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Preface

Raymond Hinnebusch & Omar Imady

Syria stands on a precipice between change and stagnation. Both, at times, seem equally ominous. March 2021 marked the tenth anniversary of the Syrian civil war which has taken hundreds of thousands of lives and has displaced millions more. Wednesday 26th May marks the date of the next Syrian presidential elections.

This special issue of Syria Studies presents a selection of the research published in this journal throughout this tumultuous period, on the eve of the next phase of Syria politics. Haian Dukhan offers an analysis of the tribal elements of Syria's society and political system and their role in the Uprising of 2011. Continuing with the theme of social and political authority, Rana Khalaf explores the nature of state building and governance during periods of conflict in the country. This is followed by an account of the emergence of Syrian civil society's political voice by Tamara al-Om, and an investigation by Diana Bashur into the sales of arms by America and Europe to the Middle East during the first three years of the Uprising. Joanne Hopkins next analyses the theme of coercive control in the context of the Syria conflict. Focussing on the reconstruction process, Omar Imady examines how the rebuilding process is being weaponized by various players in the region. Lastly, Dina Ramadan offers an in-depth exploration of the implications of the digital age for Syrian politics, and how harnessing the power of the internet may facilitate much-needed change.

These selected articles cover the political dimension of this period, the economic, the social, and the digital, presenting both lenses of analysis and opportunities to reflect upon past predictions. Over the past ten years it has been an honour to publish such studies and provide a platform for the discussion and dissemination of analysis and approaches to the conflict, with the aim of contributing, in whatever small way, to its resolution. It is our hope that the next decade will proffer new research on the rebuilding of Syria, on its reconstruction, and debates as to the best way to restore a country and civilisation, on how to learn from lessons past and avoid repeating mistakes. And we look forward to an era of articles on a revival of those aspects of Syrian life which have been overshadowed by conflict, buried in the rubble, and eclipsed by the ugliness of war.

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Tribes and Tribalism in the Syrian Uprising

(2014)

Haian Dukhan

Introduction [1]

Historians, sociologists and political scientists have shown a great interest in tribalism, ethnicity and religious identities in the Middle East for many years, and have attempted to study their influence on the stability of the states in the region.[2] The resilience of tribes towards the traumatic events of the twentieth century highlights their capacity to adapt to changing conditions on the ground, such as the shock of colonialism, which created new political borders in the Middle East, thus hindering tribal movement and migration, and the shock of Arab national-ism, which considered the tribe as a backward part of society that needed to be modernized and incorporated into modern society.[3]

Arab tribes in Syria have always maintained their culture, solidarity, local leadership and considerable control over their in-ternal affairs. However, since the 1950s, new challenges have emerged that threaten tribal structure and the tribe's traditional way of life. Two distinct periods of Syria's contemporary political history may highlight the relationship between the state and the tribes: the period before and the period after Hafez al-Assad's seizure of power in 1970. The character of this relationship ranged from the state's confrontation with the tribes to incorporation.

More recently, the Arab Spring was accompanied by the emergence of a variety of new phenomena. Most studies have focused on the re-emergence of Islamism and democracy and their by-products.[4] This article attempts to explain the re-emergence of tribalism. There is a

common perception that Syria's population is now predominantly urban, and that tribal-ism is dwindling further because of the settlement of the Bedouin in urban areas. In fact, *Aneza* and *Shammar* are large tribal confederations that still maintain close tribal connections with their relatives in the Arabian Peninsula.[5]

Following the events of September 11 in 2001, and after the American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, it became clear to the US that tribal affiliations and modes of social order were there all along, and have now re-emerged as a way of organising people in the absence of the state. More books, articles and research papers were published to analyse the tribes in those two countries, but hardly any research has been done about the tribes of Syria.[6] The weak presence of the tribal question in the academic and the political discourse about Syria does not measure up to the importance of this issue. This study aims to identify briefly the mechanisms governing the relationship between the state and the tribe in Syria, numerous aspects of which have remained unclear or even unknown to academics and outside scholars. In its largest part, it seeks to examine the political dimensions of the tribal phenomenon in modern Syria following the uprising that erupted in March 2011.

The methodology involves a review of some of the literature on the relationship between tribe and state in general and in Syria specifically in addition to some informal interviews with a few informants. Contact with the community concerned in this re-search, has started since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 due to my presence in Syria at that time.

Tribes and the state

Scholars seem to have come to no consensus on the precise definition of a tribe. Because the term has been used to describe different kinds of groups, it is virtually impossible to produce a single clear definition covering all these social formations.[7] ‘Tribe’ may be used loosely to describe a localised group in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organisation, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins.[8] There is substantial

literature about the relationship between the state and the tribe by the 13th century North African sociologist Ibn Khaldun. In his *Muqaddimah*, the Khaldunian cycle remains a valuable theory for understanding the socio-economic and political consequences of the historical interactions between tribal culture and urban civilisation in the Middle East.[9] According to Ibn Khaldoun's cyclical theory, as long as the state is strong, the tribes submit by adapting themselves to their economic and political environment. Once the state becomes weak, it be-comes vulnerable to revolution by those tribal people it tried to dominate.[10]

Evans-Pritchard uses segmentary lineage theory to describe tribal dynamics. The broad idea of this theory is that solidarity plays a major role in forming social groups, which combine or conflict in predictable ways within a cultural system to maintain a general balance of power.[11] Gellner expanded on Evans-Pritchard's approach by identifying key characteristics of the tribes, especially where the tribes interact with the state. One of these characteristics is the mercenary option, which would al-low for shifts in external allegiance or alliance in order to ensure the survival of the group.[12] The state itself depends on tribal systems for authority and, in return, the tribal system of authority is maintained and preserved in a dialogic way.[13] Therefore, patronage is one of the most basic forms of social relationship, and it typically manifests when kinship alone is unable to guarantee subsistence and physical security.

Tribes and State formation in Syria

The tribes in Syria have participated in and been affected by local and global forces and have also contributed to change, historically and at present. It should be noted that in the early days of the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in 1916, their forces were largely made up of Bedouin and other nomadic desert tribes.[14] Khalaf argues that during the French mandate in Syria, the colonial forces promoted tribalism as a counterbalance to the rising urban sentiments of nationalism.[15] The Bedouin tribes were separated out and encouraged to set up their own state in the *Badia* (the Syrian Steppe) supervised by a French military unit.[16] Khoury argues that the wedge driven by the French and the settled regions ultimately worked to the detriment of the tribes in the era of the

Syrian independence.[17] When the nationalists came to power after independence, they tried to embark upon a policy which aimed at abolishing all privileges enjoyed by the tribes. The constitution of 1950 included this item "In the electoral law process, special provisions shall be included to meet the special circumstances of the Bedouin and make it possible for them to elect their representatives in the parliament.[18] This item of the constitution was used to reduce tribal representation in the Parliament. The nine seats which had been granted to the Bedouin tribes during the French Mandate were now reduced to six.[19] Moreover, to bring its coercive power to bear in the outlaying tribal areas, the nationalist authorities posted gendarmerie with the aim of imposing law order and preventing influx of arms to the Bedouin tribes.[20]

Later on, the government became more effective and its economic and military power increased. The Bedouin were subjected to various forms of interference by the government. Nasserite and Ba'thist Party ideology in Syria required that tribes be excluded from the political field and denied access to power in an effort to break their strength and redirect their loyalty towards the state.[21] The tribes were more politically isolated under the radicalised government of the Ba'th Party when arriving to power in 1963. Tribal leaders lost much of their prestige as many of their functions were gradually assumed by state agencies. Security, livelihood, conflict resolution, range-land management have all become the state responsibility. Thus, the abolishment of (*hima*) (traditional grazing system)[22] and the suppression of customary law (*urf*)[23] in addition land reforms have all contributed to the undermining of tribal independence and the increased integration of these groups into the nation-state.

In 1970, Hafez al-Assad set out to broaden the support base for his new regime.[24] Although tribalism was considered by government and party officials as one of the major ills of pre-Ba'thist Syria, Hafez al-Assad showed an unusual degree of flexibility in his policies towards the tribes. He chose a strategy, in authoritarian fashion, based on creating a system of clientelism between his regime and influential tribal sheikhs. His strategy was to co-opt tribal leaders and employ them as tools for indirect rule through the use of official appointments and subsidies.

Hafez al-Assad faced growing opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood in major urban centres. The Syrian regime needed to counterweight the traditional urban-based power groups by fostering and maintaining support base among the rural populations including the Bedouin tribes in the Syrian Badia which constitutes 55% of the total area of Syria. Hafez al-Assad used his patronage network with the tribes and unleashed their pow-er to check the Islamists.[25] Despite its national slogans of "no sectarianism" and "no tribalism", the Syrian regime did not hesitate to seek the aid of the tribes to suppress the uprising in 1982 in Hama, the stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood.[26]

The regime called upon the assistance of some tribes, particularly Hadidiyn, in the countryside of Hama to check the flow of guns from Iraq to Hama and to prevent the desert from being refuge for the Muslim Brotherhood members.[27] Moreover, Hafez al-Assad used the tribes to counter balance the Kurdish population in the north-east part of the country. In 1973, Hafez al-Assad's regime started implementing a project that was planned in 1962 during the union with Egypt called the "Arab Belt" project.[28] Thousands of people mainly from Busha'ban tribe, who lost their villages in al-Raqqa Governorate due to the construction of Euphrates dame, have been encouraged to settle in villages built over Kurdish fertile lands in order to challenge the status quo of the region, which have traditionally had a Kurdish majority. Tribes were seen very loyal to Hafez al-Assad especially in his battle against the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, after 1982, tribal representation in the Syrian Parliament doubled from 7% to 10%.[29] Bedouins began to emerge as important members in the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of agriculture and certain branches of the security apparatus.[30]

The policies towards the tribes undertaken by Bashar al-Assad between 2000 and 2010 were not different much from the policies carried out during his father's rule. Bashar has taken the government's relationship with the tribes a step further by promoting more Bedouins to prominence within the regime and condoning claims by some Ba'ath party members to tribal links or origins.[31] Moreover, and in a similar way to Hama uprising in 1982, Bashar al-Assad used his network of clients from the Bedouin tribes, who had been encouraged to settle down in the Kurdish

areas, to suppress the Kurdish uprising in 2003. How-ever, the wider popular base of the Syrian society, to which the Bedouin in *al-Badia* and the farmers in the countryside belong, have been marginalized and impoverished. The overconcentration of power and patronage in the ruling clan debilitated the clientelist networks that connected the regime to society.[32] In 2003/2004, 5.1 million people were living under the poverty line with 2 million Syrians unable to meet their basic needs.[33] This sparked the Syrian uprising in the predominantly tribal Dar'a. From its beginning the uprising featured a rather unusual degree of mobilization in the countryside against the regime.[34]

Tribes and collective action in the Syrian uprising

The central element in tribal formation is the establishment of kinship groups. Each member of the group is responsible for each and every other member and the group's "acts" are called "collective action".[35] When attacked, group members are obliged to unite to defend themselves; when members sustain injury or loss, group members unite to gain compensation or seek vengeance. When applying these dynamics to Dar'a, which is a predominantly tribal area, where the uprising started, I would argue that the Syrian uprising started as collective be-haviour in its first phase and, as a result of the repressive tactics of the regime, it took the form of "collective violence".

Smelser's theory of collective behaviour incorporates a general conceptual analysis of social change.[36] It is principally concerned with showing how various kinds of structural strain produce "collective behaviour," which is defined as "mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action".[37] Smelser identifies six sets of social determinants whose various degrees produce different kinds of collective behaviours:

First, structural conduciveness refers to structural characteristics that permit or encourage collective behaviour. Tribal bonds between the families of Dar'a have been very important in organising the first protests. Second, structural strain perfectly describes the humiliation that the tribal delegation of Dar'a received from Atef Najeeb, the head of the political

security branch in Dar'a. The delegation asked Najeeb to release the children imprisoned for writing anti-regime slogans on the wall of their school. In a traditional gesture, they took their headbands off and placed them on the table, saying they would take them up again when the matter had been resolved.[38] The head-band is the symbol of manhood and chivalry in tribal traditions. Therefore, when making a request, tribesmen would tradition-ally take off their headband expecting the other person to reply positively. By way of response Atef took the headbands of the senior tribal leaders from the table and threw them into the rubbish bin. In response to this disrespectful behaviour, the first demonstration to take place in Dar'a was organised by net-works of tribesmen from al-Zu'bi and al-Masalmeh tribes. Therefore, "Friday of the Tribes" is held in recognition of Syrian tribes participating in protests against the Syrian regime.

Third, growth and spread of generalized belief: the development of mass communication technology enabled the rest of the Syrian tribes to see their fellow tribesmen in Dar'a being shot at and killed in the streets, which made the spark of the revolution move quickly to other regions in Syria. The word *fiz'a* which means the taking up of arms in defense of a mar-tyred relative or honoured individual has been used a lot in Dar'a early protests and is believed to be a motivator for pro-testers from other tribes in Homs, Hama and Deir Ezzor. Fourth, the precipitating factor is a specific event that triggers group action. The arrest and torture of school students in Dar'a by the time the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia had succeeded in bringing two dictators down, was the last straw for the Syrian people to start their action against the regime. The fifth social determinant is mobilization of participants for action. I would argue here that the modern mass media, most important-ly TV channels, have been the main source of mobilisation for the revolution to extend and get bigger over the Syrian regions. Sixth, operation of social control indicates "those counter-determinants which prevent, interrupt, deflect, or inhibit the accumulation of the [above] determinants".[39] Tribal leaders played a major role at the beginning of the uprising to prevent their tribesmen from participating in the protests and clashing with the security forces.

The repression and torture exercised by Syrian security forces in their attempt to interrupt and prevent all the above-mentioned determinants which pushed the revolution towards "collective violence".[40] The outline of his theory can be summarized briefly. The primary sequence in collective violence starts with the "development of discontent" and then the "politicisation of that discontent", and finally its "actualization in violent action against political objects".[41] The armed violence, which came as a response to the regime's violence corresponds with the concept of *intiqaam*, which means revenge for real or perceived offenses committed against one's kin. Members of the Arab tribes in Syria are bound by honour to take vengeance upon the aggressor, which, in this case, are the Syrian security forces who are deemed hostile towards the members of the tribe.

Sheikhs as "guarantors"

Historically, it was unlikely that states could impose effective control over the tribes in their vast territories because the cost of policing and maintaining control would likely be much higher than what taxes could be extracted from the small number of tribesmen.[42] To guarantee a continuous and safe passage through tribal regions for the purposes of travel and commerce, states would "buy" the support of the tribes by catering to their leaders. There are numerous historical examples of the establishment of asymmetric alliances and coalitions between strong states or imperial powers and prominent tribal leaders for im-mediate strategic purposes.[43] In Syria, first the Ottomans and later the mandate powers tried to implement a kind of "indirect rule" through the co-opting of Bedouin sheikhs to whom they granted extended privileges such as honourable titles and per-mission to register extensive private landholdings in their name. As it was mentioned earlier, Hafez al-Assad and later Bashar created a system of clientelism between the regime and influential tribal sheikhs.

