

Framing of the Beirut Explosion in Lebanese and British International Media

Bachelor's thesis



Radboud Universiteit

Knar Ohanjanyan (s1023844)

Department of Communication and Information Studies

Supervisor: Afrooz Rafiee MA

Table of contents

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
 - a. Beirut explosion
 - b. Representation of social realities in mass media
 - c. Framing
 - d. Literature review
 - e. Present study
3. Methodology
 - a. Data collection
 - b. Analysis
 - c. Reliability
4. Results
 - a. Frames
 - i. Abaddon
 - ii. Humanitarian
 - iii. Incompetent government
5. Discussion and Conclusion
6. References
7. Appendix

Abstract

The Beirut explosion that happened on the fourth of August in 2020 did not solely shake Lebanon but the whole world. Many people turned to mass media as a main source of information about the details on this earth-shattering event. This study investigates the framing patterns of mass media outlets from Lebanon and the UK. An inductive framing analysis revealed that, overall, the countries were rather similar with respect to their framing of the Beirut explosion. Nevertheless, differences were also observed with regard to their use of reasoning and framing devices. Three frames were found, namely ‘Abaddon’, ‘Humanitarian’, and ‘Incompetent government’. This study offered the first framing analysis of the coverage of the Beirut explosion. It also added a new framing device in the inventory of rhetorical framing devices for inductive analysis of frames, namely, thematically strengthening contrast that happens at the level of discourse rather than specific lexical choices.

Keywords: Beirut explosion, qualitative framing analysis, Lebanon, the UK

Beirut explosion

On the fourth of August 2020, a massive explosion happened in the port of Beirut, which is the main maritime entry point to Lebanon, the busiest port in the Eastern Mediterranean and one of the most important ports for the Arab world. Besides the four basins, sixteen quays, twelve warehouses, and grain silos that were used as cereal storage for the country, explosives and chemicals including nitrates were stored in the warehouses of the port (Grzeszczak, 2020). In 2014, a cargo ship that had a large amount of ammonium nitrate named MV Rhosus was abandoned in the port of Beirut. Although the danger of these materials was acknowledged, their removal and relocation from the warehouse failed due to several reasons like bad management, corruption, and issues with the registration of the ship (Urbina, 2020).

The improperly stored large amount of ammonium nitrate resulted in a massive blast. On the afternoon of that day, fire had broken out in Warehouse 12, which was alongside the grain silos, the storage of explosives, and the confiscated ammonium nitrate from MV Rhosus (El Deeb & Bassem, 2020). The firefighters had reported that something was wrong. Later, at about 18:07 local time, the first explosion happened which, consequently, sent up a large cloud of smoke. All firefighters that were asked to go to the port died later (Azhari, 2020).

The first explosion had damaged the warehouse. The impact of the second explosion, which had happened a few seconds later after the first one, was larger. It shook the central part of Beirut and sent out a red-orange cloud into the air surrounded by a white condensation cloud (Qiblawi et al., 2020). It was not possible to stop the fire until the next morning.

The explosion caused more than 200 deaths, around 7500 injuries, and property damage worth around 13 billion euros. Lebanon was under a state of emergency for two weeks after the blast. The event proceeded with disagreements and protests across the country. Citizens criticized the government for not being able to prevent the catastrophe (Najjar et al., 2020). The state of the Lebanese economy was in a critical situation before the blast with the government having debt, the Lebanese currency decreasing, and half the population living in poverty. The Lebanese were also battling with the outbreak of coronavirus which had made the hospitals of the country overwhelmed (Balkiz et al., 2020). The explosion made it worse: houses as far away as 10 kilometers were damaged; around 300000 people left homeless; Beirut's grain reserves damaged; and three hospitals destroyed (El Deeb & Mroue, 2020).

Within a small time period, the explosion became a topic of conversation in many countries because various news outlets started to cover the event. Journalists from all around the world arrived in the city of Beirut to report on the disaster. However, it is questionable whether the explosion was covered the same way in media from various countries. Previous studies suggest that the representation of the same event in the media from different countries may differ due to reasons like media culture, political and social situations of the countries and the affiliation to the event (Deuze, 2002). This study investigates whether mass media outlets from Lebanon and the UK covered the Beirut explosion in different manners.

Representation of social realities in mass media

Studying the coverage of a specific event in mass media is best understood within the context of theory of social construction of reality (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 31). It is based on the proposition that the social world is fundamentally ambiguous which means that no person, object or action has an inherent or essential meaning. This theory suggests that humans assign meaning to events, actions, and objects, and this process is heavily dependent on context (Davis, 1990). Journalistic texts are one of the possible mediums individuals use to construct

the reality around themselves, make sense of a specific event, object, or action as well as form an opinion about it. The close-remote continuum is crucial in studying the way mass media may shape reality. Individuals rely on mass media more heavily as their source of information if they have no direct experience with it. This supports the media dependency hypothesis which claims the manner media influences the way individuals construct subjective reality depends on the direct experience of the person with the phenomena, consequently, how dependent they are on media as a source of information (Adoni & Mane, 1984). In constructing social reality, some aspects of it are highlighted more than others, and some aspects of the reality are eliminated. This phenomenon is called framing which, in mass media, is done by displaying the aspects of reality in a predictable and patterned manner (Scheufele, 1999).

Framing

Framing has been a subject of a variety of disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology and linguistics (Tannen, 1993). In communication research, framing is the coverage of a specific topic or issue in a specific manner by the media and the public (Van Gorp & Vercruyse, 2012). The earliest study on framing examined the role that frames had in the conceptualisation of experiences. It concluded that individuals and groups use frames to identify a “schema of interpretation” that allows them “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events, subjects, and occurrences, thus, manifest meaning, perceive experiences and come up with further actions (Goffman, 1974).

Entman (1993, p. 52) came up with a definition of framing which draws attention to the processes of selection of particular aspects of the topic and their salience: “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Consequently, frames may be viewed as devices that are used to determine which details of reality should be selected and displayed, and which ones may be crucial to present the topic in an accessible manner to a different people (Van Gorp & Vercruyse, 2012).

Although the use of frames may seem directive, it is not a completely conscious process. In case of journalistic practices, this means that the journalists are not always aware

that they select specific aspects of the topic and leave other aspects out (Van Gorp, 2007). A possible explanation to this phenomenon is that culture influences the way people assign meaning to the various events, issues, and objects they come across with. Culture is defined as the primary base of knowledge, meaning, and comprehension of the outside world (Hall, 1997). When people come from the same culture, they also share a repertoire of perspectives, symbols, values and shared narratives which direct their decision making as well as how they perceive the world around them (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Therefore, there is a connection between frames and culture which may be demonstrated at the individual, organizational, and social levels (Brüggerman, 2014).

