

## **Mediating the Syrian revolt: how new media technologies change the development of social movements and conflicts\***

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“Enemies are many...the revolution is one...and it will continue”  
Banner in the city of Kafranbel, Syria (January 3, 2014)<sup>1</sup>

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No Matter. Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better!”  
Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (1983)

### **Introduction**

The Syrian uprising broke out at the time of what many defined as the ‘Arab Spring’, a period of revolutionary ferment, popular mobilisation and protest against authoritarian and corrupt regimes in the Arab world (Anderson, 2011).<sup>2</sup> However, Syria’s revolt has been very different from the others in that the unrest of the initial months has driven the country from an uprising to an armed conflict. These conditions have made Syria a fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalist groups, often with conspicuous participation of foreign fighters, waging a highly unorthodox *jihad* aimed at establishing a *Dar al-Islam* or new caliphate, ruled by a strict, reactionary interpretation of *sharia* law. Such a complex scenario would not be complete, without mentioning the role of regional powers, like the Gulf Cooperation Council, Turkey, Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) that have contributed with military support and fighters, and international super powers that, though not taking an active part in conflict, have financed the opposing sides.<sup>3</sup> By doing so, these countries have avoided direct participation in the civil war, engaging in a multisided proxy war, in which media wars have played a salient part.<sup>4</sup>

The unwrapping of Syria's chapter of the Arab Spring has been influenced by an unprecedented and overwhelming role that the new media technologies have proved playing since the early days of the uprising and to a large extent, one can argue, in the years that predated its outbreak.<sup>5</sup> The predominate role that the new media played at the time of the uprising was not the effect of a *deus ex-machina* but the result of years of experimentation and maturation, where Syrians were actively employing the digital tools to access information, network and disseminate campaigns on social and political issues. As the World Bank data shows, between 2002 and 2012 Syrian cell phone usage rates increased by 2,347 percent, compared to the 83 percent in the US during the same time period (Kilcullen, 2013). Moreover, Syria's Internet penetration increased by 883 percent, greater than in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The third-generation media, that is to say, satellite channels and social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have proved particularly influential in promoting social mobilisation. These tools have deeply affected the spark and development of the revolt, its narrative, the making of news and the management of the conflict. The extensive use of the new technologies at the time of the uprising is not the expression of a phenomenon limited to a single country, Syria or to a region, the Arab world, but the expression a wider phenomenon: the last decade has witnessed a global rise in social mobilisation and protest movements, all heavily influenced in their tactics and strategies by the employment of the new media (Shirky, 2011). Movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados of Puerta del Sol and those of Syntagma Square or of Brazil's 10-cent movement have been framed as mobilisations against austerity measures caused by the economic crisis while those in the Arab world as mobilisations against authoritarian regimes (Brownlee, Ghiabi, 2016) and yet, both movements denote a central theme, namely that contemporary society is turning into a "movement society" (Meyer, Tarrow, 1998) as an effect of the development of new media

that is offering citizens more opportunities to contest political authority and economic inequalities worldwide.

This paper examines the significant and multi-faced role that the new media technologies played in the course of the Syrian revolt, with the aim of reflecting on how the new information technologies have changed people's power, journalism and conflicts in many and diversified ways. In Syria, the new media technologies have been a game changer under many points of view: they have been used by citizens to vent their frustrations and sense of oppression; they have been employed to organise protest movements, to attack the regime's propaganda and to reach the international audience. On the other hand, the regime has also used the new media to launch a counteroffensive, mobilising a counter response to the anti-regime propaganda, strengthening the sentiment of its loyalists and deploying a digital army charged with spying people's activities online, identifying and arresting them. Indeed, the confrontation between the regime and the rebels has not occurred in streets and battlefields only, but in the virtual space as well. The extremist Islamic groups operating in Syria have also resorted to the new media to elicit fear, ask for ransom for hostages and recruit new followers.

For practical reasons the analysis of Syria's media field is here presented as a three-phase development, which follows the evolution of the revolt: the initial period of protests and demonstrations; the country's entry into a state of armed conflict; and the current draining stalemate of the civil war. The demarcation between these phases has been more gradual and less evident than it might appear in this analysis. Nonetheless, a framework that helps to understand the changing role of the new media in the development of the Syrian revolution may prove useful to offer a more thorough understanding of the events in Syria and reflect on the enormous potential that the new media technologies are offering people in closed regimes around the globe, as well as the dangers and harm that these same tools produce when handled by authoritarian

governments, terrorist organizations and not least, international media outlets, often more concerned with sensationalist reporting rather than fundamental ethical principles.

### **Phase 1. The spark of the uprising and the “syndrome of Hama”**

#### *The Facebook and YouTube effects*

Unlike Egypt that had enjoyed a surprisingly high and unfettered rate of network connectivity before 2011, Syrian web surfers had faced sophisticated technical infrastructures of censorship and wiretapping that applied to the online space as much as to the offline one (Kilcullen, 2013). When, at the early stages of the uprising, the regime adopted a more relaxed and comprehensive approach to the digital media, both social networks, Facebook and YouTube, were flooded by users and viewers. This coincided with the regime’s decision to lift the ban on their use in February 2011, a move that appeased the new generations and that allowed the regime to monitor and tail all possible anti-regime activists (Baiazy, 2012).

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 2011, a number of social rallies gathered through the main streets and squares of several Syrian cities, in response to the call for mobilisation of a Facebook page “the Syrian revolution 2011”.<sup>6</sup> A few days later, the page counted more than 41,000 fans (Baiazy, 2012). Since that date, the Syrian Revolution Facebook page became the revolution’s main manifesto and coordination network. Each Friday, the first day of the weekend in Syria, the page called for people to rally in defence of fundamental rights and values and to comfort the relatives of those who had lost a family member in the course of the unrest (Fares, 2015). The Facebook page, imitating the Egyptian call of Day of Rage, became instrumental to communicate with citizens, motivate people to take part in the protests and create a sort of social glue through which people could find support in each other and acquire a sense of common destiny. The great success of the page,

symbolised by growing number of followers, led to the opening of many other pages created in support to the Syrian revolt, like “the Syria Free Press” on February 20, 2011, “the Sham News Network” on March 18, 2011 and “the Ugarit Network” on April 2, 2011(Fares, 2015). One year later the number of online pages had reached the thousands. Facebook was the springboard for the spark of the Syrian uprising. Facebook pages were used as news-bulletins, building bridges with other activists in Arab countries and abroad, as well as simply sharing opinions. Facebook pages were very popular also among pro-regime supporters, sharing videos on the violence perpetuated by the rebels and uploading videos about the regime’s military grandeur and patriotic sacrifice. However, with time and with the changing political scene, activists turned to other social media tools like YouTube, Skype and Twitter.