By establishing alliances with particular tribal leaders, Hafez al-Assad and later his son Bashar, were able to maintain control of large areas of the Syrian Steppe. As much as they both relied on the Alawites for filling all strategic military and security positions, they also relied on certain

tribes to join the military and state institutions. They paid acute attention to the tribal and sectarian backgrounds of their top ranking commanding officers. On 18 July 2012, after Defence Minister Dawoud Rajiha was assassinated in a bombing in Damascus, Fehd Jassem al-Freij was appointed by Bashar al-Assad as his successor. It has been overlooked that al-Assad appointed a Sunni Muslim with a tribal background at such a crucial point in the conflict. An-other question that comes to mind is what has made Mohammad Said Bkhaytan and many other officials with Sunni tribal backgrounds so loyal to the Syrian regime thus far? And why is it that army officers with renowned tribal backgrounds have not been defecting?

Over the last few decades, Fehd Jassem al-Freij, Mohammad Said Bkhaytan and many other tribal leaders across the country helped to establish the regime's legitimacy and ensure stabil-ity.[44] During the first few months of the uprising, these tribal leaders had managed to forge convoluted relationships between the state and the community in which they have influence. In the early months of the uprising, many tribal leaders, especially in al-Hasakeh and Raqqa, actively opposed the protests to protect their tribes and clans from the Regime's retribution.[45] While many regions of Syria like Dar'a and Deir Ezzor where big tribes like *Nu'im, Aqayda*t exist have become a veritable war zone, other provinces where tribes of the *Shammar* confederacy and *al-Fadl* live have remained safe enough to absorb the hundreds of thousands of people displaced from other parts of the Syrian *Badia*. In some areas, tribesmen from the same tribe had different attitudes towards the protests. Some tribesmen from *Hadidiyn* tribe issued a statement disowning Fehd Jassem al-Freij and asking him to defect from the regime. Some other army officers from the same tribe announced their loyalty to the regime against the "conspiracy". In an interview with Ah-mad Fahed Hadidy, from the *Hadidiyn* tribe, he was asked to clarify these contradictions within the same tribe, he said: "Hafez al-Assad spent decades side-lining the traditional tribal sheikhs by creating a new system of chiefdom of newly ap-pointed sheikhs who had close ties to the intelligence service. By doing so, he hoped to internally dismantle the power of the tribes by placing obstacles between the sheikhs and their peo-ple.[46] The power and the influence within the tribe shifted, says Bander al-Khaledi from *Bani*

Khaled tribe who escaped to Saudi Arabia after the uprising. "The sheikhs that the regime created within each tribe are playing the regime's game at the moment but these sheikhs have brought shame on themselves and their tribe and there will be a time when they will be brought to court for their crimes."[47] It seems that the policies of the Syrian regime in co-opting tribal leaders have succeeded in creating allies within certain tribes that are not interested to see it fall. These policies have created strife within some tribes, sometimes even within the same clan, as some stick with Assad and some oppose him.[48]

"Gathering" the tribes

Tribal gatherings have, on a large scale, emerged following the Syria uprising. During Hafez and Bashar's reigns, the tribes did not have political coalitions or activities and the tribal political life was confined to some members in the parliament who did not have much weight.

The regime has been trying to win the hearts and minds of tribes by generously bribing the tribal sheikhs with money, cars, and land. This has been successful with a lot of sheikhs who are supportive of the regime, especially the tribal leaders in the north and east. The regime tried to mobilize certain cities and regions by invoking tribal identity on a moral level. The regime started periodically holding "tribal conferences" in Homs, Tartous and al-Raqqa in which sheikhs of tribes were asked to issue statements of loyalty and pledge of support to Bashar al-Assad.[49] They were asked in front of the state media to encourage their tribesmen to refuse joining the rebels and to condemn western and Arabian Gulf interference in Syrian in-ternal affairs. The loyal tribes attending these conferences have announced the establishment of the Syrian and Arab Tribes and Clans Forum. Sheikh Saleh al-Deli al-Nu'eimi, said that the fo-rum sends a clear message, which rejects foreign interference and the conspiracy against Syria and voices support for nation-al dialogue and reforms.[50] Tribal Sheikhs were also asked to meet the Russian ambassador and present him with gifts after Russia's veto against the Security Council resolution condemning the regime massacres. Moreover, they were also asked to meet with the UN Secretary General's envoy Kofi Annan to denounce the "terrorist acts" that target innocent

people rejecting the economic siege imposed on Syria. Syrian state media presented these tribal sheikhs as symbols of Syrian identity and patriotism.

On the other hand, the first tribal gathering against the regime was held in the Jordanian city, al-Mafraq in January 2012. More than 250 people from different tribal confederations like Aneza, Shammar and Baggarah attended the meeting. They confirmed in their meeting that the uprising was based on the tribes and asked the Syrian National Council for a representation that equals their weight in the Syrian uprising.[51] As for the rhetoric of the leaders of the Syrian National Council, while appearing to avoid mentioning the tribal factor, they occasion-ally spoke of some support and loyalty offered by the Syrian tribes to the opposition – as a reaction to the tribal discourse employed by the official media.[52] Syrian tribal leaders started holding gatherings, conferences and symposiums in different countries with the aim of unifying the ranks and collecting the legacy of the tribe. They sought to establish coalitions, most recently the Syrian Arab Tribes Council (SATC) which held its founding meeting on April 16th 2011 in Istanbul, with the agreement of the Syrian National Council (SNC). The emergence of SATC has been legitimized by SNC. Therefore, SATC has been a political framework accepted internally and externally, and aims at activating the role of Syrian tribes at this stage of the uprising and post-Assad Syria. Muhammad Mazyad al-Tirkawi, a member of SATC and SNC, stated that SATC will work on the formation of local tribal councils, and will coordinate with the Kurdish and Druze tribes to maintain security after the fall of the Assad regime, and this will be supervised by the SNC.[53]

In a Skype interview I conducted with Muhammad Mazyad al-Tirkawi, he argued that "the political history of the tribes in contemporary Syria" is affecting their role in the Syrian opposition. He referred to two divisions that emerged within the Syrian National Council. First, the Kurdish-Arab division that is related to previous policies adopted by Hafez al-Assad who encouraged thousands of people, mainly from *Shammar* and *Al-Jabbur* tribes, to settle in villages built over Kurdish fertile lands in order to challenge the status quo of the region, which have traditionally had a Kurdish majority. This big divide created between the

Arab tribes and the Kurds in al-Hasakeh was clearly manifested during a conference for the Syrian opposition held in Cairo in 2012 where the Kurdish parties ended up withdrawing after wrangling with the Syrian Arab Tribes Council (SATC) in which the latter refused a Kurdish suggestion to abolish the "discriminatory" projects initiated by the Syrian regime on their lands.

The other divide appeared between the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the dominant political power in the SNC, and the tribal council. As it has been stated already, Hafez al-Assad incorporated the tribes in his process of state building in Syria. He used the tribes as a counterweight to the Islamists. The coalition between Hafez al-Assad's regime and the tribes was a thorn in the side of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood continued to pour time and resources into building its influence within the Syrian opposition and has finally achieved its domination over the tribal council by appointing sheikh Salem Abdul-Aziz al-Mislat, who belongs to the movement itself, as the head of the tribal council.

Table of the most prominent tribes in Syria and their stance from the Syrian uprising

The tribe in Syria, as in the rest of the Arab world, is divided into smaller parallel sections – 'asha'ir' (clans) and 'afkhad' (lineages). These tribes inhabit *Al-Badia*, which covers 55 per-cent of Syria. They constitute 15 % of the Syrian population.[54]

Southern Region Tribes		**Central Region Tribes**		**Northern & Eastern Region Tribes**	
Fadl	Split	*Aneza (a group of related tribes including the following:		*Aneza (a group of related tribes including the following:	
al-Zoubi[55]	Split	*Hasanah	Split	*Fad'an	Loyal
al-Hariri[56]	Opposition	*Sba'ah	Silent	Al-Jabbur	Loyal
al-Masalmeh	Opposition	Turki	Opposition	al-Mashahdeh	Silent
Nu'im	Opposition	Bani Khaled	Split	Busha'ban	Split
		Fawa'ira	Opposition	Tay	Loyal
		Aqaydat	Split	*Shammar (a group of related tribes including the following):	
		Hadidiyn	Loyal	*Al-Khursah	Opposition
		Mawali	Silent	Al-Aslam	*Opposition
		Nu'im	Opposition		
		Bushakim	Silent		

Notes:

Some tribes inhabit more than one region

- Four classifications distinguish the stance of the tribe towards the regime during the Syrian uprising:
- Loyal (standing with the regime) 2- Opposition (standing against the regime) 3- Split (there is no agreement within the tribe on who to support) 4- Silent (did not take any position and decided to be neutral).

"Tribal Crescent" versus "Shiite Crescent"

A majority of the largest Syrian tribal groups are branches of sub-tribes of a confederated system (*qabila*) that originated in the Arabian

Peninsula and subsequently migrated north to gain access to water and grazing land. Among the most prominent of these groups are the *Aneza* and *Shammar* confederation of tribes from Nejd who began moving north in the 18th and the 19th century to conquer the *Badia* of Greater Syria.[57] By the middle of the 19th century, both *Aneza* and *Shammar* tribes had established themselves firmly in the *Badia* and controlled the important routes of trade and pilgrimage caravans between Damascus and Baghdad and Damascus and Mecca.[58]

To understand the nature of these deep tribal bonds that span Syria, we need to understand some of the assumptions of classical social anthropology. The Arab tribal formation, that exists today, functions in an analogous manner with a power-balancing conception of international relations.[59] According to this view, tribes are organized in a horizontal pattern based on patrilineal lines of descent from a common ancestor.[60] Individual segments engage in a continual process of fission and fusion in response to external conflicts, forming short-lived, complementary opposing power blocs that prevent the rise of a single hegemonic leadership.[61] Therefore, we can notice that the Arab tribal systems are akin to mini-states whose transnational bonds can be tapped into to forge channels of communication and access to foreign powers in the region, especially in the Gulf.

The relationship between certain tribes in Syria and other Gulf countries seems to be very much of the patron and client. The Saudis have always provided *Aneza* with political backing and financial subsidies. During King Abdullah's visit to Syria in 2010, he handed over large cheques to each of the *Aneza* sheikhs.[62] In return, the Saudis seem to expect loyalty and some indirect pathways into Syrian politics. Moreover, the rulers of other Gulf countries supported different tribes. For example, the annual Palmyra camel race served as a cover for Qatari support to the *Hadidiyn* tribe and other tribes.[63] The Syrian regime benefited from these inter-tribal relations in different ways. First, since members of tribes like *Hasanah* and *Turki* from *Aneza* confederation were able to cross borders freely and legitimately, they were exploited by prominent figures in the Syrian regime to smuggle arms and drugs and therefore create a black market that was lucrative for both sides. Second, these bonds provided a

way for the Syrian regime to get rid of a large number of unemployed people from the *Badia* region who have immigrated to the Gulf for economic reasons.

The shared cross-border kinship ties possessed by Syrian tribes and networks of tribal youth in Arab Gulf countries presented a regional geopolitical complication to the uprising.[64] As soon as the uprising started in Syria and after the bloody crackdown against the peaceful protestors, the tribes of Homs and Deir Ez-zor contacted their "cousins" in the Gulf asking for a firm diplomatic and economic position regarding Damascus. When the Arab tribes in Syria made appeals for protection from the brutality of the Al-Assad regime, their tribal kinsmen in the Gulf States of Saudi Arabia and Qatar have had a hard time ignoring them.[65] Saudi Arabia and Qatar are reported to be using tribal networks to move materiel and weapons into Syria. The ancestral connections have ignited sympathies among thousands of Saudis, Kuwaitis and Qataris who have donated millions of dollars in aid and recently military equipment to the free Syrian army.[66]

Much has been said about the Gulf's interest in regime change in Syria to steer Damascus away from Tehran and bolster their regional standing.[67] Saudi Arabia is troubled by the "Shiite Crescent" that has extended from Iran through Iraq, into Syria and to the Mediterranean shores of Lebanon.[68] The uprising in Syria created an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to use tribal bonds to destroy the regime of Syrian strongman Bashar Al-Assad. Ahmad Jarba, the current president of the opposition National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, is an influential tribal figure who has close links to Saudi Arabia. It is widely believed that Saudi Arabia has sup-ported him to gain this position after he played a vital role in bridging the gap between tribes in eastern Syria and the opposition.

The Saudi-Qatari competition for influence over the Syrian op-position has tribal repercussions as well. As stated previously, Saudi Arabia has sought to consolidate the position of Ahmad al-Jarba based on tribal connections, to become the president of the National Coalition in July 2013. Riad Hijab, who stood as the rival candidate for what is seen as the

Qatari-backed fac-tion[69] belongs to al-Sukhne tribe that is based in Deir-Ezzor Governorate. The election of Ahmed Jarba, to be head of the major opposition umbrella organization was a Saudi Arabian victory over Qatar and its candidate. Jarba, is from the paramount sheikhly lineage of the northern [Sunni] Shammar and a close cousin of Ghazi al Yawar, the interim president of Iraq following the liberation in 2003.

Tribal ties put pressure on Iraq

Tribal ties extend beyond the Syrian Iraqi borders and making them united. Among the most prominent of these groups with tribal ties are *Aneza*, *Shammar*, *Aqaydat* and *Al-Jabbur*. The first problem that the Iraqi government faced with the upsurge of the Syrian uprising was the large influx of refugees. Most of the refugees crossing over have relatives in Iraq, and intended to head straight to them until the situation back home im-proved.[70] Instead, they were crammed together in local schools and government buildings, and the army and police imposed strict restrictions on their movement. Thousands of Iraqis marched through al-Qaim city to denounce their government's policy in preventing their relatives from Syria to stay with them.[71] In a Skype interview I conducted with someone from *al-Jabbur* tribe, he commented on this situation “The tribes in Iraq and Syria are the same but the political borders have divided us. Each family in Syria has uncles, aunts and cousins in Iraq". After the protests of the Iraqi tribes, the government has reached a compromise with them to allow the Syrian refugees to leave the schools provided they had relatives who could "sponsor" them, and if they could deliver written guarantees to the government.