The link between culture and framing may explain why media outlets from different countries report about the same topic in different manners. One of the areas of research on framing is comparing framing patterns that were identified between media articles from different countries that covered the same subject, event or issue. There are a few factors that may explain cross-national differences in framing practices such as the stance of the country of origin of the media platform (Aday et al., 2005), event proximity (Snow et al., 2008), social norms, cultural values, pressures from interest groups as well as organisational conventions, professional journalistic protocols and individual styles of journalists (Scheufele, 1999).

Literature review

The academic literature on cross-national differences in framing has revealed contrasting outcomes. A comparative analysis of frames employed to cover terrorism revealed differences in American and British newspapers with regards to the orientation of the articles: the first one was event-oriented, whereas the latter one was theme-oriented. These differences are more evident on specific examples. The British media would use thematic key words that related to violations of human rights like “war”, “security”, “violence”, “power”, “terror” etc. The American newspapers, on the other hand, tended to cover specific terrorist attacks and focused on specific people, locations, and methods of execution of terrorist attacks like “bombing suicide”, “Guantanamo Bay”, “Al-Qaeda”, and “leader. This study also revealed that the British articles assigned more importance to diplomatic arrangements, whereas the American ones gave more space to military strategies. A notable observation was that the UK media covered all aspects of the topic no matter how intimidating it may have been for the

reader. This cross-national study has provided with a useful insight on the framing practices of the British media (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). This study has taken a deductive approach to framing because the researcher specifically focused whether the structure of the articles was episodic or thematic and whether the framing was diplomatic or military. It may have been the case that patterns have been missed due to the limitations of the deductive approach.

The aforementioned study had revealed that the manner of covering terrorism aligned with the approaches employed by the American and British governments. The US has been shown to advocate military solutions, whereas Britain is more inclined towards diplomacy (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). A paper that studied the coverage of the performance in a cathedral of a Russian group Pussy Riot has partially supported this result. A discourse analysis showed that the stance of American newspapers aligned with the one of the government, however, this was not the case for the Russian media. Journalists follow certain guidelines and conventions that usually are in accordance with the government. Nevertheless, the findings showed that some media outlets do not always follow these protocols, therefore, there is still a research gap on the question whether the framing practices of the media outlets align with the stance of the government (Bashir & Federova, 2015).

Another cross-national study examined the framing of the French Riots and has provided the existing literature on framing with interesting insights. The news was that two out of three teenagers got electrocuted and one was injured in attempt to run away from the police. The researchers compared the French coverage of this event with the coverage of five other countries. They observed that difference in proximity to the event had limited influence on the salience of the event. They explained their finding with the argument that in a global world, social and political proximity is not as important as it used to in the past. The researchers also found out that state actors such as the president were shown to put the blame for the event on external factors that did not relate to the government, such as immigrant background and parenting methods. International actors, on the other hand, blamed and assigned more responsibility to the French government. Inner actors that were not related to the state such as the French residents and the opposition also declared the state as responsible for the event (Snow et al., 2007).

The only study that analyzed the present narratives about the Beirut explosion focused on the content on TikTok, a video-producing social media platform. It was suggested that the Lebanese content creators used the platform to talk about the situation in Beirut, as well as

criticize the actions of politicians, showcase the severity of the explosion, and the devastation of the citizens (Lujain et al., 2020).

Although there have been studies that focused on the framing of specific events, less attention has been given to cross-national framing analysis. A possible explanation is ethnocentric biases which have limited the studies to geographical locations where the subject, event or occasion occurred. Moreover, the cross-national framing analyses of media texts mainly investigated the framing patterns of media from Western countries. Conducting comparative cross-national analysis of journalistic articles and investigating non-Western societies would facilitate the process of understanding the variations between journalistic conventions and communication strategies that different cultures use. Furthermore, the majority of present studies used a deductive approach to framing analysis. Researchers would determine the frames prior to the analysis. The fact that many frames may be missed is the biggest limitation of this approach (Van Gorp & Van Der Groot, 2012).

Present Study

This Bachelor's thesis will compare the ways the Beirut explosion was framed in the British and Lebanese international media. It will attempt to fill in some of the gap by conducting an inductive analysis of frames. In addition, this will be a cross-national study which has advantages of studying framing in one country since it decreases the chances of generalizing and falsely assuming the universality of news framing patterns (De Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001).

The comparison of Lebanese and British coverage of the Beirut explosion is relevant and interesting for several reasons. First of all, the countries have cultural variances because they have shown different behavioural patterns on the cultural dimensions of Hofstede. The UK has one of the highest scores on individualism which means that the British tend to value the goals of the individuals more than the ones of the group. Lebanon, on the other hand, is a collectivistic country, meaning that the collective interest is of more importance than the ones of an individual. Another difference is that the Lebanese culture is more restraint and more inclined to pessimism than the British one (Hofstede et al., 2010). Differences on cultural dimensions also bring to differences in communication styles. The British media may without any restraint discuss the struggles of individuals, whereas the Lebanese outlet is more likely to value the collective goals.

Another reason of relevance of this study is that the Guardian is one of the most read newspapers not solely in the UK, but also the world (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). It would be interesting to see how this newspaper has framed the Beirut explosion, but also compare it with a Lebanese media. The Lebanese media landscape is not as open and free as in the UK, in addition, many media outlets had to close due to the financial crisis in the country. The majority of mass media in Lebanon is affiliated to the government, however, in recent years there has been an increase in the amount of privately-owned news outlets that display an anti-government sentiment (Battah, 2020). Nonetheless, the ambiance for free media is not as safe in Lebanon. There have been journalists who were arrested for investigating on the Beirut explosion, therefore, it is interesting to see how the explosion was portrayed in the Lebanese media.

There has been little research on media practices in Lebanon. A study of the framing patterns of Lebanese journalists may give interesting insights because there is a large internal variation among the Lebanese with regards to their point of view on societal issues, political orientation, and religion. While being considered one of the most liberal countries in the Middle East, corruption has been present in the government since its foundation, and the country has frequently faced a financial crisis. Although Lebanon has been influenced by the French culture, after the civil war, an evident pan-Arab sentiment is largely present in politics (Melki, 2009).

Having all these factors in mind, this study aims to answer the following research questions, *“How was the Beirut explosion framed in news articles by British and Lebanese international media outlets?”*; *“How can these patterns of framing be explained in a broader cultural context?”*.

Methodology

Data Collection

The sample consisted of twenty news reports in English that covered the Beirut explosion: ten from the Lebanese the961 and another ten from the British Guardian International. These two media outlets have similar values as both mention in their “About us” page that they claim to report solely in the English language, do not have any political affiliations, target an international audience, and aim to report in an independent manner. Both media platform had

a section named “Beirut explosion” on their websites, therefore, all twenty articles were selected from these sections. All articles were published during the first week that followed the explosion, so from August four to August eleven. This time frame was chosen due to the relevance and the newsworthiness of the event. The articles were about the same topics in both data sets that had a relation to the explosion like the investigation, the visit of Emmanuel Macron, the state of the city, international aid, the response of the Lebanese diaspora, protests, and the resignation of the government.