In this phase, from March to July of 2011, the role performed by social media was inspired by a collective memory of the mass killing of civilians (between 10,000 to 40,000 deaths) by hands of the government in Hama 1982 which had received little media coverage.<sup>7</sup> Determined to prevent a recurrence of this episode, Syrians held on to their smartphones and cameras and kept filming every protest and peaceful march and their brutal repression by the regime. The act of uploading photos or videos documenting the regime's brutality paradoxically encouraged more people to join civil resistance despite the high degree of risk and uncertainty. Doug McAdam defines this process as "cognitive liberation", an evolution that individuals experience when put in front of a public condemnation of the regime's wrong doings, which breaks the barrier of apathy that had characterized them that far and drives them to reject the perceived injustice collectively (McAdam, 1982). Events like the regime's harsh punishment of the children of Dera'a and the torture of the 13-year-old boy Hamza al Khateb, acted as a "catalytic event", the click or fuse that lit the revolt.<sup>8</sup> These events exposed the regime's viciousness on a national level via alternative news outlets that the regime was unable to block, and which had

developed over the years prior the uprising. What marked the difference between the events in Hama of 1982 and those of 2011 was the public condemnation they received through the online media, no longer merely accounts told from mouth to mouth as had been in past.

In a year's time YouTube surpassed Facebook's popularity, which actually relied on YouTube's videos posting on its pages. These networks are closely interconnected, as videos are usually uploaded on YouTube, shared on Facebook and then referred to on Twitter. The number of YouTube videos uploaded on the Syrian revolution, approximately 2 million in the first two years of the revolt, has made some refer to the Syrian revolt as the 'YouTube revolution', as opposed to the Egyptian 'Facebook revolution' or the Iranian Green Movement 'Twitter's revolution' (Khatib, 2014). The nature of the page drove its success, as everyone with a phone or any rudimentary technology was able to post his/her video of the revolution, everyone contributing to sharing his/her own experience of the revolution. By doing so, YouTube became an online archive of homemade videos. Based on this, Fares Abed held that the "Syrian revolution is the most documented revolution in history" (Baiazy, 2012). However, given the still limited number of Internet surfers in Syria, their relevance grew when the information and footage uploaded on these social media was portrayed on satellite TV channels, the mass communication medium *par excellence*. Hence, it is when these two media, social media and satellite TV interacted that the Syrian news coverage reached the highest audience rates (Baiazy, 2012). This made the work of Syrian activists vital for international media reporting, but it also helped the aim of the revolution, given it an international echo.

The nature of video-documentation on the Syrian revolt is wide and diversified. Some testify to the creativity and humour of the Syrian people even in dark times, like *Top Goon: Diaries of the Little Dictator*, a web-based series puppet show that went on

air in 2011 mocking the President Bashar and his violent repression of protesters.<sup>9</sup> A wide number of videos testify to the resilience of the Syrian people, like the women of Salamiyah, who organised sit-ins at home, where women in disguise and holding banners with political slogans are filmed and later posted on the web.<sup>10</sup> By doing so, women avoid the risk of being arrested and support the cause of the revolution. Other videos witness the courageous demonstrations that ignited the uprising, the conflict between regime and rebels, the hard days of people under siege.

In Syria, online media represented cheap means to communicate, fast ways to coordinate action and what is more the only space where Syrians could express their dissatisfaction and call for action. In other Arab countries, citizens relied on social media to coordinate action, but expressed their dissatisfaction through massive gatherings in public spaces like Habib Bourghiba Street in Tunis, Tahrir Square in Cairo, Sittin Square in Sanaa and Pearl roundabout in Manama. In Syria, instead, the lack of large protest spaces, combined to the repressive security and military system, pushed the concentration of protests to the peripheries (Dera'a). Damascus and Aleppo, the two main urban agglomeration, were largely unencumbered by political rallies, at least in the initial stages of the revolt. For this reason, the new media were used to bridge these gaps and create a unifying force that, albeit online, was capable of keeping the revolution alive.

### *Virtual conflicts*

The extent to which the new media have dominated the development of the Syrian conflict is expressed by the establishment of the regime's "Syrian Electronic Army" (SEA), a group of IT specialists specifically recruited to fight back the anti-regime online mobilisation. The group, which defines itself as "enthusiastic Syrian youths who could not stay passive towards the massive distortion of facts about the recent uprising in Syria",

was launched in 2011 to operate digital spamming campaigns and attacks on individuals, groups and organisations undermining the legitimacy of the Syrian government (Fowler, 2013). The regime had always kept a close eye on the Internet, being the last Arab country to allow public access and even then, being very cautious at permitting unlimited access to all its pages. However, at the onset of the uprising in Syria, it became clear that new media were driving the social mobilisation and that to combat the anti-regime sentiment it was not sufficient to crush it in the streets and squares but it was necessary to wear it out online. The group, operated on different fronts: hacking and shutting down Syrian opposition websites, spamming popular Syrian opposition websites with pro-regime comments; uploading fabricated videos on YouTube to discredit protestors (Khamis et al. 2015). When activists were identified and arrested, security forces extracted information with the use of force, obtaining usernames and passwords of activists' social media accounts, which would be passed to the Syrian Electronic Army to post pro-regime slogans on their pages and contact the user's friends (Baiazy, 2012). The regime's IT army worked in close collaboration with the Syrian Security Communication branch, codenamed 225, the hub for all telecommunication security in Syria, intensifying the electronic surveillance system by controlling text-messaging, e-mails and Internet use, and blocking messages that might contain terms such as "revolution", "meeting" or "demonstration".<sup>11</sup> All these aspects are not usually sufficiently emphasised when referring to the Syrian conflict, though constituting an important component, one that has paralleled the front-line clashes in the virtual world, through spy war and cyber espionage.

### *The boom in net-art*

Social media have not only provided space for news coverage of the Syrian revolt, they have also opened venues of artistic expressions of resistance. While violence seems



to dominate most of the cyberspace coverage of the Syrian conflict, local artists have transformed the Internet into a virtual gallery to exhibit their works of art. The Syrian net-art is an innovative phenomenon of cultural production that encompasses visual art, mash-ups, cartoons, jokes, songs and web-series. One example is represented by the “Raised Hands Campaign”, a reaction to a campaign by the regime to gain popular support which entailed the putting up of billboards showing a colourful hand and the slogan “young or old, I’m with the law” (*ṣaḡhir aw kabir, ana ma‘a al-qanuun*), “whether a boy or a girl, I’m with the law” (*ṣabiy aw fatà, ana ma‘a al qanuun*). Syrians reacted to this Orwellian atmosphere by reusing the same slogans and images and by posting them across the different social media with new slogans that said “I’m free” (*ana hurr*), “I lost my shoe” (*‘faqadhtu hidha ‘i*”- suggesting it had been thrown at the dictator). The popularity of the digital version of the “Raised Hands Campaign”, as opposed to the offline one, obliged the regime to react to this manipulation and replace the old banners with new ones that displayed rhetorically more neutral mottos like “I’m with Syria. My demands are your demands” (*‘Ana ma‘a suriya. Maṭlabi huwwa maṭlabik*”). Once more, social media were filled up with the new version of the slogan, which read “I’m with Syria. My demands are freedom” (*‘Ana ma suriya. Maṭlabi al-hurriya*”).