Sheikh Abdul Rahman Ali, chief of the tribal council in Falluja says “when Assad goes, we will have a brother regime at our back.”[72] As the fighting between forces loyal to President Ba-shar al-Assad and the armed opposition has spilled across the Iraqi borders, Iraqi tribes have decisively joined their fellow Syrians in the battles that took place there. More than 40 Syrian soldiers who had sought temporary safety in Iraq from rebel fighters along the border were killed in an attack by the Iraqi tribes.[73] The Syrian uprising is stirring Iraqi tribal sympathies and is

increasingly threatening to renew the conflict in a country that is still suffering from instability after the American in-vasion.[74]

Tribes and the armed conflict:

Now with a brutal civil war raging all over Syria, the Syrian regime has crumbled and as a result society in the desert has fallen back on the tribes.[75] Tribal militias composed of many Syrian army defectors were formed in different parts of the Syrian Steppe which constitutes 55% of Syrian land. Their mobility combined with their loyalty to their kin groups and their military capacity due to the arms received during Hafez and Bashar's rule make them strong enough to take control of large areas within the Syrian Steppe.

In a remarkable shift from the tense relationship that lasted for decades between the tribes and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, a recent video released by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), showed what it called swearing an oath of allegiance to the ISIS by more than a dozen tribes in the province of Raqqa east of Syria.[76] The development comes several weeks after ISIS received formal pledges of loyalty from a number of tribal representatives in rural Aleppo.[77] Different reports confirm the shift towards an alliance between certain tribes.[78] and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant in joining battles against the regime and the Kurds. Not all tribes fight against the regime, however. Some tribal leaders who have close links to the security services in Syria have remained loyal to the regime.[79] In al-Hassakeh governorate, the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Syrian Kurdish political group has been engaged in armed conflict with jihadist groups such as the Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. As the fighting has moved into Arab-majority territories between factions, certain clans of Shammar and the Sharabia tribes have joined the Kurds in their battles against the Islamists.[80] Both of the Kurds and the Islamists have increasingly relied on support from local Arab tribes to tip the balance.[81]

Conclusion

The Syrian regimes of Hafez al-Assad and later his son Bashar utilised the tribes in the build-up of their authoritarian power and used them as tools to fight the Muslim Brotherhood and Kurdish attempts to gain autonomy. This era witnessed a balanced relationship between the tribes and the Syrian regime through which we could see an alliance between both of them that is based on interests owing to the dynamic and pragmatic nature of the tribes' quest for survival and prosperity. Tribal representation in the Syrian Parliament increased; tribal leaders started to appear in prominent positions in the state institutions (army, security apparatus and the Ba'ath Party branches). However, the collapse of the rural economy of tribal communities in the south and east of Syria during Bashar al-Assad's regime due to drought, lack of development projects and the mismanagement of al-Badia resources ignited the Syrian uprising to start in tribal regions.

Therefore, incorporation of the tribes by the authoritarian regime in Syria was decisive for regime consolidation in order to get support from the tribes and expand their patronage net-works in society while alienation and exclusion of the tribes led at a later stage to de-stabilization of the regime. From Dar'a south of Syria all the way northeast to al-Hassakeh, tribal links have had a strong influence on shaping the nature of the Syrian uprising. In response to the regime's use of force against the protest movement, tribes resorted to armed self-defense against the security forces. The tribes have been largely, but not exclusively supportive of the opposition. Some tribal leaders who have close links to the security services established tribal militias that have been fighting with the regime against the opposition. Moreover, the Syrian uprising has proved that regional tribal bonds are still strong and resilient which is shown in the Arabian Gulf and Iraqi tribal support to their fellow tribesmen in Syria. Whether the Syrian regime falls or keeps power, tribes will play a vital role in any attempt to reconcile social and political differences and to rebuild Syria's fractured polity.[82]

Endnotes

[1] I wish to thank Professor Raymond Hinnebusch, Professor Dawn Chatty, Dr. Omar Imady and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and advice. I also wish to thank research fellows of the Centre for Syrian Studies for their feedback and comments on the paper.

[2] For further reading on the relationship between the tribe and state, see for example: Faleh Abdul-Jabar and Hosham Dawod (ed.), *Tribes and Power, Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2004). Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 1991).

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2

Governance without Government in Syria: *Civil Society and State Building during Conflict*

(2015)

Rana Khalaf

Introduction

State failure, following the outbreak of internal conflict, continues to preoccupy global attention, especially in view of its cross border implications (Kaldor, 2003).[1] Serving as havens for terrorism, failed states put the lives of their own citizens and of citizens of the rest of the world in danger. The importance of the state building component of international intervention as a basis for peace is evident in the literature (Brikerhoff, 2005; Paris, 2004; Mac Ginty, 2011; Edwards, 2010; Roberts, 2011). Nonetheless, international efforts directed at institutional building, are still weak (Brikerhoff, 2005). State fragility needs to be seen as a series of complex governance dynamics shaped by the interaction between international and local factors during the conflict phase and not only in the post conflict phase.

During conflict, state-failure shifts governance from the state to other players at the local level. Citizens are compelled to fill the sovereignty gap via local groups, religious authorities, tribes and clans. This may extend to warlords and terrorist organisations tied to political, social, military or economic networks operating at local, regional and global levels (Zoellick, 2008). At the international level, state-failure shifts governance to global governance actors such as foreign governments, international organisations or private institutions. At the heart of international governance lies the neoliberal peace that, following the work of Paris (2004), promotes institution building of both the state and civil society as a basis for peace. Much criticism is raised against this approach. It is deemed unsustainably aimed at creating a top-down

neoliberal order and control over conflict-torn states and societies regardless of the latter's rights and human security (Richmond, 2005). Nonetheless, as Mac Ginty (2011) illustrates, the neoliberal peace is not all powerful, for international processes may change and/or be changed by local actors and their dynamics, thus resulting in a hybridised governance characterised by inter-linkages between state, society and economy operating at multiple levels – local, regional or global (Mac Ginty, 2011; Edwards, 2010).

The ~~Syrian case of state-failure is~~ no exception to these governance dynamics. The country's dire humanitarian crisis, disintegration of political authority and the manipulation of public services as war tools have created a void, which multiple actors have stepped in to fill. These include: Youth networks, Civil Society organisations, Local Councils, Sharia-based institutions, the Free Syrian Army's civil administration, Syrian Islamic Liberation Front, Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party structures, and the jihadist groups, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Khalaf, 2013). The most powerful of these are the latter Al -Qaeda affiliated and jihadist groups but these continue to face resistance from traditional authorities and civil society groups. The latter illustrates a certain governance ability and agency at the local level, yet it does not seem to have escaped the neoliberal peace project. Following Paris' advocacy of institutionalisation prior to liberalisation, institution building at the state and civil society level seems to have become the priority of international interveners in Syria. Both local and international forms of governance continue to compete, change and hybridise. Currently, these forms of governance do not represent an inclusive state-building process but they do provide Syrians with a minimum order in the middle of conflict. Thus, while Syria during its current conflict may be without government in many of its areas, it is not without governance.

Research Scope, Methodology and Structure

Scope: This article aims to break new ground in academia by bridging the existing knowledge and practice gap on governance during conflict. It seeks to understand the governance dynamics during conflict in the non-government-controlled parts of Syria. It pays particular attention to civil society and state building processes. In doing so, the study spans historical and geographical width. Historically, to understand the roots of

the conflict, it assesses the state-civil society-market dynamics of governance in Syria prior to 2011. Nevertheless, its focus is on contemporary Syria between March, 2011 and May, 2014. Geographically, its particular attention and in-depth analysis is on three areas in the non-government-controlled parts: Al-Raqqa (the city), Deir Ez-zor (Al-Mayadeen and the city) and Aleppo (the city). These have been chosen as per key dimensions differentiating each area as detailed in parts 4A, 4B and 4C of this article. These dimensions are: 1.The security situation reflected by the degree of violence and chaos locals are experiencing; 2. The economic situation and whether the area is rich in resources; 3.The socio-economic background of the locals and 4. The geopolitical importance of the area. Comprehensive treatment of the period prior to 2011 and after May 2014 is beyond the scope of this study.

Methodology: This research relies on both primary and secondary data. The author has extracted primary data through quantitative and qualitative methods over a period of 6 months until May 2014. Qualitatively, the research benefits from a large number of Skype interviews. It also benefits from tedious field work involving discussion groups and face-to-face interviews with key Syrian civil society activists, politicians, Local Council members, staff in the National Coalition and in international and private organisations, researchers and intellectuals based in Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. *Unless otherwise stated, information provided is drawn from this primary data.* Quantitatively, the research builds on data drawn from a previous research project (Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria (2011-2014)). This collected semi-structured questionnaires from 94 civil society organisations in non-government-controlled parts in Syria. The researcher's secondary data relies on official sources, books, academic reports, articles, publications and social media sources when confirmed by credible activists. Theoretical knowledge and expertise is drawn from the political economy, sociology and anthropology fields.

The main strength of this research is its access to local civil society groups inside Syria, benefiting from the author's background as a Syrian and her strong relationships with local civil society trust circles. The variety of methods by which the data is collected, also adds to its credibility. Meanwhile the main limitation is that the situation in Syria and key actors continue to change drastically. This, added to the minimal transparency of main international interveners about their work in Syria, has made it extremely difficult to collect information in a holistic manner

and to draw clear-cut findings. Much has yet to be understood as realities are unveiled in Syria.

Structure: The article is divided into five parts. Part 1 lays out a theoretical framework. Part 2 assesses the historical context of governance leading to the conflict in Syria and describes the new hybrid governance. Part 3 explains governance during conflict in Syria as a hybrid between local and international dynamics. Part 4 culminates with the richest part of the study's field work – case studies of three non-government-controlled areas: Al-Raqqa, Deir Ez-zor and Aleppo. It then ends with concluding remarks summarizing the findings.

Part 1. Theoretical Background

1A. Clarifying Concepts

The manner in which academics and policy-makers sometimes reduce conflict to an overly neat analysis, between a few groups over a specific issue is misleading; it overlooks other layers of conflict and the agency and the diversity of local actors (Mac Ginty, 2011). Conflict is multidimensional, is in continuous change and involves hybrid dynamics (ibid). "Hybrid governance" results as local governance shapes and becomes shaped by civil society and state building bottom-up and top-down processes. Explaining this process necessitates first redefining the following vaguely interpreted notions during conflict:

Governance: The difference between government and governance is in the multiple layers and localities of power (institutionalised and informal), in the number of actors involved and the activities regulated (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013). The definitions of the UK Department of International Development (DFID) and UNDP are most useful in this regard. DFID defines governance as 'how institutions, rules and systems of the state—executive, legislature, judiciary, and military operate at a central and local level, and how the state relates to individual citizens, civil society and the private sector' (DFID, 2001). The UNDP (1997) applies governance to states, the private sector and civil society and strives towards a mutually supportive relationship between these sectors (MacGinty, 2011, p. 160). Thus, governance during conflict is about

multi-layered power dynamics across and within the state, market and civil society spheres. It hosts a diversity and fluidity of actors, systems, institutions, procedures and boundaries at the international and domestic levels.

State Building*:* A key component of governance and peace building in international interventions is state-building (Edwards, 2010). Paris and Sisk define state building as "the construction of legitimate, effective governmental institutions" (Roberts, 2011, p. 12). Chandler refers to it as "constructing or reconstructing institutions of governance capable of providing citizens with physical and economic security" and linking them to global governance regimes (as cited in Roberts, 2011, p. 12). This (re)construction goes beyond technocratic exercises of rebuilding state infrastructure and involves political, social and economic activities with profound impact on the nature and relationships between the civil society, state and market (MacGinty & Williams, 2009). As such, state building during conflict involves constructing new or reformed governance, signalled by improved *legitimacy, effectiveness* and *security provision.*

Civil Society: A main actor of state-building during conflict is Civil Society. 'Locke, Hegel, Merkel and Lauth suggest that civil society is "the space in between" where the political, economic and private spheres interact (Fischer, 2006). Arato and Cohen add that the private sphere is not excluded from civil society as private issues like women's rights are part of the public debate (Kaldor, 2003). However, contemporary discourse tends to institutionalise civil society, to separate it from what is political and to veil the difference between the local and international (Pouligny, 2005). Meanwhile, during conflict, civil society comprises heterogeneous informal actors, with inclusive and exclusive identities, whose function revolve around survival, hence existential politics. Civil Society is an arena of both civility and incivility which academics term "conflict society" (Marchettia & Tocci, 2009). Hence, this study refers to the original definition of civil society as the space between the state and market, interacting and overlapping with both. This could embrace diverse spaces, actors and institutional forms varying in formality, autonomy, power (Centre for Civil Society, 2008) and "civility" across borders.

In a nutshell, state building with its diverse measures, does shape local governance. Simultaneously, the latter is also affected by the context and agency of civil society with all its components. The result is "hybrid governance" across multiple layers, spaces, actors, institutions, procedures and boundaries.

1B. The Hybridity Model of Governance

The hybridity notion proposed by Mac Ginty (2011) focuses on the interaction between the international-promoted liberal peace and local dynamics in the post conflict phase. It illustrates that the liberal peace project is not all-powerful; it is hindered by its contradictions and by local powers and norms. This study extends this view to the time frame during conflict as it argues that it is exactly the conflict period that sets the stage for the peace that follows. This is via both international top-down and local governance dynamics.

Governance from the top: At the international level, liberal governance interventions have broad political, economic, social and cultural implications for local governance. They may alter the nature and orientation of the state, civil society and market and the dynamics between them (MacGinty, 2011). During current conflicts, this is advanced by the focus on institution-building and civil society.

The preoccupation with state/institution-building seems to follow Paris' notion of supporting 'institutions' before changing political practices (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). In his argument, Paris prioritises (re)constructing institutions to restore basic security, which he views as the main challenge to reconstruct failed states (Paris, 2004). This raises some issues. First, as important as institution building are the kind of institutions and the manner of implementation: often the process is dictated from above aiming to transform local norms into liberal ones (Roberts, 2011). Institution building may side-line human rights in the name of competence and stability (Jenkins & Plowden, 2006). Second, state building can prolong state failure and contribute to insecurity if not supported by changed political practices. Backing corrupt institutions in the name of state building advances abusive authority and fuels conflict (Call, 2008). Such institutions fail to act as a guarantor for civil society

development, and of healthy governance (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013).

Another recent key international governance focus is civil society. Again, several issues arise around the kind of civil society promotion and the manner in which this is done. Some interventions acknowledge local civil society and support its local ambitions without imposing their own views. Other interventions opt to engineer a civil society that chimes with their preferred form, thus limiting the more diverse local expressions of civil society (Mac Ginty, 2011). This is the case even when interventions claim to encourage local ownership and participation; power redistribution is often marginal and manipulated as local actors are obliged to conform to certain norms and practices (ibid). Critically, international interventions may tilt the balance between the state and civil society (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013).