Analysis

Discourse analysis was chosen as the approach to study the framing of the Beirut explosion by Lebanese and British international media. Its analytic and interpretative nature enables the researcher to understand the meanings those texts convey rather than count or measure phenomena like quantitative studies do (Linström & Marais, 2012). The analysis proceeded in two phases: textual analysis phase and contextual analysis phase. The unit of analysis was a single article from a variety of topics related to the Beirut explosion such as investigation, casualties, government messages, international visits, protests etc. The articles from the Guardian International were hybrid articles of news reports and features, whereas the ones from the961 were solely first-hand news reports. Before the process of data collection, it was decided that all the articles had to be news reports, however, it turned out that the Guardian reported the events from Beirut live in a few sentences and later published hybrid articles on the topic.

To answer the first research question and find out which frames were salient in the coverage of the Beirut explosion by Lebanese and British international media, the researcher followed an inductive approach to qualitative framing analysis. The frames were identified in the textual phase which proceeded in six steps. In the first step, after getting enough data, the researcher read the articles multiple. It is important to note that the researcher did not look for any specific frames but rather engaged with the text to get fully acquainted with the content of the corpus.

The next step was the coding of two extreme examples from each set. These extreme cases had the same topic: the resignation of the Lebanese government due to the explosion. The researcher was looking for the elements of frame packages in the articles (Gamson & Modigliani, 1992; Van Gorp, 2005), namely, a core frame, reasoning devices, and framing devices. The explicit textual frame indicators that narrated the message were considered as

framing devices (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These devices were categorized into rhetorical and grammatical devices, and technical devices. The identification of framing devices led the researcher to the reasoning devices they could potentially evoke. Reasoning devices direct the causal reasoning of the reader, thus, create associations with culturally embedded frames (Van Gorp & Van Der Groot, 2012). The difference between reasoning devices and framing was that the latter ones were explicitly mentioned in the text. The list of framing and reasoning devices that were used in the analysis was based on previous literature and can be found in Table 1. The last component of the frame package was the core frame, which by connecting reasoning and framing devices, described the whole package.

Table 1. List of framing and reasoning devices

Device	Example
Reasoning devices	Problem definition, cause, consequences, evaluation, and solution were considered as reasoning devices (Van Gorp, 2010).
Rhetorical and grammatical framing devices	Keywords, imagery, lexical choice, catchphrases, metaphors, historical references (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), emotional appeals (Kitzinger, 2007), quantifications (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of judgement (Linström & Marais), Thematically strengthening contrasts (added after the first few rounds of analysis)
Technical framing devices	Heading, concluding paragraphs, (Linström & Marais, 2012), quotation (Pan & Kosicki, 1993)

After the analysis of two extreme cases, the researcher started analyzing the other eighteen articles. The third and fourth steps involved the identification of framing and reasoning devices respectively. It should be noted that the researcher had decided to add another rhetorical device, namely thematically strengthening contrast after the first few rounds of the analysis. In the fifth step, the researcher looked for patterns with regard to these devices and created a frame matrix explaining the core frames and their corresponding reasoning and framing devices (see Table 2). The final step of the textual analysis was the pinpointing of framing patterns in the articles and the comparison between the Lebanese and British sets. An example analysis of an article can be found in the Appendix of this paper.

In order to answer the second research question, a contextual analysis was conducted. In this phase, the patterns identified during the textual analysis as well as the specific framing and reasoning devices were explained in a broader context of media, construction of social realities in the UK and Lebanon. An explorative approach (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) was followed to explain the possible motives behind the use of the frames in each data set. These deductions were put in a larger context validated by the literature mentioned in the introduction as well as the knowledge of the researcher.

Reliability

It is essential to take the mental representations of the event that the researcher has into account, whilst conducting an inductive framing analysis. It is possible to eliminate the subjective aspect of this method by taking a systematic approach to the analysis which includes multiple parallel phases when the researcher scans and re-reads the material (Van Gorp & Van Der Groot, 2012).

The researcher has sent four articles from the set to a colleague who was trained to conduct an inductive framing analysis. There were two Lebanese and two British articles that were published on the same date and covered the same topic: the visit of Emmanuel Macron and the resignation of the Lebanese government. The researcher had provided the coder with a list of potential reasoning and framing devices, however, the second coder did not know how the researcher had named the core frames. The researcher compared the analysis of the second coder with her own right after he had sent it. Overall, both researchers had highlighted the same framing devices and connected them to the same reasoning devices. For example, they

had noted that 'struggle' and 'corruption' were the keywords of one of the articles, and "May God protect Lebanon" was a catchphrase. Both researchers highlighted that the Guardian used historical references to give more context to theme, whereas a pattern like that was not observed in the text of the961. The researchers had defined the same problem definition of the 'Incompetent government' frame, however, they had put it differently. The researcher defined it as the growing dissatisfaction about the Lebanese government, whereas the second coder put it as "the government is incapable to support Lebanon". It turned out that the second coder had put the cause identified by the researcher, "incompetence of the government" as the problem definition. Interestingly, at first the researcher also had thought of it as the problem definition, however, after re-reading the sets multiple times, it became evident that "incompetence of the government" was the cause of the dissatisfaction of the Lebanese and international actors. The second coder had named the frame 'Incompetent government' as 'Rotten system'. Although they were not completely the same, the reasoning devices were similar, and the framing devices matched.

Results

The first research question of this study was: "How was the Beirut explosion framed in news articles by British and Lebanese international media outlets?". The inductive framing analysis brought about three frames which were present in the sets of both countries, namely Abaddon, Humanitarian, and Incompetent government. In the following section, these frames will be defined together with their corresponding reasoning and framing devices. Finally, cross-national differences will be discussed and explained with examples. Table 2 offers an overview of the frames together with its corresponding reasoning devices and framing devices. It should be noted that these are not all of the patterns found in the analysis, but the most prominent ones.