As the scholar Donatella Della Ratta observes, this campaign, like many others, shows how Syrians did not accept the official rhetoric of the regime any longer, but they challenged it, regaining control over the world of public symbols (Della Ratta, 2012). The art of resilience also emerged in the powerful canvas of Monif Ajaj and Yasser Abu Hamad, the banners of Kafranbel a stronghold of resistance in the centre of Syria; likewise it can be identified in the Facebook page “Meals Under Siege”, created by the people of Homs to share improvised and creative recipes with the scarce ingredients at their disposal. Hence, social media are allowing Syrians to rediscover their creativity, once monopolised or censored by the elite-driven cultural production. By posting the arts and

crafts online, with no regime-interference and no censorship, this user-generated art, establishes a new relationship *vis à vis* power and state authority and a new connection between ordinary citizens and artists (Della Ratta, 2012).

## **Phase 2. From uprising to conflict, from media activism to citizen journalism**

When it became clear that popular demonstrations were not ending and that the regime was holding on to power, as had been the case in Tunisia and Egypt, a military confrontation between rebels and regime began. Protestors started arming themselves, guerrilla groups emerged and the regime progressively lost control of numerous towns and cities. With the formation of a civilian democracy movement and the creation of the Free Syrian Army, formed by defected Syrian officers, the Syrian uprising progressively moved from a popular uprising to a civil conflict. The change of setting had an impact on the media scene. Activists across Syria organised in Local Coordination Committees, with media centres providing local news coverage and sharing information. This phase is here identified as a period that goes from fall 2011 to the beginning of 2013 and ISIS's expansion within Syrian borders.

New media, in this context, progressively acquired a new status, one which was not linked exclusively to informing and documenting events, but that had a positive impact on the organisation and management of community. In this second phase, Syrians joined the revolt by fighting and by “doing journalism”, signalling a transition from “media activism” – conceived as a form of militant journalism, to “citizen journalism”, a form of participation that supported social development, focused on the needs of the domestic audience, rather than the international one.

This new type of journalism, also known as “public”, “participatory”, “democratic”, or “street” journalism, assigns the role of collecting, reporting, analysing

and disseminating news and information to citizens. Citizens take up this role to compensate the poor performance of state's news outlets and to dispel the distorted propaganda offered by the regime's own journalists.

The profession of citizen journalists has been the object of extensive, though not exhaustive, debates. Whether one considers it a contribution from an "insider" to the making of news, or a courageous effort by the people, yet one lacking professionalism, the role of citizen journalism remains crucial to the understanding of the media landscape during the Syrian uprising. The latter bears some truth when one looks at the context in which activists offered media coverage strongly imbued with political value and militant language, casting doubt on the training and lack of coordination that these individuals had when compared with traditional media institutions.

In this sense, media tools become weapons to protect the cause of the revolution. A media activist interviewed in Gaziantep during a media training session argued: "My aim is to use the media to help my people topple Bashar. Why shouldn't I serve the interests of my people and of myself? I have been silenced for my whole life by the regime, now I need to have my say".<sup>12</sup> This attitude, shared by many and evident in the early media production, has changed with time, both because of the endurance of the conflict and because of technical and financial support received by media activists from foreign powers. Media development is one of the sectors that foreign powers have consistently supported in Syria, with the alleged objective of securing professional media coverage of the conflict, as well as teaching a new profession to the new generations. The practice of media assistance projects, funded by international actors like the EC and USAID progressively turns into the strategy for foreign powers to intervene indirectly, a form of soft power, which supports civil society while pushing for regime change.

The Syrian revolution is teaching that the world is changing and with it the making of news. The status quo of traditional journalism is not exclusively reserved for accredited

journalists or established media outlets acting as media gatekeepers as in the past. Today, potentially every man or woman with a cell-phone camera in his/her hand can contribute and even question news coverage. News has become more visual and emphatic, including images of death and destruction, engaging the audience even more.

If in the initial stage of the uprising – or actually prior to it – the renaissance of the media landscape apparently developed through digital platforms, with the passing of time it moved toward the revaluation of traditional forms. The conflict had limited people's access to the Internet, making traditional media like newspaper, radio and TV channels regain popularity as forms of expression which were not only meant to inform or boost support, but also entertain and educate. Moreover, social media, though popular and welcoming all types of content, were not affordable for all, whether for generational gaps, high cost of devices and the limits imposed by a conflict that had caused food, water shortages and electricity restrictions.

### *Newspapers*

Underground newspapers first appeared in Syria towards the end of 2011, marking an important change in the panorama of the Syrian revolution.<sup>13</sup> The publication and distribution of periodicals produced a symbolic rupture with the monopoly of information that the regime had imposed up to then, offering alternatives to the propaganda operated by the government. The production of newspapers as well as radio channels represented that necessary step that bridged the pre-revolutionary phase in which alternative news circulated only online and were thereby limited to those accessing the web, to a post-uprising phase in which the news horizon expands to the offline production and is accessible to the wider public.

Between 2011 and 2012, a dozen of independent grassroots newspapers, often with their online version, were printed in Syria, like *Suryitna* (Our Syria) *Oxygen*, *Hurriyat* (Freedoms), *Enab Baladi* (Local Grapes), only to mention a few.<sup>14</sup> The production and distribution of these periodicals jeopardised the lives of those involved in the project, especially those working in the distribution of copies within pro-governmental areas.<sup>15</sup>

Today the number of oppositional papers has grown enormously, with a production that operates both in government-held areas as well as in regions under the control of armed groups. Some of these papers are also produced in Turkey and then re-distributed to the rebel-held territories. Higher quality publications have appeared, thanks to the financial and technical support of international media organisations. Many of these papers are published in local dialects or languages (e.g. Kurdish and Arabic) and target groups such as women, children, and religious minorities (De Angelis, Della Ratta et alia, 2015).