Governance within: Locally, where government institutions cease to exist, with the destruction of infrastructure and the disruption or complete failure of the delivery of basic services (health, shelter, education, sanitation, electricity, etc.), the result is mass dislocation, insecurity, massive sufferings and limitations of livelihoods. Indeed, life deteriorates to a struggle for the most basic needs that are markedly different from those of citizens living in safe zones. However, locals living under conflict, as suggested from examples ranging from Afghanistan to Somalia and Bosnia, do not remain passive; they create systems of governance to make their situation more predictable and liveable.[1] Spaces or "pockets of authority" are created wherein diverse actors press competing claims for power and kinds of order (Edwards, 2010). Civil society –with both civil and uncivil segments– is a major actor, but so are warlords, tribes, armed groups, international actors and extremists groups. They fight, cooperate, overlap or co-exist until customary arrangements are reached among them. Their success or failure in establishing local governance (Brikerhoff, 2005; Edwards, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Zoellick, 2008) can be measured according to three dimensions: Effectiveness, Security and Legitimacy. *Effectiveness* means regular and equitable provision of basic needs such as electricity, water, food, jobs, etc. This may involve more sustainable measures related to restarting and/or regenerating an economic cycle and livelihood opportunities. *Security* involves securing the lives of civilians in a systematic rather than ad-hoc manner through the creation, maintenance and management of the police, judicial system and armed

services. Security extends to defending infrastructure, homes, schools, sources of livelihoods like power lines, pipelines, roads, homes and schools from looting and destruction. *Legitimacy* refers to a "complex set of beliefs, values and institutions (endogenous and exogenous) about the social compact governing state–society relations". In conflict, legitimacy is related to the provision of basic services and security measures in a manner accountable to local citizens.

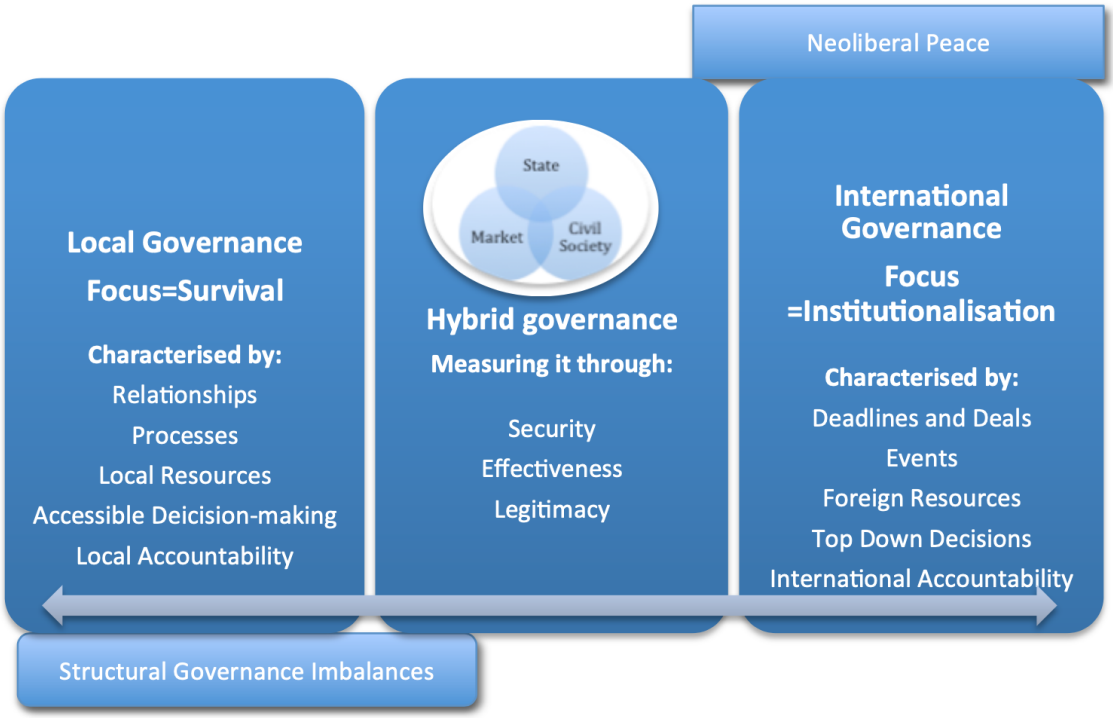
Hybrid Governance: Although international intervention is at an advantage in marshalling immense economic and cultural power, there are limits to this power. While international actors' own political and economic problems may be one problem, a bigger issue is the resistance they face from local actors who may defer, defect and/or change the nature of interventions (MacGinty, 2011). This is especially the case as the notions of governance and power may be interpreted differently by local actors.

Figure 1, which illustrates the theoretical framework of this study, highlights this dichotomy and the hybrid space in-between. Indigenous local governance in conflict situations is complex, informal and revolves around survival while feeding off structural governance imbalances. It is continuously changing, public and accessible, depends on relationships and respected traditional or charismatic figures as sources of legitimacy and relies on local resources which add to its accountability and transparency in decision making and thus to its legitimacy (Edwards, 2010; MacGinty, 2011). Meanwhile, governance measures followed by international actors are often neoliberal, top-down; arrange deals in a technocratic manner behind closed doors while engaging with national elites; prioritise reaching deals and meeting deadlines over building relationships; and rely on external personnel, ideas and material resources (MacGinty, 2011). Governance during conflict is seen as a process by the locals but treated as a series of events by the internationals (ibid). This difference paves the way for uncivil actors who understand these power structures as well as local structural issues better, to pursue their own warlord governance and/or state-building agendas.

As a result, the governance that is created on the ground during conflict is a hybrid of what is old and what is new, of what is local and what is international (MacGinty, 2011), of what is civil and what is not, all of which conflict, co-exist and cooperate across the civil society, market and

state spheres. Hybrid governance in the Syrian case is assessed in terms of the ability to provide: 1.Security on the ground, 2.Effectiveness in the delivery of services, and 3. Legitimate governance.

Figure 1: The Hybridity Model of Governance During Conflict



Source: Adapted from (Mac Ginty, 2011)

Part 2. Governance in Syria as a Hybrid of the Old and New Imbalances

A key shortcoming in international policy work aimed at providing alternatives to the violence in Syria is the tendency to treat conflict in ignorance of its historical context. This, for instance, is evident in the failure of Geneva I, II peace talks. The following, illustrate the structural implications of governance pre-conflict, on the Syrian conflict.

2A. Governance Pre-Conflict: From State Manipulation to Market Manipulation

Prior to the conflict in Syria, regime reforms were aimed at preserving authoritarian governance. The paradox is that changes produced by internal economic and political reforms to civil society and the market threatened power elements sustaining the regime; however, not implementing them threatened regime security amidst external pressures (Khalaf, 2009). Thus, reforms were carried out, but in an unbalanced manner.

2A.1 Pre-2005: State Manipulation

Syria was heavily controlled by a state described as bureaucratic, inefficient, unproductive, corrupt and overstaffed by unskilled redundant labor. In 1999 2003, over 50% of the budget was spent on military, subsidies, price transfers and public sector wages (Bruck, et al., 2007, p. 12; Khalaf, 2009). An estimated half of the Syrian population lived on fixed government incomes (Abu-Ismail & El Laithy, 2005). These issues are highly relevant for the regime's legitimacy and effectiveness in its governance during the post-Uprising conflict: following the critical humanitarian situation owing to the conflict, formal state institutions became weak and fragmented in providing social protection. Meanwhile, fashioned to serve an authoritarian regime, they have been used as war tools (Khalaf, 2013). Humanitarian aid, key public services (electricity, water, sewage control, fuel, etc.), infrastructure and sources of livelihood have been controlled, manipulated and destroyed by the regime as means to repress the uprising (ReliefWeb, 2013; Khalaf, 2013). One of the most critical issues regarding the governance-ability of the regime is wages. As a main employer, the regime -via the state that it manipulatesstill controls locals' livelihoods with wages it continues to pay, even in areas out of its control. These government wages are especially important to people given the otherwise limited private sector opportunities available to them.

Controlled by a Baathist state that portrayed it as "evil", the Syrian market was distorted with a strictly limited private sector. The latter was dominated by an alliance between the Alawi praetorian guards, security agents, the military (who politicised the market by controlling resources

and legislations) and the Damascene Sunni merchant class (who had the business knowledge and experience). This military-mercantilist complex benefited from favouritism while ensuring regime stabilisation (Hinnebusch, 2008; Haddad, 2002). The result was thus a distorted market based on networks of privilege and corruption (Haddad, 2002). During the conflict, this implied that many high level businessmen became defenders of the regime. However, only as long as domestic capital made profits would it support whoever was in power (Howell & Pearce, 2001). One example is the several businessmen backing the anti-regime National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces which is also claimed by activists to be based on networks of privileges and corruption. This context laid the foundations for a predatory war economy, during the Syrian conflict. It comes at the expense of an embryonic civil society.

Civil Society in Syria is deemed "embryonic" as it has been sharply constrained under the regime's Ba'thist discourse that sought to shape its role, needs and even aims. Since the assumption of the power of the Ba'th party in Syria in 1963, the government sought to be the sole responsible and controller of civil society (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). It established its own associations for all groupings– youth, women, youth, farmers, etc. and stopped the establishment or registration of other forms of civil society arguing that there was no need for parallel structures (ibid). This ensured the previously existent pluralism was replaced by a unified, strongly ideological understanding of society (ibid). After year 2000, the situation changed. Some civil society organisations were given the permission to operate, nonetheless, under the leadership of certain businessmen, the Syrian government or Asmaa Al-Asad the president's wife, and these flourished. However, civil society was prohibited from any involvement in collective action for justice, equality or accountability via for instance advocacy, lobbying or politics (Ruiz De Elvira, 2013). It was confined to charity work that is "ahli" i.e. apolitical and often driven by religious /ethnic identities (e.g. religious charities) rather than "madani" i.e. civil and driven by collective national interests (ibid). Meanwhile, as the state had no dependence on an otherwise oppressed and de-politicized civil society, the latter's power was limited (Schmidt, 2007). This weakness in Syrian civil society's experience of organising itself and planning strategically for civil work affected its capability for governance during conflict.

2A.2 2005 2011: Market Manipulation

The reforms that followed year 2005 heavily relied on economic rather than political liberalisations in the name of a distorted form of "Social Market Economy". The regime ensured the state kept its interventionist role but collaborated with the market to improve opportunities for the private sector (Khalaf, 2009). The market economy was allowed to exist in parallel to the state's central planning and not in replacement of it (Abboud, 2009). As for civil society, the state continued to block it except when operating under its own façade of first lady NGOs, government NGOs or business NGOs. At the same time, reform to the state's institutions remained slow to prevent opposition by potentially disadvantaged civil servants, whose positions would be threatened (Bruck, et al., 2007). Economic reforms benefitted only the business bourgeoisie and the powerful elites connected to the regime, while the civil society suffered from cuts to welfare under a more privatised liberal market (Selvik, 2009; Khalaf, 2009). The effectiveness, legitimacy and security attributes maintaining the regime's governance were falling apart. Increased market liberalisations contradicted the Ba'thist ideology and its socialist discourse as much of the regime's legitimacy rested amongst peasants, public sector workers and the industrial working class (Raphaeli, 2007). Furthermore, with civil society and particularly trade unions' voices muted, the military-mercantilist network continued to exploit the market, keeping wages low and monopolising opportunities (Sottimano, 2009). Workers became more vulnerable as the government surrendered its ultimate provision of social services and welfare. (Selvik, 2009). Although the state promised social protection mechanisms such as safety nets, these were hindered by institutional bottlenecks, weak ministerial coordination, lack of accountability, weak capacities, poor management, lack of transparent public policies and weak control of corruption (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This served to increase inequality and exposed the state's lack of accountability, limited effectiveness and deficient legitimacy (ibid).

As such, with the unbalanced governance that moved from state to market manipulation in Syria before the conflict, two of the strong regime governance factors – legitimacy and effectiveness – were already shaken while only the third factorsecurity-was maintained, though unsustainably. In this context, the popular uprisings in the rest of the Middle East inspired the Syrian uprising where governance reform was a key demand. Demonstrators chanted "down with the governor of

Daraa", "down with the governor of Homs" before resorting to call for the "fall of the regime" that was then escalated to an on-going armed conflict.

2B. Governance during Conflict: State Failure, War Economy, Conflict Society

Fed by old structural weaknesses and governance imbalances in the State, civil society and martket sectors, this conflict moved to a new governance imbalance represented by state failure, war economy and conflict society as illustrated below.

2B.1 State Failure and the Rise of Alternative Structures

Following state failure during the conflict, citizens in many areas have lost trust in state institutions and moved towards informal traditional institutions such as family, clan, region, or ethnic and religious affiliations for protection and support (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This has given rise to multiple governance structures amongst which some have been formed to fill the void created by the absent state. Shaky and full of tensions, the most outstanding of these structures are Local Councils and Sharia Courts. Their work ranges from providing key public services such as humanitarian aid and garbage collection to resolving local conflicts and performing legal duties, reestablishing order (Baczko, et al., 2013; Al-Jumhuriya Newspaper, 2013) and, beyond this, to enforcing their own policies and legistlations.

Local Councils: The first Local Council was created in Zabadani as early as 2011 with the primary aim of coordinating between civilians and armed groups. This then developed into a prototype of local governance imitated across the non-government-controlled parts of Syria. Local Councils were initiated by young leaders, mostly from the once powerful local coordination committees that gradually lost their power in the uprising with the increase of armed resistance. Many of the Local Council's first generation leaders have since been detained or killed or have fled the country and other leaders, often of lower technical or entrepreneurial capability, have replaced them. But technical limitations are not the councils' only issue; just as important are their financial

limitations. Together, these impede their ability to plan strategically beyond the ad-hoc provision of services and to be effective and independent in their work from military, clan, family or foreign control. Councils are far from well-established and are at different stages of development, depending on their security situation, access routes to border areas, length of time since their establishment and existence of other competing structures or spoilers (Khalaf, 2013). Despite this, they have managed to restore a minimum level of social services in their areas. This, together with their local nature and revolutionary history during the uprising, has ensured they are widely embraced by local communities and enjoy high legitimacy.