Table 2. The frame packages including the core frame with corresponding reasoning devices and examples of notable framing devices

Core Frame	Reasoning Devices						Framing devices
	Problem definition	Cause	Consequences	Evaluation	Responsibility	Solution	
<i>Abaddon</i>	The explosion happened	Ignition of a large amount of ammonium nitrate, chemical warehouse, explosives	Casualties, damage to the city, resignation of the government	There had never been an event like this one in Beirut before; the Minister of Justice resigned because she was incompetent	No explicit attribution of responsibility for the event, however, it seems like the Lebanese government was implicitly put as accountable.	“Those responsible should be punished”, “investigation”, “blood donation”. Nevertheless, it was implied that there is not any solution that could solve the problem completely.	Lexical choice to describe the explosion: “giant explosion”, “tragic incident”, “unforgivable horror”, “shocking”, “devastating”, “destructive”, “chaos”, “ruin”

<i>Humanitarian</i>	Lebanon needs urgent help in terms of finance and	People trapped under debris, financial crisis, need of medical support	Different countries sent help and donated to Lebanon; Arab-owned shops in the US donated their profit	Macron wrote his tweet in Arabic, so it would be accessible to every Lebanese person	British foreign secretary Dominic Raab said the country was “poised” to send search and rescue help and expert medical support	Donation, support	Thematically reinforcing sentences: Everyone, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese, wants to help.”
<i>Incompetent government</i>	There is a growing dissatisfaction towards the Lebanese government	The Lebanese government did not prevent the Beirut explosion despite the warnings	Anger, protests, demands for accountability	Macron visited Beirut to expand the French influence in the region, according to the Guardian, whereas in	Lebanese officials would put the responsibility on each other as well as blame foreign interference	In the Lebanese articles, Emmanuel Macron was suggested as someone who could solve the problem;	Thematically strengthening contrasts at a discourse level: continuous positive referencing towards the

the Lebanese
articles he
did not have
any hidden
agenda but
acted as a
“true leader”

downfall of the
government,
change of
political
system
actions by
Emmanuel
Macron
contrasted
with the
continuous
negative
referencing
about the
Lebanese
government.

Abaddon

The frame Abaddon illustrates the destructive nature of the Beirut explosion and portrays the city of Beirut as a place of destruction. This frame appeared in the set twelve times: in five Lebanese and seven British articles. Abaddon co-appeared with the frame Incompetent government thrice in the British set, and once in the Lebanese one.

The fact that the explosion happened was defined as the problem of this frame. The devastating state of the city and its citizens was shown in visual terms which illustrated the chaos that the explosion had brought to Beirut. In terms of framing devices, the problem definition was mainly illustrated via the use of imagery that described how damaged Beirut was as well the sorrows of civilians:

“Dozens of buildings had clearly sustained structural damage. Shops, and restaurants were almost all severely damaged... Men, women and children were walking, bewildered, from somewhere near the blast site.” (The Guardian, 4 August 2020).

In terms of the causal responsibility of Abaddon, the articles focused on the possible causes of the blast via the use of keywords like “ammonium nitrate”, “chemical warehouse”, “explosives” etc. Since the reason why the blast had occurred was not certain yet, there were many speculations of what had caused the explosion, therefore, the articles reported on all of them.

All the articles that had Abaddon as the core frame extensively covered the consequences of the Beirut explosion. This was mainly done with the use of quantifications which were in line with the idea that the Beirut explosion had caused a substantial destruction. Specifically, the quantifications were used to describe the number of the dead and wounded as well as the damage to the city: “[The blast] killed at least 160 people, wounded about 6,000, destroyed the country’s main port...Losses ... between \$10bn and \$15bn”.

In terms of responsibility reasoning device, none of the articles has put an explicit responsibility for the event. However, it was observed that the word “blame” was often put with “ammonium nitrate” suggesting that the cause of the explosion was responsible for the event. In addition, in the articles that were published a few days after the explosion, so starting from August 7, one may infer that the Lebanese government was portrayed as responsible for not preventing the event. Nevertheless, this was done in an implicit manner.

Regarding the solutions, most articles offered “supporting funds”, “donations” as well as “investigation”. One article also quoted the prime minister of Lebanon promising to punish those responsible (Guardian, 05.08.2020) which may be perceived as another solution to the problem. Nonetheless, the solutions appeared in a broader context of the devastation about the explosion. It seemed like even if Lebanon received funds as well as there was investigation and those responsible were punished, these solutions would not be sufficient to cover all the damage.

The most prominent evaluations in the articles with Abaddon as the core frame were concerning the novelty of the situation. As the Guardian also highlights with the use of historical exemplars about the Lebanese civil war, this explosion was not the first one in the history of Beirut, and the Lebanese had previously suffered from similar events. Nevertheless, it was highlighted that this explosion differed from events of the past. In both sets, this idea about the novelty of the situation was mainly brought about with the use of quotes such as this one from the Governor of Beirut, “there is great destruction, and what happened is unprecedented in Lebanon” (the961, 04.08.2020). These quotes of people that are familiar with the history of Lebanon and may have witnessed the previous events make the argument that the Beirut explosion was extraordinary and new more valid.

Another notable evaluation was observed in the article of the961 (10.08.2020) about the resignation of the Justice Minister Marie Claude Najm, however, this evaluation was done at the level of discourse, rather than individual sentences or phrases. The author implicitly evaluated the resignation of Najm by structuring the paragraphs in a specific manner. In the beginning of the article, the author stated that Najm had resigned due to the Beirut explosion. Furthermore, he mentions the fact that the minister had previously dismissed the rumors about her resignation and called the resigning politicians escapees from responsibility. This specific arrangement of facts negatively portrays Najm as she is shown to contradict to her previous statements and to avoid responsibility for the explosion.

Differences were also observed between the British set and the Lebanese set with regard to frame usage in the articles with Abaddon. One of the noteworthy differences was that the Guardian had included multiple perspectives about the event and put more voices in their articles. Besides government officials, the Guardian had substantially included quotes from civilians and experts. With the use of rhetorical framing devices like historical exemplars, imagery, thematically reinforcing sentences, the Guardian had provided the reader with considerable amount of context about events and facts preceding the Beirut explosion.

On the other hand, the961 had a limited repertoire of framing devices and contextual cues. The coverage of the explosion by the Lebanese authors, in contrary to the British ones, was more factual and focused on the present advances of the case. This explains the extensive use of quantifications, official sources, and quotes of Lebanese officials as well as the absence of rhetorical framing devices like imagery, metaphors, and exemplars in the Lebanese articles.

Humanitarian

The Humanitarian frame depicted the aid Lebanon had received from actors outside Lebanon due to the explosion. The frame circled around the idea that the Beirut explosion was an international crisis, hence, there was a need for international aid and support. The frame appeared in the corpus twice: in one Lebanese article (the961, 05.08.2020) and one British article (Guardian, 06.08.2020).

The problem of the Humanitarian frame was defined as the urgent need of help that Lebanon had because the country struggled with handling the situation on its own. The most prominent framing device that defined this problem was thematically reinforcing sentences such as this lead sentence from the Guardian: “Race begins to find those trapped in a rubble of Lebanon’s capital after Tuesday’s enormous blast”.

Given that the main theme of these two articles with the Humanitarian frame was the aid that Lebanon received, the articles mainly reported on the specific supplies, amount of donations, specializations of the experts arriving to Beirut and other practical matters. The main framing device that was used to report on the consequences of the frame were quantifications which offered detailed information on the aid: “Australia offered \$1.4m”, “15 tons of sanitary equipment” etc.

Several actors outside of Lebanon were shown to take responsibility to help the country in times of a crisis. A framing device that was used to convey the responsibility that these actors took was quotes such as the one by a member of the diaspora, “Everyone, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese, wants to help”. Country leaders and representatives of international organizations were also quoted to say that they would send help to Beirut.

