formation of Revolution Command Council	1	0.09%		
FSA support of other groups	1	0.09%		
Geneva II	1	0.09%		
Human Rights Award for LCC member	1	0.09%		
Interim Government	1	0.09%		
Islam and Unity between revolutionaries	1	0.09%		
Israel Attack Against Regime	1	0.09%		
Opposition Group Crimes	1	0.09%		
Regime Defection	1	0.09%		
Release of Political Prisoners	1	0.09%		

Shooting of Deah Barakat in North Carolina	1	0.09%		
NSC denial of paying lobbyists	1	0.09%		
NSC Forces Protecting UN Observers	1	0.09%		
NSC Goals	1	0.09%		
NSC Relations With FSA	1	0.09%		
NSC Support of Journalists	1	0.09%		
Statement about al Qaeda	1	0.09%		
Statement about Assad	1	0.09%		
Stating that photo of child between 2 graves is fake	1	0.09%		
Syrian blocking of UN Arms Treaty	1	0.09%		
Syria threats to Jordan	1	0.09%		
Syrian Electronic Army	1	0.09%		
Syrian Military	1	0.09%		
Ukraine	2	0.17%		
Warning to al-Nusra	1	0.09%		
Formation of First Army (Rebel Group)	1	0.09%		

Figure 3: The main narrative theme of all visual content published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Main Narrative Theme	Quantity of visual posts	Percentage of all visual posts	Quantity of visual posts (for broad themes)	Percentage of all visual posts (for broad themes)
War and Suffering			280	53.03%
Regime War Crimes	137	25.95%		
Syrian Refugees	52	9.85%		
Humanitarian Crisis in Syria	35	6.63%		
Chemical Weapons	17	3.22%		
FSA Achievements	12	2.27%		
Threat of ISIS and Regime	8	1.52%		
Violence Against Women	8	1.52%		
Destruction of Landmarks	4	0.76%		
Homs Prison Hunger Strike	3	0.57%		
Arming of Rebels	2	0.38%		
Remembrance of FSA soldiers	1	0.19%		
Death	1	0.19%		
International Support			59	11.17%
International Support for NSC	18	3.41%		
US Support of NSC	9	1.70%		
Regional Support for NSC	14	2.65%		
Arab League Meeting	2	0.38%		
NSC Delegation at UN	4	0.76%		
UN Support of NSC	4	0.76%		
Friends of Syria Conference	1	0.19%		
International Day of Peace	1	0.19%		
NSC Delegation in US	1	0.19%		
NSC Meeting G8	1	0.19%		
NSC Request to UN	1	0.19%		
NSC response to UN	1	0.19%		
NSC US Offices	1	0.19%		
Syrian relations with Turkish People	1	0.19%		
Request for Help/Action			32	6.06%
Demands to International Community	11	2.08%		
Request for Help from Public	10	1.89%		
International Inaction	6	1.14%		
Social Media	4	0.76%		
Message to Obama	1	0.19%		
Hope for Revolution and Future			54	10.23%
Hope for Victory/Freedom/Peace	22	4.17%		

Revolution	17	3.22%		
Doctors Saving Syrian Lives	3	0.57%		
Syrian Media Activists	4	0.76%		
Anniversary of Syrian Independence	2	0.38%		
Islamic Celebration	2	0.38%		
White Helmets	1	0.19%		
Christian Celebration	1	0.19%		
Revolution Anniversary	1	0.19%		
Syrian Activists Protesting	1	0.19%		
Capable Authoritative Actor			103	19.51%
Political Solution	21	3.98%		
NSC Meeting	8	1.52%		
Removal of Assad	7	1.33%		
Condemning ISIS	6	1.14%		
Regime Lies	5	0.95%		
NSC Leadership	5	0.95%		
Condemning Iran	4	0.76%		
Condemning Russian support of Regime	3	0.57%		
NSC Meeting	3	0.57%		
NSC Politicians Visit to Syria	3	0.57%		
Condemning Terror Attacks	2	0.38%		
Hezbollah in Syria	2	0.38%		
Logo	2	0.38%		
NSC Embassy Opening	2	0.38%		
NSC Guiding Principles	2	0.38%		
NSC Media Appearance	2	0.38%		
Training FSA	2	0.38%		
Syrian economy	2	0.38%		
Condemning Arab Lawyers Association	1	0.19%		
Condemning Chinese / Russian support of regime	1	0.19%		
Condemning Israel	1	0.19%		
Condemning Rebel Activity	1	0.19%		
Condemning Terror Attacks in Turkey	1	0.19%		
Condemning UN	1	0.19%		
Condemning US	1	0.19%		
Dissolution of Supreme Military Council	1	0.19%		
Documentary Showing	1	0.19%		
Extremists Stealing Revolution	1	0.19%		
Formation of First Army (Rebel Group)	1	0.19%		
Formation of Revolution Command Council	1	0.19%		
Iranian Support of Regime	1	0.19%		
Regime as root cause of ISIS	1	0.19%		
Shooting of Deah Barakat in North Carolina	1	0.19%		
NSC Goals	1	0.19%		