Among the numerous printed papers that have emerged, *Sayedat Souria* (The Lady of Syria) constitutes a meaningful voice. This magazine puts forward a vision outside the box of the revolution. The magazine is an advocacy paper in circulation since the beginning of 2014, which has been supported financially and technically by the French media organisations SMART and ASML. Printed in Gaziantep on the Turkish border with Syria – with a working plan to open branches also in the liberated areas – the paper has a distribution of five thousand copies in the liberated territories and two thousand copies in Syrian refugee camps. The magazine is also published online through *Issuu*, a digital publishing platform, along with Facebook and Twitter. *Sayedat Souria* represents the first paper in Syrian history to be dedicated to Syrian women with no political or religious orientation, aimed at raising women's awareness about politics, society and justice by having women to address to and write about other women. Yasmine

Merei, editor in-chief of the magazine, affirms that before the revolt began people spoke only of one Syrian woman, Asma al-Asad, the president's wife, the female icon of Syrian society.<sup>16</sup> Now with the revolution, the magazine is substituting that icon with one that portrays all Syrian women, regardless of whether they are for or against the regime. The aim of paper is not to put forward a certain reading of the conflict or push to take side, but to focus on the pressing issues that Syrian women face today, whether they are living in refugee camps, rebel-held areas, regime-controlled neighbourhoods or pushing to increase their representation in the Syrian National Coalition, limited to only 5 percent. The paper touches upon pressing issues for the female community, victims of a civil war and faced with problems like forced marriage of minors, childcare, environmental and food constraints. With violence perpetuated by the regime and by Islamist groupings alike, *Sayedat Souria* attempts to provide a perspective which differs from the monolithic narratives of the contending parts, with a glance at what could be a future Syria.

### *Radio*

After a first period of digital flourishing, radios have re-emerged as probably the most efficient way to reach local audiences inside Syria. Requiring only a cheap receiver and small battery, radios could easily be used across the country and could reach out to communities otherwise marginalised geographically. Radios have always constituted the best way to have access to news and they have proved very useful in times of war. Radio waves have the advantage of not having to pass checkpoints and frontiers and to reach areas under attack, offering the only possibility to receive news coverage of the event and of the outside world. Numerous radios have been established with foreign support in Turkey (both Istanbul and Gaziantep) or have their offices further abroad, like *Rozana* whose main office is in Paris. A number of transmission options are available: some

radios are only available online, while others broadcast both on short waves and online.

In some cases, like *Radio Fresh*, a local radio station broadcasting from Kafranbel in Idlib province, they are available only to their local broadcast.

In May 2015, at least 17 Syrian radio stations were broadcasting:<sup>17</sup>

Name	Main Office	Distribution	Website/Social media
FRESH	Kafranbel, Syria	90.0 FM (mainly Kafranbel)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com7Radio.Frsh.90.00FM?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com7Radio.Frsh.90.00FM?fref=ts</a>
SOURIALI	No main office-operating from several cities: Marseille, Washington DC, Paris, Damascus	Online presence + few hours of daily broadcast via Hawa mart	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Radio-SouriaLI">https://www.facebook.com/Radio-SouriaLI</a> <a href="http://soundcloud.com7souriali">http://soundcloud.com7souriali</a>
ANA	Gaziantep, Turkey	102. FM (mainly Aleppo)	<a href="http://www.ana.fm/ar/">http://www.ana.fm/ar/</a>
AL-KUL	Istanbul, Turkey	95.5 FM	<a href="http://radioalkul.com">http://radioalkul.com</a>
HAWA SMART	Gaziantep, Turkey	103.2 FM	<a href="https://facebook.com/hawasmartradio">https://facebook.com/hawasmartradio</a>
ROZANA	Paris, France	103.5 in Hama, Homs, Aleppo 99.9 in Qalamoun	<a href="http://rozana.fm">http://rozana.fm</a>
YARMOUK 63	No main office (team working from Syria, Lebanon, Turkey)	Online	<a href="http://yarmouk63radio.weebly.com">http://yarmouk63radio.weebly.com</a>
NASAEM SYRIA	Gaziantep, Turkey	98.5 FM (mainly Aleppo and Idlib)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/radio.nasaem.syria/timeline">https://www.facebook.com/radio.nasaem.syria/timeline</a>
HARA FM	Gaziantep, Turkey	99.9 FM (Minly Aleppo)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/radiohara/fm?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/radiohara/fm?fref=ts</a>
8RBTNA FM	Gaziantp, Turkey	Online	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/gherbetna/info?tab=overview">https://www.facebook.com/gherbetna/info?tab=overview</a>
ARTA FM	Gaziantep, Turkey	99.5 (mostly Kurdish areas: Amudah, amishli)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/artradio?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/artradio?fref=ts</a> <a href="http://www.arta.fm">http://www.arta.fm</a>
NAHDA FM	No main office	Online	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/NahdaFm?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/NahdaFm?fref=ts</a>
WATAN	Gaziantep, Turkey	90.2 (Aleppo) 90.3 (Idlib)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/fm.watan?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/fm.watan?fref=ts</a> <a href="http://watan.fm/">http://watan.fm/</a>
ALWAN	Gaziantep, Turkey	93.3	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alwan6070?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/alwan6070?fref=ts</a> <a href="http://www.alwan.fm">www.alwan.fm</a>
Roo7	Gaziantep, Turkey	92.7 (Aleppo) 99.7 (Hama and Homs)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Radio-Roo7?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/Radio-Roo7?fref=ts</a>

These radios are the by-product of the current civil war, therefore designed to support those Syrians afflicted by military rule and suffering from economic restriction, as well as the numerous refugees, scattered across the country. Radio stations present entertainment programmes, music, cultural programmes and everything concerning daily life whether in regime or opposition-held areas. Both radios and TV channels that have emerged since the start of the conflict, offer an agenda of “social programming”, meaning that they focus on reporting on and for a population affected by a war, offering debates, advice and discussing possible solutions to daily life problems, like power-cuts, lack of water and gas, how to cook with food shortage (De Angelis, Della Ratta et alia, 2015). They are also presenting cultural programmes based on the revival of Syrian history, culture, music, dialect and food. A very good example is represented by *Radio SouriaLi*, an Internet-based radio broadcasting from October 2012, born from a project of a group of Syrians with different ethnic, religious and intellectual backgrounds, based inside and outside Syria. Caroline Ayoub, an activist who had been detained by the regime and one of the main contributors of the radio show, explains how the name “SouriaLi” sums up the current situation in her country. It is a play on words, which combines “sourialia”, meaning surrealism, with “souria li”, meaning “Syria for me”, in order to refer to the surrealistic condition that Syria is experiencing and the need for all Syrians to come together to build a new Syria.<sup>18</sup> Caroline Ayoub affirms that the radio is trying to sew up the wounds of the war and reunite Syrians in the name of their rich cultural heritage. This is done through a number of programmes, like “*Ayam el Lulu*” (Good Old Days) in which well-known episodes of Syrian history are celebrated; “*Fattoush*”, (a traditional Syrian salad dish), which airs a 15-minute cooking show on traditional food recipes; or “*Hakawati Souria*”, a 20-minute program on traditional storytelling.<sup>19</sup> *Radio SouriaLi* is the expression of one among the many radio programs that are showing how life in Syria



endures and preserves the great culture of its people. *Radio SouriaLi* is the most successful Syrian media project, with 500,000 returning visitors to the website each month, 200,000 playbacks on their sound cloud account and 4 million on-line listeners (Marrouch, 2014). The radio broadcasts for three hours a day in Syria, using equipment and broadcasting capacity provided by *Hawa Smart* in Hama, Homs, Damascus, Latakia, and Aleppo.