The articles also had evaluations on the situation which were brought about by exemplars, quotes, and thematically reinforcing sentences. For example, the Guardian highlights the doubts of the donors that the donated money would be used to help the citizens. The newspaper indirectly evaluates the situation by quoting the foreign minister of France sharing his suspicion. Another prominent evaluation was from a rescue expert saying that

there was a chance of finding survivors under rubble. This evaluation by an expert conveyed a message that the help from outside of Lebanon was necessary to boost the search for survivors.

An evident difference between the two sets was observed with regard to the portrayal of French-Lebanese relations. The Lebanese article quoted Emmanuel Macron “expressing brotherly solidarity” and that “France always stands by Lebanon”. The Lebanese author also evaluated Macron’s tweet in a personal manner by mentioning her interpretation of the message, “the tweet [of Macron] was in Arabic as if it meant to reach all people in Lebanon with moral support and encouragement to hang on there”. There were no similar patterns like this evaluation observed in the British media. The Guardian labelled the same situation as “a special relationship with its [France] former protectorate”, thus, hinted on the possible hidden meaning of Macron’s action which would expand the French influence in Lebanon

Incompetent government

The last frame depicted the dissatisfaction towards the Lebanese government from different actors like Lebanese civilians, international organizations, diaspora, and foreign politicians. The Beirut explosion was revealed to be a foreseeable event, consequently, the Lebanese government was shown as accountable for the event. This frame appeared in the set thirteen times, in seven Lebanese articles and six British articles.

The problem this frame touches upon was the growing dissatisfaction expressed towards the actions of the Lebanese government. In terms of framing devices, the problem definition was depicted with the use of thematically reinforcing sentences: “Decades of incompetence and graft underpinned a decision to keep a stockpile of close to 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at the port and store it with combustible substances.” (Guardian, 10.08. 2020).

Most of the articles implied that the causal reasoning behind this frame was the fact that the Lebanese government had allowed the explosion to happen despite the warning about a possible disaster. In addition, there were also articles that referred to “corruption” as a cause of the problem. In terms of framing devices, causal reasoning was often depicted in an implicit manner, however, it often appeared together with other reasoning devices and served as their justification, specifically for consequences of and solutions for the problem: “Driven

by anger at the corruption and incompetence that appears to have fostered Tuesday's tragedy, people gathered..." (Guardian, 08.08.2020).

All articles portrayed the anger of the Lebanese and the emerging protests in Beirut as consequences of this frame. In terms of framing devices, thematically reinforcing sentences were shown to link the incompetence of the Lebanese government with the protests and the emerging demands for them to quit: "Enraged Lebanese had enough after decades of being led by corrupt politicians and eager to topple the government once and for all" (the961, 08.08.2020). Together with other rhetorical devices like metaphors and exemplars, articles from both sets showed that the Beirut explosion was a result of the misconduct of the Lebanese government, inducing people's demands to overthrow the government. An example is the exemplar about a twenty-year old victim of the explosion whose friends had showed up to the protests with her pictures with a message "My government killed me".

In both sets, the responsibility for not preventing the blast was assigned to Lebanese officials. However, in the Lebanese articles, the responsibility to change the situation was assigned to Emmanuel Macron. An example of a reasoning device that showed Macron's willingness to take responsibility is this quote from the961, "I will return September first... I will take my responsibilities with you."

With regard to solutions, most of the articles offered "independent investigation", "change of political system" and "downfall of the government". These solutions were suggested in a rather explicit manner via the use rhetorical devices such as keywords and catchphrases like "downfall", "revolution", "change", "The people want the fall of the regime" etc. These solutions support the idea that this frame brings about which is that the Lebanese government is incompetent and has to change.

Since the members of the Lebanese government were the main actors accountable for the Beirut explosion, both media outlets critically evaluated their incompetency and their involvement in corruption. The most prominent framing device that was used for evaluation was thematically strengthening contrast. It is the pattern of continuous negative referencing to the Lebanese government followed by positive referencing to other actors. For example, the961 portrayed Emmanuel Macron as a "true leader" and contrasted his actions to the ones of the Lebanese politicians who were portrayed as "hypocrites" and "clowns". Thematically strengthening contrasts appeared at the level of discourse rather than certain lexical or grammatical choices.

Another example of thematically strengthening contrast was the comparison between how the east does their affairs and how the west does them. The Lebanese government had blamed “foreign interference” for the explosion and rejected the calls for independent investigation which the Guardian had illustrated as the best method to find out the truth demanded by western actors (Guardian, 08.08.2020). This contrast between the demands of democratic countries and the actions of the Lebanese officials supports the idea that the latter group is trying to avoid accountability for the Beirut explosion and should be changed. In terms of this framing device, the Guardian also evaluated the political system of Lebanon, which divides the government between eighteen religious sects, as malfunctioning:

“it [the political system of Lebanon] encourages cronyism and discourages accountability, leading to disasters like the explosion” (Guardian, 07.08.2020).

Although the Lebanese and British articles had similar reporting about the distrust towards the Lebanese government, a few differences were observed in their usage of reasoning devices. For example, they had differently interpreted the visit of Emmanuel Macron. In the Lebanese articles, Macron was evaluated as a hero that wants to help Lebanon with no hidden agenda, whereas the Guardian interpreted his visit as an attempt to expand the influence of France in the region. A notable use of rhetorical framing devices in this context was the Guardian’s portrayal of Macron as an actor: “[Macron] seized his moment on the world stage”, “[his] performance won popular applause” etc. The Lebanese articles, on the other hand, portrayed him as a solution to the problem of this frame by illustrating Macron as a true leader who could make the Lebanese government change.

Another notable difference between the sets regarded the suggested solutions. The Lebanese articles suggested “revolution” and “overthrowing the government” as the ultimate solutions to the problem. The Guardian, on the other hand, evaluated these demands as not sufficient with arguing at a discourse level that even if the Lebanese government quitted, the same politicians would become a caretaker government.

Discussion and Conclusion

This Bachelor thesis investigated how Lebanese and British international media framed the explosion that happened on the fourth of August in 2020 in the city of Beirut, Lebanon. Two international media outlets that possess similar values and report solely in English were selected for this study, namely the British Guardian International and the Lebanese the961. The corpus included twenty articles that were published from August four to August eleven: ten in the Lebanese set and another ten in the British one. A qualitative inductive discourse analysis of frames was carried out to answer the two research questions: *How was the Beirut explosion framed in news articles by British and Lebanese international media outlets; How can these patterns of framing be explained in a broader cultural context?*

With regard to the first research question, three frames were brought about as a result of an inductive framing analysis, namely Abaddon, Humanitarian, and Incompetent government. It was observed that the two media outlets had employed all of the three frames throughout the corpus in a similar way suggesting that the framing of the Beirut explosion was similar in the Lebanese and British articles. Nonetheless, differences between them were also observed with regard to their repertoires of framing devices as well as their evaluations of specific topics such as Emmanuel Macron's visit to Beirut and the possible solutions to the frame Incompetent government. All in all, this research has shown that the Beirut explosion was framed in rather similar ways by British and Lebanese international media outlets.