Sharia Courts: Sharia Courts were first established to manage conflicts between armed groups before many of them –often lead by Al-Qaeda or jihadi groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra –extended their interference into every aspect of citizens' affairs. Currently, Sharia Courts represent the most important issue of contention in the struggle over governance in the various non -government-controlled areas in Syria. While it is mainly Islamist groups that run them, courts are heterogeneous and no single actor controls them. Furthermore, actors may change overnight in line with changes of power dynamics on the ground. By May 2014, leaders of Sharia Courts varied, ranging from ISIS Jihadist group as in Al-Raqqa; to local armed groups like Jaish Al Mujahedeen that enjoys high legitimacy on the ground in Aleppo; to a representation of a coalition of interests of the Al Qaeda -affiliated Al-Nusra Front, tribal elderly leaders, revolutionaries, youth and sheikhs as in Deir Ez-zor. Sharia Courts follow a mix of Islam and tradition in their laws when power is shared among various groups. Elsewhere, when run by extremist groups like ISIS or Al-Nusra, they impose radical interpretations of Islam. The role of Sharia Courts diverges across areas from solving disputes and maintaining order to overtaking Local Councils in providing humanitarian aid and services and controlling every aspect of citizens' daily lives. Vulnerable to the control of warlords and extremists, Sharia Courts are sometimes a tool of authoritarian state-like oppression -one that citizens turned to due to the integrity they first showed in the absence of better alternatives but that was later violently imposed on them. Once they have gained local legitimacy and had more power concentrated in their hands as a result of their effectiveness in the provision of social services, Sharia courts decreed civil society illegal, supplemented customary laws with rigid applications of the Sharia law and tried to marginalise traditional elders, civic leaders, and some businesspeople.

This ensured that no system of checks and balances would hold them accountable.

This said, it is important to highlight that both Local Councils and Sharia Courts operate in specific areas/villages and not across them. As in Somalia, the governance that has emerged in Syria resembles a loose constellation of city-states and villages separated by pastoral statelessness across which a dense network of communication and relationships are negotiated and/or fought over for resources and power. This geographically fragmented governance –often under political-military groups with nodes tied to international intervenerswill complicate any efforts to build unified modern, efficient, transparent, and accountable state institutions (Khalaf, 2013).

2B.2 War Economy and the Increased Power for Spoilers

The conflict's violence, insecurity and the breakdown of the formal economy in Syria have resulted in a massive loss of jobs and an unemployment rate exceeding 50% (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This is coupled with a sharp decline in purchasing power of fixed salaries with over 300% depreciation of the Syrian pound (Ibid) and over 100% food price inflation rate (Yazigi, 2014). The livelihoods of the majority of the population have been lost, with half of it living below the poverty line (Ibid). Factories and industries have been damaged, looted or closed; trade has been hampered; agricultural harvest has been limited, forcing farmers, pastoralists and petty traders to seek new sources of livelihoods (ACAPS, 2013). While some resorted to minor traditional jobs like repairing kerosene ovens and wooden heaters; others started selling humanitarian aid and many others turn to fighting as a paid job. Meanwhile, informal and illicit activity has become widespread (Khalaf, 2013). This includes bribery and extortion of ransom; human trafficking; growing and selling drugs; looting; and engagement in arms and illegal oil trade (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013; ACAPS, 2013).

As the central laws regulating business operations have fallen apart with the state's failure, a vicious war economy has entrenched itself in Syria. New informal interests and centres of power, mostly illicit, have emerged totally out of the state's control and at the expense of the traditional business class. Feeding off the violence and reaping significant material

benefit and power, these actors have no interest in any reconstruction of central governance over Syria (Yazigi, 2014). For instance, in Tel Abyad, cannabis are cultivated to be smuggled to Turkey and Iraq (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012; ReliefWeb, 2013; ACAPS, 2013). In the north-eastern region, an entire economic cycle has been created from the illicit oil trade. This informal war economy has enriched a new class of tribal, rebel and extremist groups that engage in bloody fighting over access to resources as a means for increased control. Amongst the most important resources, due to its massive revenues, are oil fields, but so are sources of key services like gas, electricity and water and sources of essential foodstuffs like flour, in addition to profits from border fees and checkpoints or from looting banks, factories and industries (Yazigi, 2014).

Extremist Jihadi groups, in particular, have been the most successful in taking hold of these resources and exploiting them to wield more power owing to the experience they already have in making optimum use of a war economy elsewhere in for instance Iraq and Afghanistan. As Yaziji (2014) details, they started with looting billions from the bank in Al-Raqqa, which helped finance their military operations and administration of the city as they expanded to control oil fields and other resources. ISIS for instance seized flourmills that satisfy the need of one million people a day and monopolised them to generate both profits and effective humanitarian aid supplies to expand its local legitimacy. Al-Nusra, meanwhile capitalised on its control of the transit roots of oil pipelines to allow the flow of oil to government-held refineries for a fee. In other instances, these groups have reached economic deals with the regime. In Aleppo, a "water-for-electricity" deal was agreed by the Sharia court and the regime. Meanwhile, in Deir Ez-zor, the regime and Al-Nusra reached a deal to share oil profits to ensure a regular supply of oil to both sides.

Amidst a war economy and armed conflict, economic cooperation takes place but in no case is it aimed at restoring state or formal market governance. Instead, it rests on the narrow governance interests of the centres of economic and military power, which are more likely to undercut local efforts to improve law and order and reduce criminality. Extremists and armed militias tend to oppress revived civil society efforts that would hold them into accountability. Many seek to perpetuate violence and obstruct any peace deals to maintain economic and political gains they have amassed as a result of state failure and the consequent chaos. Yet again, the equation is not black and white. While they may

not be interested in reviving central governance that has been predatory at their expense, new businessmen may be interested in balanced governance that provides a more stable, safe and predictable environment.

2B.3 Conflict Society between the Civil and the Uncivil

Conflict polarises society and destroys social cohesion; it destroys trust, hope and identity, and fosters radical transformations in the political cultures and codes of conduct for those who have experienced mass violence (Pouligny , 2005). More importantly, it puts societies in a state of shock in which they are prepared to accept makeshift governance recipes that would otherwise not have been acceptable (Klein, 2010). But conflict also gives rise to a revived civil society as a reaction to those fundamental limitations posed by war (Kaldor, 2003). It generates activism and gives birth to leaders; it also triggers the reconsideration of traditional sources of authority.

With the eruption of the popular uprising in Syria, there was a revival of civil society represented by youth groups, grassroots civil society movements, local coordination committees, leaders, activists, religious groups, civil courts, religious courts, Local Councils, humanitarian support groups, media groups, etc. Invested in surviving a dire humanitarian crisis with relief work, service provision, awareness creation and to a lesser extent, human rights promotion, their aims and activities stretch across many areas. These include: health; education; medical aid, civil disobedience; political, social & economic empowerment; citizenship, elections' monitoring, service provision, law enforcement, conflict resolution, peace-building, human development, psychosocial support, state and institutional building (Khalaf, et. al, 2014).

As such, during the Syrian conflict, civil society exists. However, it is important to note that the nature and role of civil society during conflict is in continuous change and depends on the context in which it exists (Marchettia & Tocci, 2009). The wide definition this study adopts of civil society as the space between the market and the state spheres ensures it is not limited to its western understanding in peaceful states as merely non-governmental organisations. Rather, it encompasses the public, less

structured grassroots movements on the ground whose incentives to mobilise public action and whose political significance is far more prominent during conflict. Nevertheless, while the lines between the civil society, market economy and state become increasingly blurred, as they intertwine with war economy and state failure, what might be called "uncivil" forces coexist with what is civil as components of a "conflict society". This renders it difficult to pinpoint who exactly are the components of civil society in the Syria conflict. Thus, function is the criterion this article uses to distinguish civil society -so long as actors are not taking on the role of the state's monopoly of violence or of warlords' war economy, they are considered components of civil society, even if they might be said to be "uncivil".

Three groups that seem to be at times playing the civil society role in the Syrian conflict and at other times taking up the role against it are armed groups, state-like structures and traditional groups. In a study mapping civil society groups in Syria's non-government controlled parts, Khalaf, et. al (2014) indicate that the growth rate of these groups coincides with the movement of the relevant groups' areas out of the government's control. This growth was only possible with the support of armed groups who resisted an authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, the very decline of civil society groups' growth rate is also attributed to the increased control of armed groups running state-like structures ranging from less extremist groups who seem to be more or less publicly accepted as legitimate, like Jaish Al-Mujahedeen militias, to ISIS, which is still trying to gain increased legitimacy on the ground. Meanwhile, in the case of traditional groups, tribal, ethnic and religious groupings were the most powerful in opposing ISIS and the best structured in carrying out a lot of the humanitarian relief and other civil society functions during the Syrian conflict. This, for instance, is the case of some tribes in Deir Ez-zor who managed to resist the control of ISIS on its territory and of some of the Islamic charities that managed to provide food and shelter support to the internally displaced in Aleppo. On the other hand, the Al-Baryedje was the key tribe supporting ISIS with its human resources and many religious institutions were the platforms used to foster hatred, increased divisions and criminality.

Thus, again, the question of who is a member of civil society and who is not, is very ambiguous in Syria. This depends not only on the function and power of the actor in question but indeed on its identity, be it inclusive or exclusive. In a field study mapping civil society in non-

government areas in Syria by Khalaf et al. (2014), that questioned civil society organisations about their identity, ambiguity was the one clear finding. Whereas many of the groups highlighted that they are apolitical, their work was in many ways political. In addition, while the vast majority suggested they were with democracy, equality and freedoms, they seemed to have their own understanding of these notions that range from the international conventions to the Islamic concept of "shura" (consultation). Furthermore, while most agreed to the statement "religion should be separated from politics", many also agreed to the contradictory statement "moderate Islam is the solution". One explanation for this is that the control of extremist groups over public life makes any expression that is more secular, risky for civil society. Nonetheless, even those opposing the extremists, such as wholeheartedly progressive groups expressing notions of citizenship, participation, individual and minority rights, do not appear to distance themselves from the broader Islamist discourse that permeates the non-government-controlled areas' political life in Syria. Controversially, Gellner and Kaldor, consider this problematic as the Islamic discourse is still collectivist and has not "generated the kind of protestant individualism that provided the beginnings of civil society in Christianity" (Kaldor, 2003, p. 43). While a lot of positive discussions are taking place on the ground in Syria over the different forms of Islam and how it/they should evolve, vested political interests have moved faster to use Islam as a political project to their advantage. For instance, the Islamic concept of "Moubayaa", which is a form of social contract in which the ruled express loyalty to the ruler (Kaldor, 2003), has been used by the ISIS leader Al-Baghdadi to create blind followers of his rule in Syria, thus expanding the legitimacy and control of ISIS across the country against civil society organizations.

Many such extremist 'uncivil' forces have expanded their power against civil society in parallel with the war economy and shadow state structures, but civil society continues to exist outside their boundaries and as a counterweight to them. With its most basic form of monitoring and lobbying through demonstrations, deals and negotiations, civil society has been able to gain some leverage in pushing state-like structures to fulfil their duties and to be held accountable. While structurally weak, lacking support and technical and financial capacities to counter the power of money represented by the war economy and the power of violence of a shadow state, civil society has the power of the people.

In other words, while the control of state and market goods could represent the effectiveness and security factors of governance, civil society has the legitimacy. This was the case prior to conflict and is the case during conflict. Yet again, as old and new governance imbalances hybridize, the key question is whether civil society in Syria can produce civility in spite of its uncivil version and of state failure and war economy during the conflict. Nonetheless, tied to international nodes, governance during the Syrian conflict is not only a hybrid of the civil and uncivil, the old and the new local governance imbalances. It is, as importantly, a hybrid of international and local governance.

Part 3. Governance in Syria as a Hybrid between the International and the Local

Treating international actors as undifferentiated is problematic. They encompass NGOs, rival governments, the private sector, multilateral institutions, humanitarian institutions, the media, human rights groups, international networks, think tanks, governmental subcontracted private companies, the diaspora, etc. They compose a diverse set of actors and interests that may collaborate and/or compete with each other and with the Syrian local actors. Taking account of all of these is beyond the scope of this study, but general trends will be identified.

In Syria, the key governance trend of main international interveners seems to revolve around both state-building and civil society. More often than not, these follow Paris' notion of "institutionalisation prior to liberalisation" where the priority is building the necessary political and economic institutions as foundations for neoliberal peace.

3A. International Governance

3A.1 State Building

The top-down creation and promotion of the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (the Coalition) and the increased support for the creation and promotion of Local Councils in Syria are two examples of this:

The National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (The Coalition): The Coalition was created to be a recognisable interface of the Syrian opposition that external actors could deal with. Nonetheless, its local legitimacy remains debated. Locals perceive it as having minimal representation of home-grown interests and as being very dependent on international funds from which it derives its power and to which it is accountable. Many also deem it an abusive authority serving merely as a tool for domination and as a catchment for foreign aid easily diverted to the pockets of its representatives who are powerful and well connected.[2] These are criticized as serving the competition between two main powers Saudi Arabia and Qatarover authority in Syria. Al-Jarba, the president of the Coalition in 2013, was the man of Saudi Arabia with tribal origins linked to the Saudi royal dynasty (The Economist, 2013). The Secretary General, Sabagh, was the man of Qatar and enjoyed support from the Muslim Brotherhood (Reuters, 2013). This ensured the Coalition's limited local legitimacy.

To overcome its legitimacy deficit, the Coalition has resorted to providing Local Councils with technical and financial support via both its Assistance Coordinating Unit (ACU) and Local Assistance Coordination Unit (LACU). Of the ACU's main aims was delivering aid to local councils.[3] That of the LACU was to build state institutions by providing local councils with consultancy and with the basics of the electoral process.[4] Nonetheless, given their politicisation and their backing by competing powers, the work of both units overlapped on the ground. Also albeit beneficial to the councils, the Coalition's support did not come without its imposition of plans and even area representatives on Local Councils. These dynamics have ensured that many Local Councils viewed their relationship with the Coalition as just financial. This knowledge is not new to international interveners, but seemingly the creation of a minimal form of state remains a priority when compared to advancing the common interests of the Syrian society.

Local Councils: When not funnelled to the Coalition, foreign funds often directly target Local Councils via foreign governments' subcontracted private agencies referred to as "implementers". Operating from Gaziantep in Turkey, implementers have proved to be the most efficient in delivering the institution-building project of the neoliberal peace. As private institutions, these are accountable mainly to their funders. Access

to funding through an improved ability to bid for and win more projects is the criterion through which they seem to measure success. Complaints have been shared that cooperation between them or sharing of information and lessons learnt about Local Councils, hardly takes place. Furthermore, implementers are not necessarily concerned with the impact of donor agendas on Local Councils. Elsewhere, cases of political exploitation via private state-funded agencies have been reported; they are cited as potentially able to manipulate changes to a political order in their donors' zones of interest (Fischer, 2006). Otherwise, when implementers raise concerns of potentially harmful impacts, by the time their voice reaches decision-makers in Western capitals, agendas would have already been established.