Another example of a successful radio station is *Radio Fresh*, though very different with regards to its reach and quality. Founded in 2013, *Radio Fresh* was established by a group of media activists in Kafranbel, Idlib province, as a community-radio, which could cover local issues that were relevant for its local audience. As Rima Marrouch reports through the words of a Syrian researcher living in Gaziantep, “the success of Radio Fresh is that they really speak about issues that touch Kafranbel’s residents. For example, fixing the local power plant or distribution of humanitarian aid in town. They don’t speak about the Iranian nuclear program or international affairs, stories that people can follow in mainstream Arabic-language media outlets”. The funding of these radio stations is difficult to track as most of the operators have shown a certain degree of discretion with regards to disclosing the names of the donors they rely on and the level of resource they deploy. Such level of transparency seems, at times, to infringe those same values preached by these radios. Despite the difficulties, two main options appear to regulate the sector: donor funding and a more self-generated funding mix (Marrouch, 2014).

The panorama on Syrian radios would not be complete without mentioning other less promising examples of media outlets. In fact along with the broadcasting of radios trying to provide a non-partisan report on the conflict, there are less successful cases of radios channelling hateful messages. This may appear under different forms, like telling stories of mothers sending their children to take up arms to fight the regime, or chanting

songs encouraging young people to join the battle or simply merging news coverage with propaganda and sensationalism. If these trends are determined by a conflict that has overwhelmed everyone and where detachment is at times difficult to put in practice, in other cases radios are consciously transformed into tools to propagate fear and hate. With the emergence of the Islamic State within Syrian borders, radios have also become a means of unorthodox jihadi propaganda. This is the case of radio *Al-Bayan*, established by the Islamic State after the size of the city of Raqqa in January 2014 (Marrouch, 2014). This radio broadcasts daily news about the advancement of the Islamic State, reads out political statements and describes the benefits of those living under the Islamic law. Though the broadcast of radios like *Al-Bayan* are limited to the territories under the control of the Islamic State, it represents an alarming sign, that the enthusiasm and creativity that characterised the beginning of the uprising, has made the way to a more complex reality, where media outlets can be sources for community building as well as be carrier of deleterious effects, causing an escalation of violence and hate speech.

### *Satellite TV*

Satellite TV channels have played a fundamental role in the Syrian conflict, for their capacity to give news a wider reach and to bring people, in Syria and abroad, face-to-face with the reality of the war. If Internet, radio and newspapers were already contrasting the regime's monopoly of information, satellite TV was somehow a stronger weapon for its extensive popularity among people and the power that images and videos provoked in people's imaginary. However, satellite TV channels have not emerged with the same rhythm of radio stations, due to their high operational costs. Two satellite channels, *Orient TV* and *Barada TV*, created before the uprising and based abroad, transformed the already existing anti-regime orientation into an explicit anti-regime

opposition, adopting the discourse of the revolution. This was followed by the creation of up to nine opposition broadcasting channels, among which *Souria Al-Shaab* (Syrian People), *Souria Al-Ghad* (Syria Tomorrow), *18<sup>th</sup> of March Channel* and *Aleppo Today*.

Despite the controversies regarding the financial support it received, *Barada TV* played a fundamental role in the years leading up to the revolt and in those that followed it (Withlock, 2011). This London-based TV channel, funded in 2008 by a group of Syrian expatriates with a low-budget production, covered topics that were taboo within Syria, often with explicit anti-regime stances and political debates usually left out of Syria's national channels. As soon as the first protests and manifestations started, the channel gave wide coverage of the events. It started streaming YouTube videos that protestors had posted online, inaugurating a technique that characterised the news coverage on Syria of most of the established international news networks. Beside the use of exclusive footages, the channel also relied on open debates, where people were able to call in and express their opinions, opening a venue for critical thinking and civic engagement.

However, the most significant development in the Syrian media war between opposition and regime came when the government of Saudi Arabia and Qatar decided to use their media assets, respectively *al-Arabiya* and *al-Jazeera*, to hasten Assad's demise (Al-Abdeh, 2012). Though this happen when the uprising had already taken to the streets in massive numbers, this drift revolutionised the media landscape on the Syrian conflict, in terms of information available and for the strong influence the two channels have on public opinion (Abu Khalil, 2011). The two channels, founded by members of the Qatari and Saudi royal families, respectively, had won the hearts of the Arab audience by introducing a new type of journalism inspired by Western values of professionalism, accountability, precision and independent thinking. When the uprising in Tunisia broke out, these channels played a fundamental role in advertising the local protest as the expression of a broader Arab story of popular uprising. This facilitated the spread of the

protests from one country to another, as part of a common framework, something that would have hardly been possible without the unifying media narrative. Unfortunately the type of professionalism which they praised was strongly undermined in the coverage of the Syrian conflict, serving the interests of their patrons and local proxies. This contrasted with the coverage of state television, which resisted reforms and became a weapon in the hands of the security apparatus and the old regime (Lynch, 2015). Unfortunately, as pointed out by Marc Lynch, the partisan tone adopted by national and transnational broadcasting had a debilitating effect on the fate of the uprising, fading the enthusiasm of its early days and contributing to internal divisions and to its enduring war stagnation (Lynch, 2015).

### **Phase 3. Media professionalisation and war stagnation**

The revolution of the first days has by now entered a new phase, with new participants joining the conflict and a civil war taking over the country. With the fall of the regime not expected to happen any time soon, and with the radical Islamist guerrillas taking control over large swaths of the country, the media sector also moved into a new phase, which can be identified beginning at the start of 2013. Syrian media developed in terms of professionalism and widened their sphere of production. Despite the war, media centres and media professionals were working with higher standards of professionalism, inspired by Western models and supported by foreign media support programmes. This type of support to local journalists and media activists was conceived as necessary to keep news from Syria flowing, as international reporters had been barred from or had restricted access to the country, leaving local journalists as the only newsgatherers to Syria's war. Media development, intended to provide material support, technical assistance, training

and financial support to media centres and activists, grew enormously, to an extent that it resembled an industry (Stanley, 2007).

