Journalism on Service of Transitional Justice: Why the media and the justice should form a network in Syria with the goal of restoring victims' rights before the war is over

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Abstract   Since the upheaval against President Bashar al-Assad broke out in 2011, Syria has been in the stage of a conflict whose tolls of victims surpass the thousands. The conflict is not over and numbers of affected people are likely to increase. This papers puts forward a policy discussion and guidelines for the creation of a governance network structure through which international organizations, such as the International Criminal Court, the United Nations, the Syrian government, and other global actors involved in the conflict, should operate while the conflict is still happening. More important, this paper argues that the media — which has a key yet neglected role in TJ processes — must be a part of such a network if the actors' intentions are to bring about restorative justice to victims. The paper also offers a mapping strategy of media outlets to be part of the network.

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A humanitarian crisis needs a proper response

Since the upheaval against President Bashar al-Assad broke out in 2011, Syria has been in the stage of a conflict whose tolls of victims surpass the thousands.[1] About 117,000 people were detained or have disappeared since 2011; over 6 million were displaced, with a million estimated to be living in areas without humanitarian aid or urgent help; and 4.8 million willing to flee the country and seek refuge abroad.[2] About 500,000 have died in the war.[3]

The conflict is not over and numbers of affected people are likely to increase. Whatever the outcome, international organizations such as the International Criminal Court, the United Nations, the Syrian government, and other global actors involved in the conflict must think not only of implementing a Special Court aimed at Transitional Justice (TJ) to focus on human rights violations committed since the conflict has begun six years ago. This process will benefit from the inclusion of the media — which has a key yet neglected role in TJ processes[4] — in a collaborative network governance structure[5] with the mandate of setting some clear but essential goals and standards.

The collaborative process is multi-sided. The broader target is using the media to help TJ processes restore victims' reparation in a Syria post-conflict. TJ processes must map media outlets in Syria — with the support of media experts, media outlets, academics and others — before the transitioning phase starts. This aims at providing legal ability to media practitioners, especially citizen journalists who became the primary source of information in the Syrian war.[6] Along with long-term peace achievements, the collaborative work will help the media collect better information that can be used in criminal trials while a stronger media best identifies and investigates sensitive cases to be looked at by TJ institutions. If adopted, the network can set the groundwork for further advancing transitional justice processes elsewhere.

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[1] "Syria: Events of 2016" (New Yorke: Human Rights Watch, January 12, 2017), https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria.

[2] "Syria: Events of 2016" (New Yorke: Human Rights Watch, January 12, 2017), https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria.

[3] "Syria: Events of 2016" (New Yorke: Human Rights Watch, January 12, 2017), https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria.

[4] Lisa J. Laplante and Kelly Phenicie, "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009.

[5] It is used in this policy paper the definition of network governance as established by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2008), in which network is definited as a government arrangement where state and non-state actors engage in collective decision-making processes that aim at consensus building among the stakeholders in order to find a solution for policies' experiments that failed when left at the initiative of governments or the markets alone. For further information on the matter, see: Ansell, Chris, and Alison Gash. "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 18, no. 4 (2008): 543–571.

[6] "Syria: A War Reported By Citizen-Journalists, Social Media." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 18, 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html.

The media as a key player in transitional justice

Syria's conflict may soon come to an end while some global and regional powers involved in the clash — Russia, Turkey, and Iran — now discuss the future of the fragmented state.[7] With the debacle of ISIS in Syria, the focus has shifted from investing in military intervention to finding a political solution for Syria.[8] Nonetheless, what apparently hasn't been on these powers' radar is the need for carrying out the so-called Transitional Justice (TJ) — for addressing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and human rights violations in nations coming from periods of violence, and whose weak judiciary seems inadequate to respond to that need[9] — that considers the role of the media. Any tribunal established in Syria to restore victims' human rights by the United Nations, tribunals at the International Criminal Court and its special chambers, or Truth Commissions that end up being the chosen institution for that goal should consider designing, before any TJ process start, a network governance structure that aims at formally involving the media.

While the literature has grown larger on legal standards and frameworks to build transitional justice since the end of the Cold War,[10] there is an avenue open for the role of the media in these efforts.[11] A study published in 2009 showed that the media plays a key role in nations transitioning from conflict to its aftermath (but also during ongoing tensions), in shaping public opinion either toward peace or a hatred divide between winners and losers.[12] TJ's overall goal of bringing reconciliation and sustainable peace to states under tensions can be fostered by the media — or contribute to making it a resonant failure.[13]

The role of the media in the Rwandan conflict is a powerful case of how it drove a

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[7] Patrick Wintour and Diplomatic editor, "Putin Brings Iran and Turkey Together in Bold Syria Peace Plan," November 22, 2017, sec. World news, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/22/iranian-and-turkish-leaders-arrive-in-russia-for-syria-talks-with-putin.