Meanwhile, foreign governments continue to compete for control through their project-driven funding and training for Local Councils. A vivid illustration of this is both the content of the training itself and the manner in which it is delivered. A recipe for the neoliberal peace, "good governance" has become a key training course offered to Local Councils via the Coalition and many implementers. Following such an apolitical and technical governance approach, social power relations may be undermined, structural political issues may be ignored, and democracy may risk its reduction to elite-focussed, one-off events such as elections rather than a people-centric and relationship-orientated process. This may empower state institutions at the expense of society. Implementers' agendas are a critical issue. For instance, according to a Syrian intellectual, one of the NGOs offered to the five Local Councils it supports totally different training courses on institutional management (Khalaf, et al., 2014); having been trained for autonomous rather than coordinated action, these councils will support decentralised governance (ibid) at the expense of cooperation across jurisdictions. While decentralization in itself is not problematic, its application in the lack of a robust system is. Such procedures seem to pave the way for the promotion of interveners' interest and, in Syria, as in Yemen and Libya post the "Arab spring", in the balkanisation of these states in the name of decentralisation.

3A.2 Civil Society Engineering

Another form of institutionalisation is that related to civil society. In the liberal peace literature, post-conflict, efforts have been focussed on either

the urban, metropolitan and English-speaking elite groups (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009) or on taming the grassroots social movements –i.e. their NGOisation to become part of a global governance network of institutionalised and professional NGOs (Kaldor, 2003). The risk of the first involves the limited access to the actual local civil society on the ground. The latter meanwhile, risks advancing the agendas of northern donors at the expense of the locals given the donor-dependency cycle they may fall in (Kaldor, 2003; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). In both cases, the Syrian case is no exception.

According to criticism by Syrian activists, intellectuals and development workers, the large amounts of money spent on supporting Syrian civil society do not seem to bear the desired impact of "civilising" the conflict. This is argued to stem from several issues, the first of which is outreach. Much of the funds and time is lost as funding goes first to international NGOs and implementers, which then filter it down to Syrian NGOs that are big, English speaking and institutionalised. Based outside Syria in Gaziantep or Lebanon, these NGOs are not necessarily linked to the ground. When they are, only a small percentage of funds reaches a segment of the local society. The second issue is with the "projectisation" of civil society. To receive financial support and to attract foreign technical support, many local social movements have been forced to be registered as NGOs. While this renders them more bureaucratic speaking the language of their donors and at times taking up donor priorities, local social movements are becoming a "civil society project", driven by financial motives. This is serving to distance them from their agency as an autonomous process based on strong societal values and relationships, seeking to hold power perpetrators to account. It is thus not strange that many locals perceive the terms NGO, civil society and activist as a co-optation of their revolutionary social movements. From this derives society's resistance to universalist importations including that of democracy while accommodating other forms with which locals may better identify.

3B. Local – International Hybrid Governance

Centred on the above-mentioned top-down technocratic "institutionalisation" process, governance of most international interveners in Syria seems to be increasing state and civil society fragility, thus paving the way for extremists groups to take over. In many

ways, even the best-intentioned international interventions are not able to positively contribute to this fragility. The main problem is that governance is perceived differently from where they are. Governance factors explain this:

3B.1 Effectiveness

To many international interveners, effectiveness is mainly related to the success indicators in implementing their own agendas and thus projects via their own institutions or institutionalised bodies. Designed and implemented following foreign policies shaped far away in interveners' capitals (Edwards, 2010), international aid often fails to serve the quick and continuously changing dynamics on the ground. Furthermore, as each donor has different interests, donor coordination is often limited, resulting in the fluctuation and ineffectiveness of aid. For instance, some donors have opted to work with the Coalition, others cross it to work directly with their network of Local Councils and civil society groups as per their interests and preferences. Added to this, it is perceived by local activists and also by the interviewed beneficiaries from refugee populations, that donors insist on working in the ways they know best, regardless if they end up spending more at a slower pace and with less impact. It seems ensuring formal project completion is more important to them than outreach and impact.

Khalaf et. al., (2014) suggest that this inconsistent, inefficient and limited outreach and impact of aid, be it due to lack of local knowledge or to an ideological warfare, has affected not only the provision of aid but also institutions delivering it. The imbalanced support from international NGOs to civil society groups have served to deepen mistrust among them. Furthermore, as relief aid has been the more central focus of the international donors, this seems to have served to supplant the political role of civil society as efforts are diverted towards it. For instance, given the money available for relief aid, currently many civil society groups in the non-government controlled areas have moved their political work focus to partial or full concentration on provision of aid. (Khalaf, et al., 2014). Alternatively, the politicisation of aid as per donor agendas has put less resourced local civil society groups that are focused on inclusive governance processes, at a disadvantage (ibid). A point in case are the religious ideological agendas of the heavily resourced donors from the Gulf States that are anything but progressive and democratic.

On the other end, international interventions pursuing less politicised agendas away from self-interested foreign government and private economic interests seem to be more beneficial. It is crucial to highlight that it is thanks to organisations and movements like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for instance that under-represented issues – like the outbreak of measles– have been put to focus.[5] Meanwhile, it is the presence of international organisations that is pushing decision-making processes in Local Councils, in the Coalition and internationally to be more transparent and inclusive. Had it not been for some global civil society and humanitarian organisations, the humanitarian needs and voices of Syrians, would have been less heard globally than they have been.

3B.2 Security

Security for international powers is mainly that of their own. In their focus on protecting themselves from terrorism and internal armed conflict abroad, they seek to reinforce stability on the ground in a failed state via building state institutions. Their focus seems to revolve around the 'core five' institutions they use as the solution for all failed states. These are: the military, police, civil service, justice system and leadership (Call, 2008). However, in their emphasis on creating states that are strong security providers, little attention is paid to the kind and role of these institutions, i.e. whether they are predatory, corrupt and/or authoritarian; whether they serve the context-specific needs of a conflict-torn state and whether their security provision is just and thus sustainable (Call, 2008).

This situation is partly reflected in the Syrian case. In backing the Coalition, the international community has, in fact, promoted another regime -like institution that is not only corrupt and lacks local legitimacy, but that is, more importantly, driven by a mixture of competing local elite and international governance interests. In terms of security, to date, the Coalition seems more interested in fuelling the conflict rather than reaching settlements that would enhance security on the ground for the locals. Even in terms of its involvement in supporting militarisation to protect the locals, the Coalition is seen to be creating more insecurity. In Aleppo, the Coalition's military group is claimed to be the most involved in looting and thus remains one of the most widely unaccepted military groups there. Meanwhile, in Al-Raqqa earlier in the uprising, before its

fall under Al-Nusra and then ISIS, local plans have been forwarded to international donors to establish a police force there. However, as claimed by local activists, the project has been stopped, as donors who were seeking the approval of the Coalition on this, never received it.

The Coalition is said to have been more interested in advancing its Muslim Brotherhood-driven police project under the Al-Doroa armed groups that are deemed by local activists as affiliated with it. By-passing the coalition, with the support of private implementers and governments, various projects are currently on-going to establish a police force in several areas in Syria like Idlib and Aleppo. However, the low transparency from the international interveners is raising concerns regarding ownership and success. Meanwhile, despite the regime's random shelling and the consequent spread of ISIS as the most important security threat for locals, there seems to be no positive intervention in this regard. Many locals have been advocating for the creation of a non-fly zone, for efforts to diminish the flow of terrorists from other countries via especially Turkey, and for the control of the oil financial gains of ISIS by limiting its sale in international markets. Nevertheless, the increased focus of all states seem to be on protecting their borders from the migration of Syrians, rather than improving Syrians' security in their homeland to enable their stay there. This leaves Syrians trapped in a cycle of violence that would only make the security that ISIS provides all the more attractive and legitimate.

3B. 3 Legitimacy

In fragile states, international interveners replace legitimacy based on local values, beliefs and relationships by a focus on international legitimacy centred on their agendas or on institutional sources of rational-legal types of legitimacy related to the security of the state, provision of public goods, etc. (Roberts, 2011, Edwards, 2010). But this type of legitimacy, found in Western states, is only one type of legitimacy in states in conflict. As suggested earlier, local legitimacy is derived from complex patterns of power, responsibility and obligation as it also relies on local values (tribal, communal, religious, or traditional) that enable groups of people to satisfy their needs and survive. A lack of understanding of these dynamics leads to high competition between internal and external sources of legitimacy and may undermine the legitimacy of existing local institutions and consequently contribute to

increased fragility (Edwards, 2010). The following case studies illustrate that different areas in Syria exhibit different internal sources of legitimacy, both civil and uncivil. The tribal area of Deir Ez-zor, which still embodies a mix of systems based on kinship and patronage derived from a war economy, is unlikely to resemble a purely rational-legal system of a Weberian state any time soon. As important as was effectiveness in the delivery of services in elections in Deir Ez-zor's Local Council, were relationships based on kinship, patronage and/or on common history and interests. Should international donors solely focus on the legal-rational type of legitimacy and ignore the relationship factor and alternative forms of charismatic or traditional authority derived from them, the council is unlikely to cooperate with them.

This is not to mention that in conflict situations some elites may remain more interested in gaining international legitimacy rather than local legitimacy to ensure their stay in power and their continued access to resources (MacGinty, 2011). Two cases are the institutionalised state-like structures like the Coalition and several other civil society groups that have forged privileged connections to donors. Local civil society members see these as taking their resources and imposing priorities and notions via project-driven funding that they do not necessarily identify with (Khalaf, et al., 2014). This has served to increase the legitimacy gap in local areas, thus paving the way for Jihadist groups. The latter are increasingly gaining legitimacy with a religious discourse that mobilises entire communities. This is added to a massive financial capability to build legitimacy in their provision of social goods and security.

Part 4. Local Modes of Governance

The following case studies illustrate the complex governance dynamics of both civil and uncivil local actors on the ground during conflict. They focus on three non-government-controlled areas in Syria starting with their move out of the government's control until May 2014. These are: Al-Raqqa (the city), Deir Ez-zor (the city and Al-Mayadeen rural area), and Aleppo (the city).

4A. Al-Raqqa – The Hegemony of a Shadow State

4A.1 Pre-conflict

Located at a distance from main city centres, with hardly any resources or previous geopolitical importance, Al-Raqqa has been long treated by the regime as a poor periphery. According to the UNDP 2005 poverty study, Al-Raqqa ranks as the first governorate in Syria in terms of poverty with seven of the poorest 100 villages in Syria and of the eight villages with over 99% poverty. (Abu-Ismail & El Laithy, 2005; UNDP, 2009). Al-Raqqa also ranks first in terms of illiteracy rate with 29.1%; illiteracy scores as high as 98% in the two poorest areas of Al-Raqqa (ibid). Partly urbanized, it is a relatively new semi-urban stretch of rural land lacking any significant industrial and/or private sector development except for the hydraulic projects associated with the Euphrates Dam. Its inhabitants belong to either its indigenous local tribes (whose authority and relations are social rather than political) or to internal migrants (who form a heterogeneous group not necessarily well integrated with the indigenous tribes). A large segment of the population – especially those from the indigenous tribes – remain employed either in the government or in the agricultural sector. Others are involved in small trade work in the informal sector or tend to commute to neighbouring areas for better livelihood and educational opportunities. The locals retell no history of enmity between Al-Raqqa inhabitants and the Syrian regime -apart from a few cases.

4A.2 The "Liberation" of Al-Raqqa

In parallel to the uprising across the country, a few local anti -regime armed groups were formed in Al-Raqqa. These include Ahrar Al Sham, Al-Nusra, Ahfad Al-Rasool, Thuwwar Al Raqqa, Jabhat Al Wahda Wal Tahreer, Al-Mountaser Billah, AlNaser Salah Al-Deen, and Ouwais Al-Qurani. Although this armed resistance is cited by local activists as relatively fragmented and weak, Al-Raqqa moved out of the regime's control in no more than six days in March 2012. To them, this event, coupled with the escape of the regime's intelligence services from the city before the fall of its military services, is "mysterious". Al-Akhbar confirms this stating "Mystery has shrouded the manner in which Raqqa fell, as there have been no indications the city fell militarily. While there was no formidable Syrian army deployment in the city, which had been surrounded on four sides by checkpoints, it is not logical that the city fell in a matter of hours" (Al-Akhbar English, 2013). Accordingly, Al-Raqqa

is seen by the locals to have been "given away" by the regime for strategic reasons.

4A.3 The first few months of "Liberation"

The three months that followed Al-Raqqa's "liberation" saw the mushrooming of civil society groups. Over 35 groups were established. From these, a more democratically elected Local Council relative to other governorates was formed (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). In addition to humanitarian relief, the work of these civil society groups sought to create awareness on and promote elections, human rights, citizenship, democracy, women's political participation, etc.. In a field study, Khalaf, et. al (2014) highlight Al-Raqqa's civil society as seemingly more progressive, peaceful and secular with much better focused strategies and plans, than many civil society groups elsewhere in Syria; however due to structural challenges and limitations, their evolution was slow. Concurrently, in the first few months, plans to establish a police force by a group of community intellectuals under "Liwaa Oumanaa Al-Raqqa" were also proposed. Nevertheless, due to the high politicization and lack of support from the external opposition Coalition, these plans were never translated to any viable project on the ground. Alarmingly, parallel to the rise of these civil elements and forces, was the faster strengthening of "uncivil" forces in Al-Raqqa as represented by the extremist armed groups of ISIS and Al-Nusra Front. These made optimum use of the pre-conflict vulnerability of Al-Raqqa residents, where poverty and illiteracy are rampant, along with their increased capability to control the governance factors of effectiveness, security and legitimacy, as highlighted below.

4A.4 The fall of Al-Raqqa into the hands of Extremist Groups

With their massive economic gains from the war economy and control of key resources such as flour mills and oil wells, added to their grandiose cross-border funding, the military and administrative capacity of both ISIS and Al-Nusra became supreme. After a fight between the two groups, Al-Nusra was forced out of the city. Soon after its violent take-over of the Sharia Court, ISIS became the shadow state in Al-Raqqa. It started providing public goods and security and extended this to imposing its own rules on the locals. As its oppression increased, it was met with a

wave of civil society demonstrations. Yet local armed groups soon persuaded the demonstrating activists into a peace agreement with it. At the time, many of the newly founded local civil society groups had already been weakening due to their structurally weak capabilities and limited financial and technical support (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). This was compounded by the extreme violence ISIS imposed on them, including kidnapping, detainment, torture and targeted killings that forced many to flee the city (ibid). ISIS also managed to monopolize violence after having forced all local brigades/armed groups either out of the city or to surrender and join its ranks via a "moubayaa". This monopoly of violence enabled ISIS's unchallenged expansion as it continued to impose its rules and reap war economy benefits as a shadow state in Al-Raqqa.