Media development programmes became a pillar in the international response to the ongoing Syrian crisis, with a number of actors involved in the media assistance, from governments, to multilateral organisations and a large number of national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The US government and EU are two of the main donors, which entrust the projects to a vast number of implementers like BBC Media Action, Internews Europe, the National Democratic Institute, HIVOS, Free Press Unlimited, Canal France International, l'Association du Soutien aux Médias Libres (ASML), and AVAAZ. These projects are usually carried out in Syria's neighbouring countries, with Turkey being the main host. Gaziantep, a city on the Turkish-Syrian border, has become the hub for media organisations that have established their office and operate trainings, workshops for Syrian media activists. Here they learn the basics of journalism and video shooting, they are provided with broadcast equipment to use for the news coverage. Some become themselves trainers who return to Syria to teach others media skills and provide them with the necessary equipment, in some cases establishing media centres in the different governorates. The protracted conflict and deteriorating situation inside Syria has forced media support projects to return working on traditional media, principally radios and newspapers, which could reach areas under siege. These programmes are specifically designed to respond to the needs produced by a crisis that has left people without houses, reduced many to being refugees across the country and in the region, confined others in refugee camps, while sectarian strife and the terror caused by the prospect of an Islamist takeover is spreading across the country.

One of the main initiatives of this phase is represented by the formation of platforms fulfilling the critical task of mediating between the online production of news and the public: checking the contents, contextualizing the events and verifying their

authenticity. One example is the *Damascus Bureau*, a news platform where independent journalists and inexperienced media activists can publicise their articles, have them translated, and receive comments from experts and the public.<sup>20</sup>

Other types of initiatives gather news and videos provided by activists in the field, verifying, and contextualising raw material into useable footage, which is then distributed to international media. One example is offered by the citizen press group *ANA News Media Association*, a Cairo-based network of journalists providing training and equipment to media activists working in Syria, with support from private donors and EU funding.<sup>21</sup> ANA, co-funded by the British-Syrian journalist Rami Jarrah, offers Syrian activists clandestine training and equipment usually smuggled through the Lebanese border. The organisation has grown substantially, reaching a network of 350 Syrians who file news from across the country.<sup>22</sup>

Of a different nature is the platform *Syrian Media*, funded by the media activist Monis Bokhari. It constitutes a database of the different headlines that have appeared since the outbreak of the revolution and a connection between these different media platforms.<sup>23</sup> Monis Bukhari, also funder of the online radio *Baladna* (our country), holds that the objective is to create a common language for Syrian journalism, which is based on more professionalism on behalf of journalists and more collaboration among them (De Angelis, 2014). All of these initiatives testify to an epochal change of the Syrian media landscape, which is strongly dependent on the Internet as its main platform. The emergence of these organizations charged with the selection and publication of news, guarantees higher reliability and more relevance to news, as opposed to what was a chaotic, if not piecemeal, uploading of news by activists on social media.

Despite these initiatives, aimed at portraying a more balanced picture of the Syrian crisis, one that stands on authentic and verifiable news, a large section of news outlets are still lacking professional rigour and ethical responsibility, adopting highly partisan

narratives, which serve specific state authorities/factions or political aims. This picture refers to both national and international media outlets, which driven by higher political and strategic purposes have contributed to the marketization of fear, the sectarianization of the conflict and the demonization of specific minorities. This means, as Lynch points out, that if the media played a prominent role in enabling the outbreak of the uprising, the fragmentation in the media coverage that followed also transformed it into a vehicle for proxy warfare by regional powers and encouraged the logic of violence (Lynch, 2015). For instance, the emphasis that has been put on the sectarian nature of the Syrian civil war, whether by the regime, some opposition groups or regional state actors, has been employed and manipulated by the different parties operating on the ground to serve their political aims. The Syrian regime has inevitably stressed the sectarian nature of the conflict to justify its repression against rebel forces and its call for national unity against the *takfiri* Islamist threat. Regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, have embarked on their part in a proxy war that has taken also place through competing media channels and networks.

### *Isis and the Cyber Caliphate*

The analysis of the Syrian mediascape would not be complete without mentioning the hi-tech jihadi war directed by the so-called Islamic State in the third phase of the Syrian conflict. Despite the retrograde aim of restoring an Islamic caliphate over the territories of Iraq and Syria, harking back to the religious and political state that succeeded the Prophet Muhammad's death (632 CE), the new Islamic state or as Jean-Pierre Filiu defines it the “Deep State”, is anything but retrograde in terms of the sophisticated media campaign it launches.<sup>24</sup> ISIS has invested enormously in its marketing strategy, proving to have improved greatly since the "fuzzy, monotonous camcorder sermons" of a decade

ago Osama bin Laden's use of the media (Rose, 2014). ISIS global media operation makes use of *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Tumblr* and other social media to instil fear, discredit and stir hatred against its enemies (i.e. Iran and Shi'a groups), provoke the US and its allies and recruit from outside the Middle East. The group has also founded *al-Hayat Media Centre*, a broadcaster aimed at non-Arabic speakers, with programmes shaped on the model of Western TV channels, streaming in several languages, with the intent of showing the perfect life existence of those living within the confines of the Islamic Caliphate.

Differently from the dreadful video footages showing the brutality of the group when killing Western hostages or different ethnic and religious groups facing their military advance, other videos circulate on the *mujdatweets*, few-minutes videos under the shape of a jihadi travel show, showing colourful scenes of street life, children at playground or eating an ice cream, with people joyfully coming up to the camera to express the security and peace that the "land of the Khalifah" offers, saying "We don't need any democracy, we don't need any communism or anything like that, all we need is shari'a" (Rose, 2015). The Western origin of many of its fighters is revealed by the professional audio and visual techniques being used as well as by the expressions of ostentation and pride that the fashion of shooting selfies has produced through Islamic fighters (Diab, 2015). Sadly, these "poster boys", posing in Rambo-like selfies and circulating through ISIS's followers social networks, beside questioning the religious "legality" (*haram* vs. *halal*) of these photos, are proving to find the way to future recruits' hearts.

The emergence of ISIS further complicates the conflict in Syria, presenting a third contending party in the already fragmented conflict and deepening the crisis. However, beside the actual brutality of the group, experienced by all those falling under its authority, the group is also waging a war that trespasses the borders of the presumed



Islamic caliphate, reaching Western countries through cyberspace and undermining fundamental questions about the idea of territorial sovereignty. ISIS' "electronic war", waged against Europe and the US, is threatening Western computing systems, hacking business and government websites and provoking serious economic and national challenges. Examples as the one occurred in April 2015, where ISIS hacked the French Television network TV5 Monde, preventing it from broadcasting for three hours and controlling its social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook.

This confirms that the media are ductile tools, they can serve popular democratic movements, authoritarian governments and terrorist organisations alike. In this regard, it is necessary to stress how the alarming expansion of the Islamic state or of the so called “caliphate” has not just occurred through Syrian and Iraqi territories but also through the virtual world. It is in the cyberspace that the power of the caliphate is rooted. Here, digital platforms have become the main pool of recruits who discover not only ISIS, but as Adam Shatz argues on the *London Review of Books*, Islam itself (Shatz, 2015). Indeed digital media have paradoxically bridged the gap between two crises of citizenship: the exclusion of young Muslim in Europe and the exclusion of Sunnis in Syria and Iraq (Shatz, 2015). Therefore the impact of the new media in the Syrian conflict has to be carefully weighted and diversified according to the specific player and audience to which it appeals, as they can equally breach gaps between atomised citizens and drive regime changes or gather disfranchised people inebriated by fanaticism and violence.