[8] Trenin, Dmitri. "Putin's Plan for Syria." Foreign Affairs, December 13, 2017. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-12-13/putins-plan-syria.

[9] "What Is Transitional Justice? | ICTJ." International Center for Transitional Justice, February 22, 2011. https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice.

[10] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

[11] Julia Viebach et al., "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice" (Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017), https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[12] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

[13] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

genocidal movement in the country.[14] Radio, TV, and newspapers incited violence that resulted in the mass killing of hundreds of people.[15] The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda had a well-known "media case" that proved Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Colines', and the newspaper Kangura' representatives guilty for the 1994 genocide in the country.[16] Investigations concluded that they worked, through media channels, to eliminate the Tutsi ethnic group.[17] The use of media outlets to boost and incite ethnic divides was also found in Kenya, during the election violence between 2007 and 2008, and in the Former Yugoslavia.[18] In Colombia, the guerrilla movement FARC, the Colombian government, and the traditional media each disseminated their antagonistic 'truths' that have been misleading the society in understanding the war. That is likely to complicate transitional justice in the country now that they reached a peace agreement.

The case of Sri Lanka, whose conflict winded down in 2009,[19] was like Syria' example. In the former, three languages are spoken, mainly Sinhala and Tamil, English being the officially used language by the government.[20] During the conflict between the state and the separatist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the media, also divided along language lines, bought narratives accordingly; Sinhala outlets backed the government, while the Tamil favored the rebels in their coverage.[21] Owing to the war, journalists couldn't report on the ground, leading to a lack of coverage of what was happening in some sites, helping create among people a different perception of the conflict according to what media outlet they had access to.[22]

If the role of the media has been analyzed by few pieces of research, even less literature

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[14] Julia Viebach et al., "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice" (Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017), https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[15] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

[16] "ICTR-99-52 | United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda," accessed December 19, 2017, http://unictr.unmict.org/en/cases/ictr-99-52.

[17] Allan Thompson, The Media and the Rwanda Genocide (IDRC, 2007).

[18] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[19] "Sri Lanka's Conflict-Affected Women: Dealing with the Legacy of War | Crisis Group." Accessed December 20, 2017. https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/289-sri-lankas-conflict-affected-women-dealing-legacy-war.

[20] "The World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency," accessed December 19, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html.

[21] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

[22] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

is aimed at examining how the media, the academia, and TJ institutions can build upon each other's differences and objectives toward resolution and reconciliation in transitioning societies.[23] In 2015, an initiative by the University of Oxford moved the debate forward in a series of workshops aimed at spotting challenges and opportunities for knowledge exchange between these fields.[24]

The aforementioned series resulted in a report that identified potential ways in which the media can share knowledge with TJ institutions. According to it, the media can help better communicate the role of transitional justice procedures and its resulting trials to society, helping the audience to reach a necessary 'consensus' among their conflicting past, while addressing victims of human rights abuses throughout outreach strategies.[25] As transitional justice is a complex phase—whose dynamics may change—society needs media outlets that are better prepared to understand how TJ procedures work and that helps the work of TJ processes itself.[26]

Challenges in the relationship between the media and the justice

If a network is established to improve transitional justice processes in Syria when the time falls, at least some challenges and differences involved in the relationship between both fields have been identified to be kept on organizations' radars when operating the network. The Oxford series have shown that the media and the justice have their own professional compliances and guidelines; journalists are committed to reporting and attending their outlets' needs, whereas justice actors in transitional justice initiatives have their own legal standards in dealing with information that is collected on the ground. While the media work grows over time from before a conflict to its aftermath, TJ processes are bound to jurisdiction and limited

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[23] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017.
https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[24] Julia Viebach et al., "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice" (Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017), https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[25] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017.
https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[26] Laplante, Lisa J., and Kelly Phenicie. "Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes," 2009. http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4934&context=mulr.

time.[27] The mandate of each profession is a challenge to look at.