NSC/ACU Aid to Syria	1	0.19%		
Syrian Military	1	0.19%		
Thanking activists, volunteers and others in Syrian Revolution	1	0.19%		
Ukraine	1	0.19%		
US Denying coordination with Assad	1	0.19%		
Warning to al-Nusra	1	0.19%		

Figure 4: People in images of war and conflict published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

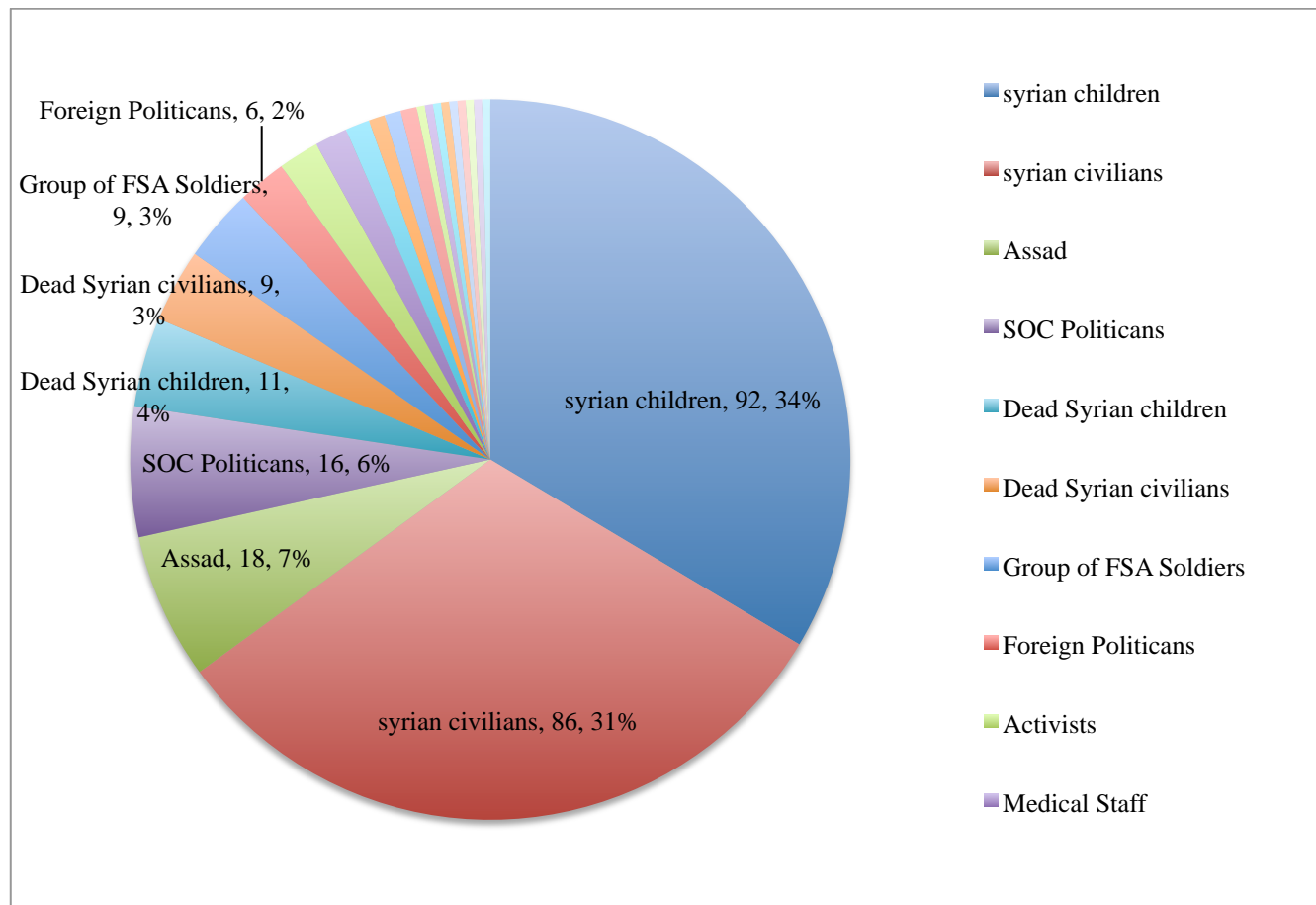


Figure 5: Most common activities depicted in images of war and conflict published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Activity	Number of images depicting the activity	Prominence as percentage of images of war
Crying / screaming	13	6.40%
Talking at press conference	13	6.40%
Carrying equipment/belongings	12	5.91%
Walking on rubble	11	5.42%
Carrying children	10	4.93%
Carrying dead child	9	4.43%
Funeral / mourning	8	3.94%
Adults lying dead	8	3.94%
Children lying dead	7	3.45%

Figure 6: Most common equipment depicted in images of war and conflict published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (11th November 2012 – 1st March 2015)