## **Conclusion**

The role and development of the new media in Syria has been a revolution within a revolution. Social networking sites, web-aggregators, TV channels, satellite stations, radios, online and printed newspapers, magazines, have emerged in the midst of the

revolt, eager to replace what had been the official and meagre news diet that the Syrian regime had offered thus far. It was the combination of old and new media, online and offline protests that marked the success of the media campaign. If, on the one hand, activists opened new webpages and uploaded videos reporting on the brutality of the regime, on the other hand, there were underground newspapers distributed in rebel-held areas, radio stations operating from neighbouring countries that reached the Syrian airwave space and satellite TV channels spreading the news of Syrian social network to an international audience. All of this amplified the capacity of the movement and the reaching of its message across the population.

The events, *à la* Alain Badiou, unfolding in Syria have been influenced by the media in all its phases and aspects, to an extent that it would be very difficult to think of the Syrian uprising separately from the media. Based on these assumptions, this paper analyses the diversified role that the new media technologies have played during the course of the Syrian uprising – from its early days to the current civil war – identifying the actors employing them, the strategies used and the impact they produced on the development of the conflict. Specifically, the paper argues that the Syrian media scene experienced three major phases in its development: the emergence of alternative sources of information through the digital space that acted as catalysts, mobilisers and organisers of the popular movement; the evolution from media activism to citizen journalism and finally what we are now witnessing the professionalisation and diversification of the media sphere within a state of war stagnation.

Analysing the role of the media in the Syrian conflict is important for a number of different reasons. The most evident one is that with the spark of the Syrian revolt, the monopoly of information held by the Syrian regime crumbled with citizens' access and employment of the new media technologies. These tools do not simply offer a new and diversified news panorama, but they set platforms where interaction and coordination

occur, where common actions are organised and where everyone, government included, are asked to be accountable for their actions. The new information technologies damage the regime's longevity and stability by putting an end to the regime's control over the flow of information and people's interaction. Moreover, the Syrian conflict becomes the expression of another important phenomenon, namely that the new media have not simply increased the opportunities for social movements to emerge, but they have changed the way conflicts are fought, becoming at the same time tools to inform and weapons to attack. Today the media are not just tools to spread information, but to "perform" in the conflict (Zelizer, 2007). This entails that nowadays conflicts are not simply fought on the ground with heavy artillery but online, with real electronic armies fighting over the control of space, power and language. Through the virtual allies of the cyberspace contentious action takes place, contesting factions spy over the enemy's virtual activities and inflict heavy blows with a simple click of the mouse. And yet the role of the new media in the Syrian conflict has not simply empowered citizens against authoritarian ruling and duplicated the conflict in a real and virtual dimension but it has produced a new type of journalism, less professional but incredibly more vivid and crude. If the Vietnam War was the first televised war and the Gulf War the first 24/7 cable war, the Syrian conflict is the first social media war. Lynch defines it as the "most socially mediated civil conflict in history", with a range of videos, information and discourses flowing from Syria that is unprecedented and at times, ungovernable (Lynch, Freelon et alia, 2014). The abundance of messages and the emergence of new guerrilla groups has complicated the news panorama, with each group trying to control the message.

Images and live footages have dominated the news coverage of the Syrian revolt since its onset and have profoundly affected its development. Some images are now glued in our collective memory, like the massacre of Izra', near Dera'a on April 22 of 2011 and the picture of an anguished father carrying the dead body of his son, who had been shot in

the head (Al-Abdeh, 2012). The videos of the singer Ibrahim Qashush who gathered thousands in the streets of Hama by tuning the song “Come on, Bashar, leave!” (*yallah, irhal ya Bashar!*) and who was found dead in a river with his throat cut, is another symbolic icon (Shadid, 2011); and even more, the rows of dead children heaped up after the chemical attack in East Ghouta province in August 2013 (Mahmoud, Chulov, 2013). Daunting videos and images like these have encouraged Syrians to participate and have shaped the world’s understanding of the violent repression of peaceful protestors by the Syrian regime. Equally shocking videos like the one of the rebel commander eating the heart of a fallen enemy, have proved how the enduring state of war and devastating humanitarian catastrophe is dis-humanising, on whichever side they occur.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually the mediatisation that has been done of the Syrian conflict has brought in every home images of the war, bringing foreign audiences closer to the conflict and to the catastrophe of the refugee crisis that the war has created. The rise of citizen journalists and their performance with new media is progressively changing the nature and the limits of journalism, extending “journalists authority in questionable ways” (Zelizer, 2007). If on the one hand the media coverage offered by citizen journalists can be criticised for being imbued with political value and militant language, on the other hand one should also question the agenda of international media outlets that collect the material uploaded by citizens journalists to build a narrative serving the interests of their patrons, local proxies or simply at the mercy of the market. This means that this type of media, instead of giving voice to the voiceless as it was the case at the onset of the uprising, is once again the expression of bigger and stronger actors/countries that in order to pursue their political agenda, focus their coverage on sensationalism, inciting hatred against political adversaries and deepening ethnic and religious divisions. This suggests that the media are powerful tools, which can be equally effective to encourage collective action and drive popular mobilisations as they can produce fear, resentment and divisions (Lynch, 2015).

The recent catastrophe of Syrian refugees fleeing their country and embarking on an unknown journey is assigning the media the decisive role of documenting the crisis and calling for the international community to act promptly. When the image of a dead Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, in September of 2015, washed ashore the coastal city of Bodrum in Turkey, appeared on social media and on international newspapers, this has not simply questioned the ethics of journalism, but has more importantly reminded the international community that the Syrian crisis has not ended, thus is widening and coming closer to Europe with the calamity of its refugees fleeing the war. The image has provoked an unprecedented involvement of civil society actors around European countries, rallying in the streets and pushing their governments to provide temporary asylum to the many Syrian refugees, a fact that *per se* shows the unprecedented potentialities that the new media have in changing society and politics. And yet the role of the media does not terminate here. The Syrian revolt, which seems to have succumbed to a self-perpetuating war, still lives in the heart of its people. Once it is over, the new media will have to take part in a much harder task: sewing the wounds that the violence caused by sectarian, religious and political divides has provoked during these years of civil war.<sup>26</sup>

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\* For transliteration, I have modified the system developed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, dispensing with diacritical marks, and, where possible, adopting the spelling used in the mainstream media. Due to the multiplicity of transliteration forms which regularly appear in the media, I opted for this simplified, inclusive model of transliteration which privileges the forms used in the media, rather than the established academic transliteration.