Each field's ethics is indeed a concern in TJ processes, according to the Oxford series. While the courts usually practice legal standards in their cases, the work of journalists in TJ processes — especially in the context of citizen journalists collecting information on the ground — often fail to meet universally accepted standards on objectivity, impartiality, and commitment to hearing multiple views on the same story.[28] Besides, what is a standard for information and evidence collection in journalism may contrast with TJ institutions' understandings of what is a 'victim'.[29] Both fields will engage better if they reach a consensus on terminologies. The designing of a network with the mandate of investigating human rights violations that integrates the media into TJ processes, for Syria, is an unparalleled opportunity to bridge the current practice gaps.

Beyond achieving a consensus, a network can enhance the work of the media in practicing a journalism that later improves transitional justice for society, on one hand, while it benefits the work of Truth Commissions, Special Chambers, or criminal courts eventually established in Syria.

The Syrian media context demands these efforts. The uprising allowed grassroots movements and citizens to enjoy the freedom to release videos and information on social media (Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook) like never before; their goal being countering the one-sided narrative propagated by the regime—owing to its media monopoly.[30] From night to day, common citizens became key disseminators of information. Using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, common citizens engaged in a quick form of journalism, and soon became citizen journalists.[31] Inspired by uprisings taking place in Tunisia and Egypt, Syrians responded to the regime's oppression by pulling out their cellphones as guns — and videos, tweets, and posts

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[27] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[28] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[29] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice." Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, December 18, 2017. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[30] "Syria: A War Reported By Citizen-Journalists, Social Media." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Accessed December 18, 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html.

[31] "Syria: A War Reported By Citizen-Journalists, Social Media," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 18, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html.

flooded on social media describing atrocities committed by the government.[32]

At the same time, the Assad regime imposed a ban on foreign journalists in 2012 — that lasted for a year[33] — in an already challenging environment for journalism practice, as Syria is known for its censoring practices and concentration of media outlets,[34] making international coverage almost entirely dependent on information released over social media; and citizen journalists turned into preferential sources of information.[35]

Citizen journalists' narratives were blended with those of other activists, anti-Assad movements, terrorist organizations such as ISIS, and the government, each group fighting against each other on social media.[36] The world learned that Syria's information cyberspace was being filled with information that couldn't be verified, checked, or trusted. Issues around objectivity behind many citizen journalists' work in Syria arose.[37] Their nature was considered questionable for professional journalism standards; they either advocated their points of view — by not covering many aspects of a same story — or lacked the necessary knowledge or skills to devise correct information, by pushing for fabrication of facts, embellishment, and exaggeration of information.[38]

Matters would get worse. States' propaganda poured over Syria, with Russia circulating fake content throughout its national channels, to keep Syria's president Assad in power.[39] Later, anti-Assad movements, regime militias, and ISIS would join social media, conveying their own "truths" to the detriment of facts.[40] As a consequence, what was left on Syrian cyberspace was pure information war.[41] A study mapped about 200 media outlets operating in Syria in the wake of the uprising, classified by their coverage biases into four different groups: pro-government,

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[32] Lynch, Marc, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday. "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War," 2014, 978–1.

[33] Cottle, Simon, Richard Sambrook, and Nick Mosdell. Reporting Dangerously: Journalist Killings, Intimidation and Security. Springer, 2016.

[34] "Syria | Country Report | Freedom in the World | 2017," n.d. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/syria.

[35] Lynch, Marc, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday. "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War," 2014, 978–1.

[36] Marc Lynch, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday, "SYRIA'S SOCIALLY MEDIATED CIVIL WAR," 2014, 978–1.

[37] Issa, Antoun. "Syria's New Media Landscape Independent Media Born Out of War," 2016. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP9_Issa_Syrianmedia_web_0.pdf.

[38] Issa, Antoun. "Syria's New Media Landscape Independent Media Born Out of War," 2016. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP9_Issa_Syrianmedia_web_0.pdf.

[39] Paul, Christopher, and Miriam Matthews. "The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model." *RAND Corporation*, 2016.

[40] "Syria: A War Reported By Citizen-Journalists, Social Media." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Accessed December 18, 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html.; Lynch, Marc, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday. "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War," 2014, 978–1.; "Syria | Country Report | Freedom in the World | 2017," n.d., https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/syria.

[41] Marc Lynch, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday, "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War," 2014, 978–1.

pro-rebels, independent, or Kurdish independent.[42] Together with external coverage and propaganda on the internet, Syria's war has become the most socially mediated conflict.[43]

That has been distorting and misleading the international audience about happenings in Syria.[44] It has also made the task of collecting evidence and verifying it for TJ processes — as it has been in previous TJ cases[45] — a greater challenge when the moment to redress human rights violations arrives in Syria.