4A.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

In the meantime, the main governance actors in Al-Raqqa are: ISIS armed group and its Sharia Court, the Local Council, tribal networks, local humanitarian organisations and a handful of civil society groups. Governance factors are assessed to locate their power on the ground:

Effectiveness: The main actors involved in the provision of public goods in Al Raqqa are local humanitarian organizations, eight civil society groups (Khalaf, et. al, 2014), tribal networks, the Local Council and the Sharia Court. Due to reasons mentioned earlier, the best-structured and funded humanitarian organizations in Al Raqqa are those aligned along an Islamic religious ideology. Meanwhile, forced to work in secret, the eight surviving civil society groups are much challenged. While their focus is on awareness creation and to a lesser extent on developmental or rights-based work, half of them provide humanitarian aid to gain legitimacy on the ground. This has ensured that given their already limited capabilities and resources, their efforts are scattered and weak, especially when faced with high violence by ISIS (ibid). As for tribal networks, these have provided strong social solidarity and a means of conflict mediation many locals have been depending on long before the conflict; yet their authority remains more social than political. Unlike the Sharia Court of ISIS, they have no implementing arm on the ground and no local armed groups.

Controlled by a brutal ISIS force that is backed by massive cross -border human, financial and technical resources in addition to the war economy it manipulates, the Sharia Court is the most effective and efficient provider of the main shadow state functions to the locals. The ISIS Sharia Court undertakes regular provision of public goods and big supplies of humanitarian aid. It also enforces its own rules and justice systems through its implementing arm, the Islamic police. The only other side working with some effectiveness, but lacking the capacity to make a genuine impact is the Local Council. The latter serves several functions via its offices, which stretch across: 1-services [water and waste collection], 2-civil defence, 3-child and family, 4-education, 5-media, 6-finance, 7-secretaria, 8-presidency. The Sharia Court, threatened to close the Local Council but continued to permit its operation; its strategy seemed to be similar to that of the regime, which is seen to outsource its obligations to humanitarian organizations, in order to focus its human and financial resources on sustaining its survival and expansion.

Security: Supported by a strong and highly trained military force largely based on foreign jihadi fighters, ISIS succeeded in abolishing other local armed groups in Al-Raqqa. With no local military factions left and with hardly any shelling by the regime on the city, ISIS managed to monopolize violence there and is the only actor providing security and order on the ground for the locals. With its rigid form of Sharia laws and structured institutions ranging from the Sharia Court to the Islamic police-, ISIS does not hesitate to use its brutal violence to maintain security on the ground. Nonetheless, some locals perceive it as a protection from the chaos created by state failure and conflict. One issue they retell is its ability to control looting, the reason why many started using its court and police services. Additionally, many locals have found the mere control of ISIS in their areas deters random barrel bombing by the regime. The latter rarely targeted ISIS areas, seemingly in an alliance of convenience since the expansion of ISIS rendered the regime's narrative of terrorism as a self-fulfilling prophecy that supported its maintenance in power.

However, on the other hand, ISIS is also perceived as a security threat to the locals. Not only has it killed or forced their local armed groups out of the city, but it continues to control them by brutal violence and terror. Consequently, albeit in a minor manner, ISIS continues to face both non-violent and violent local resistance. Some civil society groups have been fostering civil disobedience against it; others have been randomly

targeting its jihadi members at night when these enter their neighbourhoods. The city is said to resemble a ghost town after 7:00 pm when very few people dare to leave their houses.

Legitimacy: Although used as a shadow state tool to impose authority, and despite its ability to provide effectiveness and security, ISIS' Sharia Court remains illegitimate and continues to face resistance. ISIS is not blind to this fact and has been trying to build relationships with the local tribes via the "tribes' office" it runs in its Sharia Court. Their strategies stretch from recruiting young tribal members to its army to setting up war economy deals and promoting inter-marriages between them and the locals. However, at the time of writing, ISIS remained unpopular due to its brutality and insensitivity to local culture.

Legitimacy belongs to the Local Council and the civil society, which unlike it, are totally local but also a relatively democratic institution. This is the case since a group of 600 people from civil society members in Al-Raqqa gathered and elected a 50 member general commission for the Local Council. They followed three criteria in distributing seats: geographical distribution, revolutionary distribution and tribal representation. The commission in turn, elected a core team on a six-month rotation basis to run the Local Council. As for the civil society groups, beyond their local blood ties, many derive legitimacy from their humanitarian work and their revolutionary history against authoritarianism since the start of the uprising in Syria. Added to this, civil society in Al Raqqa continues to build its relationships with the locals via the work they do which has a local ownership aspect. (Khalaf, et.al, 2014). However, ISIS continues to diminish its ranks through oppression.

Another key actor that must not be omitted in these dynamics is the Syrian regime. While not present in Al-Raqqa, the Syrian regime still maintains governance via the government salaries it controls. According to testimonies by local activists, it continued to pay salaries for government staff within the electricity establishment, health and other government institutions even when those have ceased to function. Its purpose is seen to demonstrate that it remains the legitimate government of all Syria. Meanwhile, the regime has cut-off salaries to the government staff working in the communication and water management sectors. It is

suggested that the regime has done so because ISIS has been taking taxes on these.

4B. Aleppo – Power of the Civil in a Conflict Society

4B.1 Pre-Conflict

Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria (Ministry of Tourism, 2006). Its critical role and geopolitical importance is next to none as the country's main industrial hub given its closeness to neighbouring Turkey (ibid). Aleppo competes with Damascus on its rank as the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. A key metropolitan city, it hosts a diversity of religions and ethnicities with a relatively conservative Sunni majority. Economically, Aleppo was divided between a niche of rich businessmen with a dwindling middle class living in its western part and a mix of middle and poor classes, many of which have come from rural Aleppo to live mostly in informal settlements in the eastern part of the city. Those not employed in the industrial, business or trade sectors, are in the majority government employees in public institutions. The impact of the social market reforms across Syria was strongly reflected in Aleppo with the increased gap between the rich and the poor. This, together with the government's hegemony and corruption, has left many dissatisfied with the regime. Syrian intellectuals also talk of a rural/urban divide that pushed the "free Syrian army" that was recruited from the rural areas to move the conflict into Aleppo's urban centres.

4B.2 The "Liberation" of Aleppo

Currently Aleppo is a highly contested and divided city. Aleppo city was never "liberated" by its own people. Rather, armed groups from neighbouring rural areas moved the conflict to Aleppo city. In November 2012, they took the western part of the city out of the government's control. The western part was then divided from the other richer government-controlled part by a bus surrounded by deadly snipers. This left only the dangerous "Maabar Boastan Al-Qasr" pathway next to it for the pedestrians to cross to the other side. Nonetheless, thousands of people crossed every day to the western part to go to their work, to pursue

their livelihoods and resume their education. Shortly after, the pathway was totally blocked and the two sides fully separated.

4B.3 The first few months of "Liberation"

What followed the movement of the poorer part of the Aleppo city out of the government's control was the worst forms of state failure. All the resources, infrastructure and institutions were lacking in the "liberated" part of the city. This resulted in conflicting armed factions fighting over power, a dire humanitarian crisis with a regime-imposed siege, increased insecurity, and parasitic gangs formed for the sole purpose of looting and criminality. For a short period, a local societal initiative -the revolution security police (Shortet Amn Al Thawra) tried to reconstruct security on the ground; however, without a strong reference point and support, it was soon dismantled. Parallel to this was also the rise of a civil society stronger than most other areas in Syria. This is because many revolting activists who have had to flee the regime-controlled areas due to the regime brutality moved to the second biggest city, Aleppo. However, having had to work in secret and in segregation from each other under regime control and in other areas than Aleppo, for a prolonged period, civil society in Aleppo has not had the chance to combine its efforts (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). A war of ideology between its secular and Islamic components further reinforced fragmentation and divisions within it (ibid). Added to this, the work of many activists became depoliticised as they fell into fulfilling the ad -hoc humanitarian needs of the public (ibid). Thus, beyond demonstrations meant to hold power holders accountable for their actions, civil society in Aleppo hardly forwarded any alternative plans to reconstitute governance in it.

4B.4 The Rise and Fall of ISIS in Aleppo

Concurrently, ISIS started to establish increased authority over the western part of the city. It was effective in the provision of services and managed to oust parasitic gangs looting the city and its industrial hub, namely the Ghourabaa Al Sham and Al-Hayyani factions. This, coupled with the fact that the regime hardly shelled ISIS bases, enabled ISIS to reconstitute partial security that helped locals live and resume their work. This issue served to improve the legitimacy of ISIS. However, ISIS's brutality and hostility to civil society and armed groups triggered a strong

resistance against it. Armed resistance, under the leadership of the Jaish Al-Mujahideen local branch soon managed to expel ISIS from Aleppo. This raised expectations of improved civil life in the city. However, directly after the outcast of ISIS, the regime started its random bombing of civilian areas and institutions like the Local Council, field hospitals, etc. but not the Sharia Court. This resulted in massive migration out of the non-government-controlled part of Aleppo city, leaving only a small number of people who could not afford to move elsewhere. The city came to resemble a ghost town with continuous random shelling, limited resources, and violent fights over power between armed factions and a conflict society from which a strong civil side is trying to civilize the situation and improve its governance.

4B.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

The main governance actors in the non-government controlled parts of Aleppo are three layers of Local Councils (the Aleppo Governorate Council founded by the Syrian National Coalition to coordinate the work of city councils; the Aleppo Local Council and 64 district councils in the rural governorate); the Sharia Court, which is managed by armed groups; and a "conflict society" comprised of actors ranging from humanitarian institutions aligned along Islamic to secular lines, which may be politicizing humanitarian aid as per their own and/or their donors' agendas. The governance factors of these actors are assessed below to locate power on the ground:

Effectiveness: Run by powerful Islamist armed groups on the ground, including Jabhat al-Nusra, the Sharia court is seen as the most powerful with its strong ability to enforce its rules and laws. Its work is not limited to legal issues, but extends to cover public services like relief work and medical services, and to intervene in the everyday life of citizens. However, due to its patronage system and manipulation of the law to its advantage, it is perceived as corrupt while hiding behind its Islamist discourse. This has resulted in much resistance to it by civil society groups who seek to hold it accountable but fear that no alternative is available to replace it. The city of Aleppo Local Council seems to compete with the court in the provision of services but with limited resources and little military backing to enforce law and security on the ground. Its performance of functions spanning local administration, civil defence, social and legal work, media, public relations, education and

project planning is perceived as extremely effective, especially in its provision of education and civil defence, and it is well respected unlike the Sharia Court. However, it has limited resources and continues to be targeted by the regime. It is also vulnerable to the control of the armed groups and risks being used as a tool by the National Coalition, the Aleppo Governorate council and donors' agendas. Some activists have been highlighting it as increasingly controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood who seek to use it as a shadow state to serve their agendas of controlling the city. Nevertheless, as it does not hold power yet, the Aleppo city Local Council remains part of civil society, even though it enjoys support from one of the main armed groups, Jaish Al Mujahideen. The council meanwhile remained fragmented and unorganized in the provision of services. Civil society groups have put forward efforts to create networks, unions and syndicates like the free Syrian doctors, free Syrian lawyers, etc. but these have not been effective and continue to face divisions. For instance, the free teachers group was divided into six formations and the sides that provide medical relief (the free medical union, united medical council and the directorate of health) hardly coordinate. Financial support from international sides seems to further enforce this fragmentation.

Security: With barrel bombs falling on civilians from the sky, the regime has ensured no one is secure in the non-government controlled part of Aleppo. However, various sides have tried to otherwise reconstruct security by making the situation on the ground safer from looting, criminality and conflict. These include the structures promoted by the Sharia Court, Local Council and foreign interventions. The Sharia court established by Al-Nusra is expanding in its influence as it united with other armed groups under the banner of Al Jabha Al Islamiyya. This court has been trying to enforce order but as per its own patronage system -an issue which actually triggered more insecurity on the ground for those with no weapons or connections to it. As per the local council and foreign interventions, currently, local efforts, with the support of international aid have been planning the reconstitution of a proper police force in Aleppo. These seek to rely on the old police institution itself, under the lead of a respected police officer who enjoys very high integrity amongst the locals. Negotiations have been ongoing to have the police institution run under the Local Council. With all the positive and negative implications this triggers, it has raised much hope for security reconstitution.

Legitimacy: All actors have been working on gaining legitimacy on the ground. The Sharia Court tries to improve its capacity-related legitimacy with the public services it offers, yet its corrupt practices are limiting its effectiveness. The Local Council, which enjoys good local legitimacy as it is elected by civil society activists, traditional and revolutionary figures, also continues to work on its capacity-related legitimacy, but remains limited in its resources. The main local army that supports it – Jaish Al Mujahideenenjoys the highest legitimacy amongst all armed groups because it managed to expel ISIS from the city and is the only armed group capable –to a certain levelof standing up against the power of the Sharia Court. Nevertheless, legitimacy in Aleppo belongs to civil society. Although fragmented in its work, the latter's capability is relatively strong. It has plans to hold power perpetrators to account and enjoys a diversity of well-educated and well-connected youth, some of which are from outside Aleppo (Khalaf et al, 2014). This has attracted to it international technical and financial support which served to increase its authority. Some armed groups are currently seeking to have some cooperation with civil society, as this would improve their international legitimacy (and thus funding). Even the strongest force in Aleppo, the Sharia Court that has kidnapped and killed several activists to ensure it is not held to account, has had to do this in secret, as it fears the voice of civil society. The Sharia Court has been pushed many times to submit to civil society's demands in the several demonstrations carried against it. One of the biggest campaigns "Until Here, Stop" (La Hown Wbas), which aimed to hold the court to account for detaining activists summarized this best in its banners which stated "you are the court and we are the legitimacy" (Entoo El Hayaa w Nehna El Shariyyeh).

4C. Deir Ez-zor – The Monopoly of a War Economy

4C.1 Pre-Conflict

The main source of oil fields in Syria, Deir Ez-zor is a very rich governorate. Although its resources have been monopolised by the regime, leaving it underdeveloped and not invested in, it remains relatively richer than neighbouring governorates. Livelihood sources of its inhabitants are derived from either agriculture, trade or employment in the public sector or in its private and government oil companies (though at lower labour ranks). Dair Ezzor is of a tribal nature but its tribes are divided and riven by regime-fostered patronage systems.

Fragmented, their political and social authority increases as one moves to the rural areas of the governorate. The main tribes include Albagara, Alqarshan, Almaamra, Aleqaidat. Many of these tribes had been co-opted by the regime with their leaders replaced by others. To maintain regime security, this was supported by the rule of an extremely corrupt governor Jamea Jamea who had been manipulating and reaping economic benefits from even the smallest business in the city. Jamea Jamea was widely hated and at the beginning of the uprising, the top demand before calling for the fall of the regime was for his fall.