Equipment	Number of images featuring the equipment	Prominence as percentage of images of war
Rubble and damaged/demolished buildings	45	28.66%
Refugee camp tents	21	13.38%
Medical Equipment	10	6.37%
NSC flags	8	5.10%
Weapons	7	4.46%
Burnt out vehicles	5	3.18%
Rubble and burning buildings	4	2.55%

Figure 7: Top 10 posts in terms of audience engagement (total likes, comments and shares) published on Facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en (November 2012 - March 2015)

Rank	Date	Type of post	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Audience Engagement	Content	Main Narrative Theme
1	19/06/14	Photograph	101569	750	21813	124132	Computer graphic of football stadium with text '3.5 billion people watching #worldcup' above a photograph of burnt out car, smoke and 2 children crying and holding hands, with text 'anyone? #syria'	International Inaction
2	14/03/14	Link: Youtube	3358	3	1	3362	Thumbnail image that links to 'Be the revolution' video of protesters.	Revolution
3	07/08/14	Photograph	1259	29	1452	2740	Syrian family walking down dusty street through crowd, with text 'world shame, 170000 dead, 680000 injured, SYRIA'	International Inaction
4	08/04/14	Photograph	547	96	1596	2239	Assad's face, with text 'I have killed 150000, injured 600000, used chemical weapons, used tnt bombs, starved 500000, raped and tortured thousand's, destroyed 5000, year of history'	Regime War Crimes
5	03/08/14	Infographic	297	26	1064	1387	Gaza and Syria comparison of casualties: under Gaza heading 'approx 1000 casualties, worldwide condemnation', under Syria heading 'approx 170000 casualties, worldwide silence' below 'why the double standard?'	International Inaction
6	23/08/14	Photograph	475	21	779	1275	Syrian child with facial wounds, with text 'syria: over 191000 dead. Assad and ISIS are free to kill. Silence from the world'	International Inaction
7	12/11/13	Photograph	964	10	3	977	Syrian man stood in front of damaged buildings, with overlaid Assad logo and text 'Syrians are for a binding political solution without Assad'	Request for Help from Public
8	23/05/14	Photograph	542	36	358	936	Assad family, children crying and holding mouths, with text 'my name is Assad, I will kill your family, never set foot in a refugee camp, don't care about you... ..would you vote for a war criminal? Would you vote for Assad?'	Regime War Crimes
9	21/05/14	Photograph	537	60	323	920	Assad smiling and waving, demolished buildings, text 'my name is Bashar Assad: I barrel bombed schools, starved babies, destroyed an entire city... ..would you vote for a war criminal? Would you vote for Assad?'	Regime War Crimes
10	03/05/14	Infographic	424	36	387	847	Bashar Assad's face with tentacles to different facts about numbers of people killed, injured, displaced. Titled 'Assad is campaigning for re-election... ..would you vote for him?'	Regime War Crimes

Figure 8: Content of comments on 'Is anyone watching Syria?'

Code of comments	Frequency
Praying/religion	181
Support for the NSC	130
Other conflicts	39
Critical	37
Global indifference	35
Emojis	30
Tagging friend	22
Random	17
Anti-Israel	13
Calling on Muslim community	13
The Takbir (Allahuakbar)	13
ISIS	6
Questioning what others do	5
Critical of the media	4
Joke	4
The Assad regime	3
Anti-Muslim comment	1
Family in Syria	1

Appendix 3: List of Interviewees

The British Army

British Army Focus Group (2014) November 2014

British Army Interview (2014a) August 2014

British Army Interview (2014b) September 2014

British Army Interview (2014c) November 2014

British Army Interview (2015a) September 2015

British Army Interview (2015b) September 2015

British Army Interview (2015c) September 2015

British Army Interview (2015d) November 2015

British Army Interview (2015e) November 2015

The Syrian Opposition

In chronological order:

Bayan Khatib (2015) North American public relations manager, and former social media manager, for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, March 2015

Mariam Hamou (2015) North American social media manager for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, March 2015

Obai Sukar (2015) Co-Founder of Radio al-Kul (set up with help by the NSC, but became independent within a few months), September 2015

Obaida Fares (2015) Human rights and media activist, September 2015

Adnan Hadad (2015) Founder of Syria Media Group and co-founder of Aleppo Media Centre and Radio Hara, November 2015

Sinan Hatahet (2015) Head of media for National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces 2012-2014, November 2015

Ghias Aljundi (2015) Human rights consultant, journalist and media activist, November 2015

Susan Ahmad (2015) Spokesperson for Revolutionary Command Council, journalist and media activist, December 2015

Ola Albarazi (2015) Media officer for the Hama Local Coordination Committee, December 2015

Abu Eljood (2015) Coordinator of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces multimedia team, December 2015, (translated with the help of Susan Ahmad)

Radwan Ziadeh (2015) Former director of foreign relations for the Syrian National Council, December 2015

Al'aa Basatneh (2015) A Chicago based activist involved in the development of citizen journalism in the Syrian revolution, and the focus of the documentary #ChicagoGirl, December 2015

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