Mapping key media stakeholders

A key recommendation for the designing of the network depends on mapping media outlets that can join the initiative. A study reported on the need of clustering the support to media; especially the independent media, represented through 39 outlets among another 196 in Syria (72 were mapped as pro-regime and 71 as opposition).[46] Attention should be given to independent outlets in the network at an initial stage. Already a step ahead in terms of objectivity and reliability, independents can better communicate the need of doing transitional justice to their audience. Enab Balad, an online and print publication, is a good example in this direction. It has carried out relevant workshops in media literacy for citizen journalists and is likely to be well connected with and has a good knowledge of new professionals emerging in Syria.[47]

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is another organization from which the network can benefit. It has been consulted by major international media outlets, such as *The New York Times*, Reuters, and Associated Press, and its managing editor is aware of grassroots movements on the ground and has an appeal for fact-checking information.[48] The Violations

[42] Issa, Antoun. "Syria's New Media Landscape Independent Media Born Out of War," 2016. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP9_Issa_Syrianmedia_web_0.pdf.

[43] Lynch, Marc, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday. "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War," 2014, 978–1.

[44] Nikita A. Smirnov, "Information War in Syria | MGIMO Review of International Relations," 2015, http://www.vestnik.mgimo.ru/en/razdely/political-science/information-war-syria.

[45] Viebach, Julia, Leila Ullrich, Matilde Gawronski, and Carolyn Hoyle. "Media and the Search for Criminal Evidence: Learning from the (Non-) Cooperation between Journalists and International Criminal Tribunals." In Innovative Media for Change: Opportunities and Challenges of Media Collaboration in Transitional Justice. Oxford Transitional Justice Research/Centre for Criminology, 2017. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/innovative_media_for_change_full_report.pdf.

[46] Issa, Antoun. "Syria's New Media Landscape Independent Media Born Out of War," 2016. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP9_Issa_Syrianmedia_web_0.pdf.

[47] "Can New Syrian Media Confront Yellow Journalism?" Accessed December 14, 2017. http://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2017/11/can-new-syrian-media-confront-yellow-journalism/amp/.

[48] Caplan-Bricker, Nora. "A Guide to Syria's Best Citizen Journalism." The New Republic, August 30, 2013. https://newrepublic.com/article/114532/guide-citizen-journalists-feeding-us-news-syria.

Documentation Center, a web portal in Arabic,[49] has been praised by its journalistic procedures and for using a database with information on victims that can be later used in justice reparation and criminal trials. Syria Tracker does a similar job, mapping humanitarian casualties since the conflict has started.[50]

Attention to independent groups on the ground doesn't imply unique choice, and focus should be expanded to establish a collaborative network. Bringing to the initiative outlets representative of opposition or ethnic movements such as the Kurdish is crucial for building reconciliation principles among their representatives when they cover their opponents. That's important because opposition movements in the media who enjoyed freedom of expression now fear for their future as pro-regime forces regain control of areas lost during the uprising.[51] Yet, uniting such vocal opponents is expected to be challenging. Yet the objectivity principle in journalism — to avoid fabrication and the dissemination of hate speech, to mention two nefarious uses of the media — should be considered as a driver of collaboration within the network. That also doesn't mean journalism should not be critical. To be reliable and reputable, it needs transparency, accuracy, and respect. These standards should be one of the goals of the network.

At the international level, media outlets such as The New York Times, Al-jazeera, and BBC Arabic are known for their journalistic expertise and can transfer key skills to locals while fostering the collaboration with citizen journalists collecting evidence on the ground. Such an outcome is beneficial for TJ selection of rampant human rights violations and later verification of evidence used in trials.

In the academia, practitioners at the Oxford Transitional Justice Research, Oxford Centre for Criminology, or the Swiss NGO Fondation Hirondelle (FH) — who helped launch the series on media and TJ knowledge exchange discussed before — , to name a few, have connections with academic practitioners with in-depth knowledge of Syrian media and TJ practices. They can mediate the collaboration between the media and TJ institutions in the network. They can, for example, help the media and TJ institutions in setting standards and guidelines for technology use. Digital platforms that both fields can use together in transitional justice activities have been coming out. One of them, called eyewitness, is an app dedicated to

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[49] "Violations Documentation Center in Syria." Accessed December 20, 2017. http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/ar/otherstatistics#.

[50] "Syria Tracker." Accessed December 20, 2017. https://syriatracker.crowdmap.com/main.