<sup>1</sup> Slogan written on a banner by the city of Kafranbel, now known for its courageous spirit, carrying out distinctive acts of civil activism in the midst of a civil war. See Joseph Daher, 'The Roots and Grassroots of the Syrian Revolution (Part 4 of 4)', *Open Democracy*, April 5, 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/joseph-daher/roots-and-grassroots-of-syrian-revolution-part-4-of-4-3>, accessed April 27, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> As terminology is a locus of lasting influence and as definitions are often conventional, this paper attempts to avoid the unfinished debate about the definitions of the Arab uprisings, given the ongoing confrontation present in many countries that joined the call to revolt in 2011. This means that expressions such as "Arab Spring", "Arab Awakening" are used with great attention, favouring terms like "uprising", "upheaval" or "revolts" and "revolution", which are less limiting and better suited to the unsettled, dynamic reality of the Arab region. Moreover, in order to clarify a few important semantic and operational issues, this paper makes use of expressions "Arab world", "Middle East" and the "region" interchangeably to address the Middle East in the larger sense, aware of the mixture of racial and ethnic groups, social classes, religious affiliations, nationalities, rural and settings and linguistic communities. Any discussion that makes use of these broad categories and which attempts to delineate some general patterns, does not assume that they apply everywhere.

<sup>3</sup> The Asad regime has benefitted from a trustful and generous friendship with Russia, Iran and Lebanon, while the rebel groups have been fattened by Turkey, the conservative Arab states, specifically Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the EU member states and the US, with financial revenues by Gulf countries fuelling the Islamic groups.

<sup>4</sup> This covert intervention has been justified on two grounds, that the Syrian regime is authoritarian (despite many authoritarian nations have been also allied with the West) and because the Syrian government has been charged with using illegal chemical weapons. It is noteworthy that 99 percent of the casualties and destruction in Syria has been caused by the use of conventional weapons. Wide criticism has been directed toward such funding, given the very difficult, if not impossible task of knowing whether the funding is fuelling the most extreme fringes of the rebel groups. Secretary of State John Kerry claimed that only a small portion of the rebels (15-20%) are the "bad guys". Unfortunately the estimates have to be thought as 15,000 or 25,000.

<sup>5</sup> The development of Syria's media landscape in the years that predated the uprising of 2011 is the issue of enquiry of my PhD thesis, *New Media and Revolution: Syria's Silent Movement towards the 2011 Uprising*, (PhD, Exeter University, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> The page was created on January 18, 2011. See Joshua Landis, 'The Man behind "Syria Revolution 2011" Facebook Page Speaks Out', *Syria Comment Blog*, April 24, 2011, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/the-man-behind-syria-revolution-2011-facebook-page-speaks-out/>, accessed April 16, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> 'Emergence: Inform to Protect', *ASML*, <http://medialibre.fr/en/evolution-of-media-in-syria/emergence-inform-to-protect/>, accessed April 28, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Ayman Ayoub, 'Syria's Revolution a Year On', *Open Democracy*, March 22, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ayman-ayoub/syrias-revolution-year-on>, accessed April 28, 2015. See also, Hugh Macleod, Annasofie Flamand, 'Tortured and Killed: Hamza al-Khateeb, Age 13', *al-Jazeera*, May 31, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/05/201153185927813389.html>, accessed April 28, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The series was realized by 10 artists from inside Syria and is made of two seasons. It received an incredible success with more of 40,000 viewers. See, 'Little Dictator', *al-Jazeera*, August 21, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2012/08/2012820111648774405.html>, accessed April 27, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> 'Salamiyah Coordination Committee', *Syria Untold*, May 8, 2014, [http://www.syriauntold.com/en/work\\_group/salamiyah-women-coordination-committee/](http://www.syriauntold.com/en/work_group/salamiyah-women-coordination-committee/), accessed April 27, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Zaluski, 'Syria's Cyberwar Branch 225 at Work', *Centre for Strategic Cyberspace + Security Science*, <http://cscss.org/cscssdev1/?p=3668>, accessed May 5, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Syrian activists in Gaziantep, on the Turkish border with Syria, August 8, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Syria has a long history of underground papers. See, James A. Paul, *Human Rights in Syria*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990).

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- <sup>14</sup> ‘Revolutionary Press Blooms Underground in Syria’, *al-Arabiya*, September 27, 2012, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/09/27/240428.html>, accessed April 24, 2015.
- <sup>15</sup> ‘Activists Take Big Risks to Deliver Underground Newspapers in Syria’, *France 24*, November 11, 2011, <http://observers.france24.com/content/20111121-syria-syrian-activists-take-risks-distribute-underground-newspaper-hurriyat-damascus-homs-appelo-opposition>, accessed April 24, 2015.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with the editor in-chief of Sayedat Souria, Yasmine Merai, via Skype, March 4, 2014.
- <sup>17</sup> Table present in Rima Morrouch’s report, ‘Syria’s Post-Uprising Media Outlets: Challenges and Opportunities in Syrian Radio Startups’, *Reuters Institute*, 2014, <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/syria%E2%80%99s-post-uprising-media-outlets-challenges-and-opportunities-syria>, accessed December 16, 2015.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with one of the main contributor of Radio SouriaLi, Caroline Ayoub, via Skype, March 3, 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Caroline Ayoub, via Skype, March 3, 2014.
- <sup>20</sup> The Damascus Bureau’s website: <https://damascusbureau.org/en/>, accessed May 7, 2015.
- <sup>21</sup> Brendan McGeagh, Amy Johnson, ‘Citizen Journalism in Syria: Rami Jarrah’, *Canadian Journalists for Free Expression*, November 27, 2012, <https://cjfe.org/resources/features/citizen-journalism-syria-rami-jarrah>, accessed May 7, 2015.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘Syria: A War Reported by Citizen-Journalists, Social Media’, *Radio Free Europe*, April 7, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html>, accessed May 6, 2015.
- <sup>23</sup> Syrian Media’s website (in Arabic): <http://www.syrianmedia.com/>, accessed May 5, 2015.
- <sup>24</sup> Jean Pierre Filu, *From Deep State to Islamic State*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015).
- <sup>25</sup> Paul Wood, ‘Face-to-Face with Abu Sakkar Syria’s “Heart-Eating Cannibal”’, *BBC News*, July 5, 2013, accessed May 6, 2015.
- <sup>26</sup> Sierra Leone is an interesting example of a country where the media is trying to sew up the wounds of a ten-year civil war, teaching to forgive but not to forget. For a comparison see, Nick Oatley, Rashimi Thapa, ‘Media Youth and Conflict Prevention in Sierra Leone’, *The Initiative for Peacebuilding-Early Warning Analysis to Action*, April 2012, <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201204IfPEWMediaYouthConflictPreventionSalone.pdf>, accessed May 17, 2015.