With respect to the first frame Abaddon, the repertoires of reasoning devices of the two sets were similar since they depicted Beirut as a place of destruction and supported the argument that the explosion was an event with a destructive nature; suggested the sources of the explosion like "ammonium nitrate" as the cause; described the devastating situation as a consequence; did not directly put responsibility for the event on any actor, as well as implicitly implied that the problem does not have a solution that could solve it despite the investigation on the event and the help Lebanon received.

The two media outlets also highlighted that there has never been a similar event to this one in Beirut, thus, there were no cross-national differences observed with regard to the evaluations about the novelty of the situation. Nevertheless, the two sets differed with regard to their manner of reporting as well as framing devices they used. The reporting style of the961 was rather factual and focused on the present advances of the situation, whereas the Guardian centered around the opinions and experiences of Beirut residents. Logically, the Guardian made use of a broader repertoire of framing devices such as historical exemplars,

imagery, and quotations of different people, whereas the961 mostly reported facts via the use of quantifications. A similar pattern was observed in the articles with the Humanitarian frame and the Incompetent government frame: the sets had similar reasoning devices, however, they differed in terms of the reasoning device evaluations and the repertoire of framing devices. For example, their representations of the visit of Emmanuel Macron and the possible solutions to the problem contradicted to each other. These evaluations were made at a level of discourse rather than lexical or grammatical choices. Consequently, a new framing device was added to the inventory of rhetorical framing devices for inductive analysis of frames, namely, thematically strengthening contrast.

With regard to the second research question, this study attempted to explain the aforementioned similarities and differences in a broader cultural context. There may be a few possible explanations why the Guardian and the961 employed the same frames and did not significantly differ in their use of reasoning and framing devices. One may have assumed that the difference with regard to the proximity to the event of the countries had the potential to influence the framing patterns of the news outlets. The fact that proximity did not play a role in how the British and Lebanese international media framed the Beirut explosion may be explained with the findings of previous literature claiming that due to globalization geographic, economic, and political proximity does not affect framing practices anymore (Snow et al., 2008).

In terms of similarities of frame packages, for the frames Abaddon and Humanitarian, the similarities may be explained by the conventions of these media outlets: they both claim to function independently and provide fair and objective coverage of events. Therefore, they similarly described the destructive nature of the explosion and the aid Lebanon received: they illustrated the situation as it was. Given that media in Lebanon is not as free and is heavily affiliated with the state, in case of the last frame, it was surprising that the961 actively criticized the Lebanese government and explicitly called the politicians corrupt and incompetent. Nevertheless, this finding may also be explained with the fact that the961 is a media outlet that functions independently and holds an anti-government sentiment.

Previous cross-national studies on framing observed inconsistent results on whether the coverage of a specific topic in media texts align with the position of the government (Bashir & Federova, 2015). The findings of this study partially supported this statement: it was the case for the UK, but, as shown above, not for Lebanon. The framing of the Beirut explosion by the Guardian may be supported by previous literature on the framing practices of

British media. The findings of this paper supported previous literature that showed that the British media tends to assign more importance to diplomatic arrangements and, consequently, is reluctant to any solution that may include some kind of violent or military actions (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). In the articles with Incompetent government frame, the Guardian expressed its doubts about the solution of “overthrowing” the government or “revolution” at a discourse level, and, by quoting experts and drawing from historical exemplars, showed that this solution was debatable. The961, on the other hand, promoted “revolution” as the ultimate solution to the problem. Therefore, one may infer that the Guardian stayed in line with the stance of the British government, whereas the961 explicitly went against it.

This was the first study that investigated the media coverage of the Beirut explosion, in general, as well as it was the first one to specifically focus on the framing of this event. Moreover, it was the first study that examined the framing practices of Lebanese international media. Lebanon is a country that has intranational variances due to religious, ethnic, and political diversity within the country. The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to further researchers that will investigate the framing practices in Lebanon or other similarly diverse countries. It will also contribute to the work of researchers that will study the framing of the Beirut explosion or other events between different Lebanese news outlets. In addition, this study showed that framing does not appear solely at the level of individual sentences and lexical choices, since the framing devices at the level of discourse played a key role in the Incompetent government frame.

This study had limitations, and there are still many unanswered questions about the framing of the Beirut explosion as well as cross-national similarities and differences between the framing practices between British and Lebanese international media outlets. First of all, the generalizability of this study may be argued since only twenty articles were included in the corpus. Further research should be undertaken to investigate whether the frames found in this study are present in a larger corpus. Furthermore, even though the qualitative nature of this study enabled the researcher to gain insights that a quantitative analysis would not be able to provide, a quantitative analysis of framing is still required to validate the generalizability of the findings. Further studies could also include more international media outlets to see whether the frames also appear in the articles by other newspapers. Another limitation of this study was that the articles from the961 were news articles, whereas the ones from the Guardian were hybrid articles of news articles and features. It is suggested for further

researchers to analyze articles of the same genre. Moreover, a limitation of this study was the fact that the authors of the Guardian had a linguistic power over the authors of the 961 since English was not the mother tongue of the Lebanese authors. It is advised to include Lebanese media outlets whose writers are near-native English speakers. Another suggestion would be including articles by Lebanese authors from international media outlets of other Arab countries such as Al Jazeera. Lastly, in spite of its limitations, this study has added a new framing device in the inventory of rhetorical framing devices for inductive framing analysis, namely thematically strengthening contrasts at a discourse level. Therefore, further research needs to be done to establish whether the framing devices that appear at the level of discourse rather than specific lexical or grammatical choices play a key role in framing like the aforementioned device did in this study.