[51] Safwan, Luna. "Opposition Media Activists Face Uncertain Future." Syria. Accessed December 20, 2017. https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2017/11/28/opposition-media-activists-face-uncertain-future?utm_campaign=coschedule&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=SyriaDeeply&utm_content=Opposition%20Media%20Activists%20Face%20Uncertain%20Future.

storing evidence for the end goal of supporting trial cases and investigations.[52] The knowledge transfer can occur in many ways, but the academia will do well if it builds up or improves ongoing media literacy programs in Syria aimed at media organizations.

Focus on legal training

Training modules for journalists have been attempted in Syria already through NGOs and international organizations.[53] However, a study has indicated that no coordination exists between such initiatives, leading to areas uncovered by such programs, or places receiving attention from different organizations doing similar jobs, which resulted in journalists finding them inefficient.[54] Another issue found in the mentioned study is related to the type of assistance provided; it's mainly focused on media or broad management skills.

While those skills are relevant, attention should also be devoted to improving objectivity and accuracy among the outlets through which the network can connect. That's important for journalists to better collect information that can be used, later, during the evidence collection phase in TJ processes. Yet that shouldn't limit the scope of the training. By missing other key components in war reporting, existing training programs won't help journalists make transitional justice more effective.

A key recommendation for the network is to engage TJ practitioners, academics, and the media in legal training modules. On one hand, It has the purpose of building common knowledge on legal standards and procedures for both fields in the Syrian network context. On the other, it can avoid many pitfalls in war reporting and benefit transitional justice. A study mentions that it is possible, and indeed necessary, that journalists report on victims' locations and identify who are their captors.[55] But in many cases unprofessional or naïve coverage can have the opposite effect, making detainees held by militias exploited because sensitive information came out.[56]

Therefore, the network can start up a training module that provides journalists with

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[52] "Eyewitness." eyewitness. Accessed December 20, 2017. http://www.eyewitnessproject.org/.

[53] Brownlee, Billie Jeanne. "Media Development in Syria: The Janus-Faced Nature of Foreign Aid Assistance." *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 10 (October 3, 2017): 2276–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1333420.

[54] Issa, Antoun. "Syria's New Media Landscape Independent Media Born Out of War," 2016. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP9_Issa_Syrianmedia_web_0.pdf.

[55] Saxon, Dan. "Covering Syria: Legal and Ethical Obligations of Journalists." *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law* 2 (2013): 411–30.

[56] Saxon, Dan. "Covering Syria: Legal and Ethical Obligations of Journalists." *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law* 2 (2013): 411–30.

expertise on the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War[57]. It will prevent journalists from committing undesired abuses and harm against victims that weren't even intended. Changing victim's names if requested is a basic example of how the legal training can improve citizen journalists work while reducing risks to victims. The ability to balance risks when releasing sensitive information or the need of avoiding meeting sources in the presence of captors[58] are yet other good practices. Such culture changing in coverage requires and depends on more sophisticated training, longer than a few days of workshops. With a mandate, a network seems a good platform for building such standards through a collaborative discussion among practitioners of these fields.

Syria needs a collaborative network

There is a need to establish a collaborative network governance structure between TJ actors, the media, and academics in Syria aimed at transitional justice to avoid pitfalls in this effort, such as in Rwanda, as this paper has showed. Mapping potential stakeholders is a necessary first step toward these efforts. Even though this paper was not aimed at providing a definitive or comprehensive list of key players to be mapped and incorporated into a network, it did no harm to indicate potential players highlighted as trustworthy stakeholders by experts and news articles since the uprising in Syria broke out in 2011.

Calling for media, experts, and justice actors to carry out together the tentative solutions described above — and thus bridge the gap between transitional justice institutions and media outlets — sounds like an insurmountable effort and even infeasible. Yet the examples on how the neglected role of the media in transitional justice processes doomed peace efforts are rich. Citizen journalists, amateurs, or journalists committed to correct information are rare examples of players who can help the justice to deliver reparation to victims. In Syria, there have been too many neglected roles and too little actors held accountable already. A collaborative network can fix that.

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[57] Kevin Studds and Michael Meyer, "Upholding Dignity and the Geneva Conventions: The Role of the Media in Protecting Prisoners of War and Civilian Security Internees Against Insults and Public Curiosity," July 14, 2016, https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/2006/amic-feature-010806.htm.
[58] Saxon, Dan. "Covering Syria: Legal and Ethical Obligations of Journalists." *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law* 2 (2013): 411–30.

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