References

- Aday, S., Livingston, S., & Hebert, M. (2005) 'Embedding the truth: A cross-cultural analysis of objectivity and television coverage of the Iraq war', *Journal of Press and Politics*, 10(1), pp.3–21. [10.1177/1081180X05275727](https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X05275727)
- Adoni, H., & Mane, S. (1984). Media and The Social Construction of Reality: Toward an Integration of Theory and Research. *Communication Research*, 11(3), 323–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365084011003001>
- Azhari, T. (2020, August 4). Hundreds wounded as huge blast rips through Lebanon’s Beirut. *Al Jazeera*
- Balkiz, G., Qiblawi, T., Wedeman, B. (2020, 5 August). Beirut explosion shatters windows across Lebanese capital. *CNN*
- Bashir, M. & Fedorova, M. (2015) Framing the Pussy Riot between the USA and Russia, *The Journal of International Communication*, 21(1), 132-152, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13216597.2014.978881>
- Cappella, J. B., & Jamieson, K. H. (1998). Spiral of cynicism: the press and the public good. *The Journal of Politics*, 60(2), 526.
- Deuze, M. (2002). National news cultures: a comparison of dutch, german, british, australian, and u.s. journalists. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79, 134–149.
- De Vreese, C., H., Peter, J., Semetko, H. A. (2001). Framing politics at the launch of the euro: a cross-national comparative study of frames in the news. *Political Communication*, 18(2), 107–122. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/105846001750322934>

- De Vries, M. S. (2004). Framing crises: response patterns to explosions in fireworks factories. *Administration & Society*, 36(5), 594–614.
- El Deeb, S., Mroue, B. (2020, 6 August). "In a horrific instant, a burst of power that ravaged Beirut". *Associated Press News*
- Entman, R. M. (1993). *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x
- Fausey, C. M., & Boroditsky, L. (2011). Who dunnit? Cross-linguistic differences in eye-witness memory. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 18(1), 150-157.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64–91.
- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95, 1-37.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Grzeszczak, J. (2020, 4 August). What is the Port of Beirut? Everything We Know About the Site Following Deadly Explosion. *Newsweek*
- Hancock, J. (1998). Lebanon and the west: uk, eu and us. *Mediterranean Politics*, 3(1), 163–169. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13629399808414645>
- Linstrom, M., & Marais, W. (2012). Qualitative news frame analysis: A Methodology. *Communitas*, 17, 21-38
- Najjar, T. R., Arwa I.F. (2020, 9 August) Second day of protest as anger over Beirut explosion grows: Live. *Al Jazeera*
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M.(1993) Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse, *Political Communication*, 10:1, 55-75, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963
- Papacharissi, Z., & de Fatima Oliveira, M. (2008). News Frames Terrorism: A Comparative Analysis of Frames Employed in Terrorism Coverage in U.S. and U.K. Newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(1), 52–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161207312676>
- Qiblawi, T., Mankarious, S.G., Thompson, N. (2020, 6 August). From sea to mountain: How a massive explosion left a trail of destruction across Beirut and beyond. *CNN*
- Rafiee, A., Spooren, W., & Sanders José. (2018). Culture and discourse structure: a comparative study of dutch and iranian news texts. *Discourse & Communication*, 12(1), 58–79. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1750481317735626>

- Rafiee, A., Spooren, W., & Sanders José. (2021). Framing similar issues differently: a cross-cultural discourse analysis of news images. *Social Semiotics*, 1-24, 1–24. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1900719>
- Scheufele, D.A. (1999) 'Framing as a theory of media effects', *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103–22.
- Snow, D. A., Vliegenthart, R., & Corrigan-Brown, C. (2008). Framing the french riots: a comparative study of frame variation. *Social Forces*, 86(2), 385–415.
- Tannen, D. (1993). Framing in discourse. *Oxford University Press*.
- Urbina, I. (2020, October 26). 'Ticking time bomb': Abandoned seafarers stranded without water, food or money. *CTV NEWS*
- Van Gorp, B. (2007). The constructionist approach to framing: bringing culture back in. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 60–78. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00329.x>
- Van Gorp, B., & Van der Groot, M. J. (2012). Sustainable food and agriculture: stakeholder's frames. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 5(2), 127–148.
- Vliegenthart, R., & van Zoonen, L. (2011). Power to the frame: Bringing sociology back to frame analysis. *European Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 101-115. doi:10.1177/0267323111404838
- Wolfsfeld, G. (1997). *Media and political conflict : news from the middle east*. Cambridge University Press. 31-35
- Yuan Zhang & Yan Jin (2015) Who's responsible for depression?, *The Journal of International Communication*, 21(2),204-225, DOI: [10.1080/13216597.2015.1052532](https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2015.1052532)
- Zhongdang Pan & Gerald M. Kosicki (1993) Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse, *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55-75, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963

Appendix

'We're cursed': shock and despair in Beirut as explosion devastates city

Lebanese capital in state of chaos as people grapple with scale of blast that has injured thousands

As a ghostly brown haze began to clear, the streets of east Beirut emerged in apocalyptic ruin. Even 4km from the centre of the blast each building had lost some, if not all, of its windows. It was just after 6pm. Smoke, dispersed with pockets of pink gas, shrouded some of the carnage. Huge shards of glass covered roads – some jagged pieces had ripped through cars. Trees were shredded, and pools of blood formed puddles in the streets.

Blood trails led to the cars and motorbikes that had sped the injured away to clinics or hospitals, which within minutes of the explosion were struggling to cope with the number of dead and injured.

Ambulances wailed along the city's boulevards, speeding past intersections gridlocked by the sheer numbers of cars trying to flee and the weight of hazards they had to pass. The mushroom cloud that had billowed over the nearby port was being pushed to the east, but it towered in some form for almost half an hour.

Walking down through the east Beirut suburb of Ashrafieh to Gemmayze and towards the site of the blast at the port, the devastation was even more comprehensive. Dozens of buildings had clearly sustained structural damage. Shops, and restaurants were almost all severely damaged. A whole nightclub district was virtually wiped out. Weeks of sustained artillery shelling had not caused the same amount of ruin, even during the peak of the civil war.

Men, women and children were walking, bewildered, from somewhere near the blast site. Few were hurrying. Many were abandoning what remained of their homes, heading for nowhere in particular. It was just as difficult to get past the debris on foot as it was by car.

It takes a lot to shake Beirut, which has risen and fallen under bombs before. But in a city injured by an explosion, this was something new. An economic implosion had left a country on edge. Now a devastating explosion of a dimension that few could comprehend”

Beirut explosion: scores dead and thousands hurt as blast rips through city – video report

The last time a blast anywhere near this size had rocked Lebanon was in February 2005, when the former prime minister Rafik Hariri was killed by a car bomb outside a waterfront hotel. More than 15 years later, a result in the trial of his accused killers is due in The Hague on Friday, and there were fears the explosion could be a harbinger of the verdict.

“Nothing happens without a reason here,” said Sobhi Shattar, as he swept debris from the front of the former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn’s house in a well-to-do street. “This could be a message for everyone to back off.”

The focus quickly became what had blown up and how, with everybody having a theory. The blast wave was felt as far away as south Beirut, and was heard 80km (50 miles) away in northern Lebanon. There were reports that the sound of the explosion was heard 250km (160 miles) to the west in Cyprus.

“Only huge quantities of high explosives could do that,” said Riyadh Haddad, a local engineer. “Something at the port either blew up by itself, or got targeted.”

Like his neighbours in the entertainment district of Gemmayze, Haddad had a lot of work to do to make his house habitable. “Look at it,” he said. “How do we recover? There are at least 1m windows missing across the city, and that’s the least of our worries. No money, jobs, power, fuel. And now this. Will it be a wake-up call, or will there be a war?”

In the early aftermath, Lebanese officials were blaming the chaos on a storage of fireworks igniting in a catastrophic accident. That version was debunked by the sheer size of the explosion and reach of the blast wave.

The Interior minister, Mohamed Fehmi, later told the MTV Lebanon channel that the explosion appeared to have been caused by “huge quantities of ammonium nitrate” being stored at the port. But the announcement was not enough to put an end to rampant speculation.

“Was this a weapons storage centre?” asked one man, frantically trying to phone his friends. “Did the Israelis hit it? There was a small explosion, then a bigger one. What caused the first?”

Rumour and intrigue spread as fast as the shockwave, and by nightfall, Lebanon’s security chief, Gen Abbas Ibrahim, had debunked the fireworks theory and blamed an industrial accident in a warehouse depot, which he said had housed highly combustible chemicals.

Not everyone was convinced. “In all the history of Lebanon, there has never been anything like this,” said another man, in his 30s, as he swept glass out his front door. “This was almost

thermonuclear, and I think it was a lot of military-grade explosives that went up. Will they ever be truthful about it? I doubt it.”

As night closed in, Beirut was darker than ever. The waning electricity that recently could barely keep the city going was barely needed, for once. The city was rapidly emptying. The lights were no longer on.

Core frame(s): Abaddon

Reasoning devices :

- a. Problem definition: the explosion happened
- b. Causes: Only huge quantities of high explosives could do that, storage of fireworks, ammonium nitrate, weapon storage, Israel
- c. Consequences: “blast has injured thousands” (active voice), hospitals struggling to cope with the number of injured and dead, almost all restaurants and shops were severely damaged, many were abandoning homes, rumors and intrigue, people fleeing Beirut, Beirut was inhabitable
- d. Evaluation: Will it be a wake-up call, or will there be a war (meaning of the explosion), “Will they ever be truthful about it? I doubt it”, “Beirut was darker than ever”
- e. Solution: none
- f. Responsibility: blaming the chaos on a storage of fireworks

Framing devices:

Rhetorical and grammatical devices:

- a. **Catchphrases:** “We’re cursed” → evaluation
- b. **Keywords:** shock, despair, devastation, theory → consequences and evaluation of the civilians
- c. **Lexical choice:** explosion devastates, chaos, people grapple, blood trails, ambulances wailed along, almost all restaurants and shops were severely damaged, city injured by an explosion, devastating explosion, catastrophic accident → consequences and problem definition

- d. **Metaphors:** darkness → consequences, evaluation
- e. **Quantification:** The blast wave was felt as far away as south Beirut, and was heard 80km (50 miles) away in northern Lebanon. There were reports that the sound of the explosion was heard 250km (160 miles) to the west in Cyprus.
- f. **Imagery:**
 - a. “As a *ghostly brown haze* began to clear, the streets of east Beirut emerged in *apocalyptic ruin*. Even 4km from the centre of the blast each building had lost some, *if not all*, of its windows. It was just after 6pm. Smoke, *dispersed with pockets of pink gas*, shrouded some of the carnage. Huge shards of glass covered roads – some jagged pieces had *ripped through* cars. Trees were shredded, and pools of blood formed puddles in the streets”. → description of the consequences
 - b. Blood trails led to the cars and motorbikes that had sped the injured away to clinics or hospitals, which within minutes of the explosion were struggling to cope with the number of dead and injured.
 - c. Men, women and children were walking, bewildered, from somewhere near the blast site. Few were hurrying. Many were abandoning what remained of their homes, heading for nowhere in particular. It was just as difficult to get past the debris on foot as it was by car.
 - d. Beirut was darker than ever. The waning electricity that recently could barely keep the city going was barely needed, for once. The city was rapidly emptying. The lights were no longer on. → consequences

The imagery used in the article highlights the state of the city and its citizen. The readers of the Guardian are not from Beirut and are likely not be affiliated with Lebanon at all. They do not know what has happened and probably are not familiar with the history and previous wars in Lebanon. They need that information for broader context. The Guardian attempts to provide its readers with information that would help them to get the idea about the topic and understand the situation.

- g. Historical references:
 - a. Weeks of sustained artillery shelling had not caused the same amount of ruin, even during the peak of the civil war. (civil war comparison)

- b. It takes a lot to shake Beirut, which has risen and fallen under bombs before.
(civil war and other conflicts)
- c. The last time a blast anywhere near this size had rocked Lebanon was in February 2005, when the former prime minister Rafik Hariri was killed by a car bomb outside a waterfront hotel. (Assassination of Rafik Hariri)

Note: These comparisons are made to display the scale of the explosion, highlight its novelty: although Beirut has been under bombs, this explosion is something new.

- h. Thematically reinforcing sentences:
 - a. Even if this was an accident, it's the last thing we could afford. → evaluation
 - b. Nothing happens without a reason here → evaluation
 - c. This could be a message for everyone to back off → evaluation
 - d. In all the history of Lebanon, there has never been anything like this → evaluation

All of the thematically reinforcing sentences were statements by civilians.

Technical devices:

Heading: "We're cursed": shock and despair in Beirut as explosion devastates city → refers to the state of the city and its residents, "We're shocked" is a quote from a civilian

The Guardian highlights that the article is first of all about the people of Beirut

Concluding paragraph: As night closed in, Beirut was darker than ever. The waning electricity that recently could barely keep the city going was barely needed, for once. The city was rapidly emptying. The lights were no longer on.

→ metaphor of darkness, association of night, there is no need for electricity because of the devastation. This sentence also refers to the previous state of Lebanon, more specifically to poverty and bad state (electricity could barely keep the city). There is no light only darkness

Quotes:

- e. "We're cursed... Even if this was an accident, it's the last thing we could afford." (civilian)

- f. “Nothing happens without a reason here,... This could be a message for everyone to back off” (civilian)
- g. Only huge quantities of high explosives could do that,... Something at the port either blew up by itself, or got targeted” (civilian expert). “Look at it,” he said. “How do we recover? There are at least 1m windows missing across the city, and that’s the least of our worries. No money, jobs, power, fuel. And now this. Will it be a wake-up call, or will there be a war?”
- h. The Interior minister, Mohamed Fehmi, later told the MTV Lebanon channel that the explosion appeared to have been caused by “huge quantities of ammonium nitrate” being stored at the port.
- i. “Was this a weapons storage centre?” asked one man, frantically trying to phone his friends. “Did the Israelis hit it? There was a small explosion, then a bigger one. What caused the first?”
- j. “In all the history of Lebanon, there has never been anything like this,” said another man, in his 30s, as he swept glass out his front door. “This was almost thermonuclear, and I think it was a lot of military-grade explosives that went up. Will they ever be truthful about it? I doubt it.”

The Guardian does not rely solely on the official statements of the government but includes the theories of the citizens of Beirut. These statements are not necessarily backed with evidence, but their function in the text is representing the citizens.