4C.2 The "Liberation" of Dair Ezzor

The liberation of parts of Dair Ezzor have been very violent and costly in terms of both human and material losses. Although the uprising started as peaceful in Dair Ezzor, it was soon rendered violent with a very high level of militarisation and shelling. Because of its rich oil resources, Dair Ezzor is one of the most contested and thus destroyed areas in Syria today. Currently, the liberated area in Dair Ezzor city is trapped between small regime -controlled areas from both its eastern and western sides; by a mountain from its south and a river from its north. Across this river, only a bridge links it to the rest of the country.

4C.3 The first few months of "Liberation"

Following the liberation of parts of Deir Ez-zor, the city fell under a siege imposed on it by the regime for over two years. Moreover, with continuous shelling of the city by the regime, the security situation there is one of the direst across Syria. All of this has ensured that the once booming civil society groups, established after the move of the biggest part of the city and its rural areas out of the government's control, have been strongly limited and depoliticised. This has left the place to the control of armed groups seeking to reap maximum benefit from their authority in the city and oil resources in Deir Ez-zor's rural areas.

4C.4 The fight for oil and power

In the city, Al-Nusra being the strongest armed group, with a very big percentage of its army recruited from local tribes, established its own Sharia Court and started implementing its own rules and systems on the ground. This monopoly of authority did not satisfy the other local armed groups, each of whom alone could not face Al-Nusra, but together, posed a great threat to it. As such, power in the Sharia Court was renegotiated and ended being shared by the different local armed groups, but under the leadership of Al-Nusra. In the neighbouring rural area of Al-Mayadeen, as the armed groups were busy protecting the oil fields they have taken and are sharing with their tribes, Al-Nusra–whom again controls the biggest oil fields–, managed to establish the strongest authority. There, its Sharia Court is extended from that of the city and is supported by its own police-like structures on the ground, the Islamic General Security (Al-Amn Al-Am al Islami). Nonetheless, the situation changes regularly every day. Rural Deir Ez-zor hosted bloody fights between Al-Nusra and ISIS over control of oil fields and authority. In the violent fights between the two, the local armed groups in the city have distanced themselves from siding with either and most of those in the rural areas are busy protecting their –and often their tribe'soil fields. Eventually ISIS won out over al-Nusra.

4C.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

The main governance actors in the non-government controlled parts of Deir Ez-zor were armed groups, tribes, ISIS, Al-Nusra, the Sharia Court, the local council and local civil society groups. The governance factors of these actors are assessed below:

Effectiveness: Due to the heavy militarization and the resulting warlordism where different armed groups and associated tribes took over oil fields, effectiveness seems to have been privatized by a war economy where each supports their own group. Indeed, even the Sharia Court did not provide many services beyond its rules and systems, which it had been imposing on the locals, thanks to its integrity and military power that had given it popularity at the beginning of its rule. On a lower scale, the city's Local Council and some civil society groups were also providing public services and humanitarian aid. Despite their limited capabilities and resources, this earned them much respect by the locals. Nevertheless, overall effectiveness remained a result of the power dynamics of the armed groups in their deals with each other and with the

regime. For instance, it was very common to have an armed fight over a resource, that is often settled either to the benefit of the stronger armed group or to that supported by the Sharia Court. Meanwhile, public goods like electricity and water were settled by the armed control of resources of the warring parties. An illustration of this is the "gas for electricity" deal between the regime and the local armed group where the latter controls Konaco, the country's main gas factory and the first controls electricity (Yaziji, 2014).

Security: The heavy shelling Deir Ez-zor continued to face by the regime ensured the security situation was the direst, especially in the city, which is the most contested. There, as the strongest group, Al-Nusra was protected by its Sharia Court that is seen to serve mostly its own security interests and not that of the locals. As for locals' security, this is the responsibility of each armed group that protects its own people. Indeed, even the Local Council is closely linked to an armed group that protects it. In the rural areas, the shelling is relatively less and as the armed groups are more involved in securing their own oil gains, Al-Nusra's Islamic General Security (Al-Amn Al-Am al Islami) provided some security on the ground to the locals. However, the overall situation reflects that, due to the war economy that has benefited many tribal and armed groups and even individual warlords, many of these were more interested in perpetuating the insecurity.

Legitimacy: With the vicious war economy cycle across the entire governorate, especially in the city, legitimacy was lost. When Al-Nusra first established its Sharia Court, given its good records in defeating the regime, it enjoyed some legitimacy, especially as it did not interfere much with local affairs. However, as it gained power it started setting its own rules and systems, which were becoming increasingly corrupt and based on patronage systems. It started interfering in the everyday life and rights of the locals. This did snot pare their civil rights -when detaining local activists; nor their economic rights –when taking over any empty houses and shops. At the same time, Al-Nusra failed to build on its capacity-related legitimacy from the provision of services and security. It lost legitimacy in the eyes of the locals, except for those sharing its ideology like the religion-preaching "Daawi" groups. The more legitimate side seems to be the Local Council that is well respected due to its relative effectiveness in the provision of public goods despite its limited resources. However, the Local Council never played a role in holding the court accountable. As for civil society, given the heavy

militarization and increased oppression by Al -Nusra, it remained very weak and forced to shy away from politics and to limit its work to humanitarian aid. Other civil society groups seemed to embrace religious-related identities; those that did not, were marginalized.

Nonetheless, when heavy violations to what is acceptable to the locals occurred, they stood up for themselves, even without civil society groups mobilizing them. A well-told story is the mass demonstration held against the Sharia Court in which a very big number of the city's locals participated demanding the release of four of local activists from Al-Nusra's detention. However, by then the case was not only who was detained – the activists being young community leaders with high legitimacy – but mostly how they were detained. Two of them had been taken from their wedding party during which the bride was slapped by a Tunisian fighter. To the locals, this meant a complete violation of their dignity – and by a foreigner. The demonstration did not stop until all four detainees were released.

Concluding Remarks

Host to one of the most vicious conflicts in modern history, Syria is a fertile arena for diverse forms of governance, both destructive and benevolent. This stems from structurally imbalanced governance that moved from state and market manipulation in the past decade, to state-failure, war economy and conflict society, during the current conflict. This situation has given rise to new governance structures that have emerged to fill up the resulting void. These include both civil and uncivil, top-down and grassroots, local and international players. They range from civil society groups, Local Councils, Sharia Courts, Extremist Groups, warlords, armed groups, the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, to International Organizations and private implementers.

As state-building and civil society forces seek to reconstruct and/or reform governance with and without these governance structures, and as these forces are shaping and being shaped by each other, a "Hybrid Governance" is being formed. Nonetheless, given the structural weakness of the Syrian civil society, this hybridization process seems more inclined towards international state-building interests that are

focused on top-down technocratic "institutionalisation" processes and that exacerbate the fragility and fragmentation of civil society groups on the ground. This in turn is paving the way for extremist groups to fill the vacuum in governance. Indeed, even the best-intentioned international interventions will not be able to positively redress this fragility unless they understand governance on the ground in Syria, from a local perspective. The latter highlights that, during conflict, on the ground, security is equated with the protection of local Syrians and their survival and not solely with the protection of citizens of the international community from terrorist threats. In parallel, legitimacy is deemed based on local values, beliefs and relationships, and does not only focus on an international rational-legal type of legitimacy or on foreign processes and negotiations that are top-down and set behind closed doors. Additionally, effectiveness is perceived as based on the delivery of services to the locals and not on mainly implementing external agendas and/or project-driven support.

Furthermore, in order to be able to more efficiently reconstitute a balanced form of governance in conflict-torn states, this study invites us, as suggested in its first part, to rethink the contradictions and limitations in our understanding of and work on conflict, civil society and state-building. During conflict, while hybridity may alter the nature and orientation of the state, civil society and market, it also affects the relationships and dynamics between them (Mac Ginty, 2011); thus, we cannot afford to focus narrowly on governance actors accross these spheres, in isolation from each other. Additionally, a proper analysis has to include historical depth and contextual understanding of local versus international interests and agency. As clarified by the Syrian case, the historical roots of conflict do matter. So do the local context and the manner in which the international actors interact with these. The case studies illustrate that both economic and human resources are critical for improved governance, but so is agency and social relationships on the ground. Continued local resistance meanwhile, suggests that there is no peace without justice, and that security is meaningless without real change – a change at the social, economic and political levels.

Nonetheless, regardless of the form of governance that might in the future be established in Syria (be it inclusive or exclusive, unified or fragmented, centralised or decentralised or somewhere in-between), generations and an entire civilisation are vanishing in Syria with implications for decades to come both nationwide and worldwide. Thus,

we may need to start thinking of the state, market and civil society together; of peace and justice together; of security and change together; but of people and their rights, first of all.

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Endnotes

1. For further reference view (Menkhaus, 2007; Edwards, 2010; Kostovicova, et al., 2013)
2. For a case study, view: https://www.zamanalwsl.net/en/news/2789.html
3. More detailed information is available on the ACU Website: http://www.acu-sy.org/88/Who-we-are/Mission-And-Goals/
4. For further reference view: https://www.facebook.com/LACUsyria/info?tab=page_info
5. See (MSF, 2013)

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List of Acronyms

ACU	Assistance Coordinating Unit
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DFID	Department for International Development
ISIS	Islamic State in Syria/Levant – Also know as *Daesh* in Arabic
LACU	Local Administration Councils Unit
LC	Local Council
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontière
NGO(s)	Non-governmental Organisation(s)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

3

The Emergence of the Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society from within the Non-Violent Movements of the Syria Uprising

(2016)

Tamara al Om

There is a tendency in the mainstream media to frame the situation in Syria as a one dimensional conflict. Assaad al-Achi[1] points out how "war is much more sensational than a nonviolent movement, (…), that is what sells"[2] and as such that is what is overwhelmingly depicted. As a result, with the absence of pivotal elements of the struggle on the ground, the complexity of the situation is obscured. In many ways, this dominant narrative leads us to what Yassin Al Haj Saleh highlights as an 'unknowing' of Syria and its people by "the West and the world at large" which makes "the population invisible, indeed non-existent."[3] Everything that is Syrian, in essence, is absent. Its inner dimensions, its people, are passed over in silence. For Al Haj Saleh, the conditions of life, education, health, culture, art, structures of rule, distribution of wealth, stories of men and women, their lives, faces and names. And issues of justice, freedom, human dignity, and the rule of law also remain outside of this narrative. (...) A change of approach is necessary in order for us to become visible, for us to exist.[4]

Indeed this unknowing of Syria is by no means a new phenomenon and it has not only been the West who are guilty of it. The Syrian government has itself remained unknowing of its people, their needs passed over in silence and their freedoms and dignity absent for decades. It was in an attempt to have their voices heard and needs met that the peaceful protests began in early 2011. At the start of the uprising there was a much wider support base both domestically and internationally, with audiences sympathetic to their struggle. This changed with the subversion of the situation from peaceful calls for reform to a violent conflict between

multiple sides. Once again, the Syrian people's voices were side-lined. So in response to this and to Al Haj Saleh's demand for a change of approach, this paper is attempting to provide both context to and an arena for the voices of the Syrian people who are fighting within the non-violent movements, whom have been playing a significant role since the start of the peaceful uprising, demanding their narrative be heard. The work of these non-violent movements will be the focus of this paper whom it will argue are building the foundations for a dynamic, and autonomous civil society – *this time with a political voice* – that is indigenous to the Syrian people, their needs and expectations.

In an attempt to show this advancement of civil society, section 2 will explore the changing nature of Syria's civil society in light of the activities of those within Syria's active and diverse non-violent movements. For comparative purposes it is first necessary to outline the state of Syria's civil society pre uprising, under Bashar Al Assad's rule. Section 3 will attempt to show, through an analytical discussion, how Syria's non-violent movements can be seen to be developing a space of civil society, citizenship and freedom. However before we can even begin to do this it is necessary to outline a conceptual framework in section 1, relating in particular to the conceptual understanding of civil society, its relationship to democracy and to non-violent movements. While the debate on civil society will emerge at various points throughout this paper, it is not its main aim to provide a thorough investigation into the existing debate, which has been done effectively elsewhere.[5] Instead this paper aims to focus its attention on the case of Syrian civil society, with reference to the debate more generally where relevant to the paper and its main objectives. At the same time, this paper does intend to expand the existing debate, to include resistance as a central theme, taking it beyond some of its current boundaries and limitations.

Conceptual Framework

There is little consensus amongst scholars as to an all-encompassing definition of civil society or what it entails, i.e. non-government organisations, social movements, cultural institutions, etc. Although there are certain characteristics that emerge from the discourse, in regards to its 'external borders' and to its 'inner space'.[6] The external borders being predominantly that *which it is not* and the inner space referring to

its internal characteristics. The external borders of civil society are commonly perceived to be "outside of the State and marketplace"[7] and "the opposite of family"[8] with groups that "crosscut ties of kinship and patronage"[9]. In this way, civil society today is commonly seen to be a separate sphere of society, which should remain autonomous from other spheres of society that may attempt to control or undermine it. In order to be able to ensure this autonomy it must also have the power to resist, influence and change that which it deems necessary for collective purposes, in the common interest of society.[10] For Suzanne Rudolph this power is likely to come from civil society's "interaction with rather than subordination to the state."[11] It is here then, that the discourse on civil society and democracy begins to emerge since for the two spheres to interact the relationship would likely have to be built on the foundations of democracy and not on a system that would subordinate and restrict civil society.

Civil Society and Democracy

In many respects civil society has become synonymous in our contemporary world with the idea of a strong working democracy,[12] being one of the foundational 'building blocks' of democracy that is generally conceptualised as the social space in which a democratic polity is enacted. According to John Keane the positive connotations attached to civil society signify "the emerging consensus that civil society is a realm of freedom [which] correctly highlights its basic value as a condition of democracy; where there is no civil society there cannot be citizens with capacities to choose their identities, entitlements and duties within a political-legal framework."[13] Taking it even further Michael Walzer states that "only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state".[14]

There are three potential assumptions here. Firstly that civil society is itself democratic. Secondly, that without civil society there can be no free citizen. Thirdly, that civil society must (and can potentially only) exist within a democratic state. The first assumption would likely be dependent both on our conceptions of civil society and democracy and on the context of the situation of which we are researching. As such as Zinecker stipulates, civil society "can contain democratic as well as non-democratic, civilised as well as non-civilised segments, where either segment may outweigh the other, and depending on the balance, may

configure civil society as a whole as being democratic, non-democratic, civilised or non-civilised. Democratic civil societies are civilised, but civilised civil societies are not necessarily democratic."[15]

Secondly and perhaps most importantly is the question of the relationship between civil society and the free citizen. There is no easy answer to this question and as such it will be tackled all the way through this paper. As will become clear throughout the discussion on Syria, the freedom of the citizen is directly related to the restrictions placed upon and repression of civil society by the government and/or governing bodies. The final question is particularly pertinent if we are discussing civil society in terms of non-democratic countries. If a democratic state is a stipulation for the existence of civil society, how can we even begin to consider the existence of civil society in developing countries and possibly in some developed countries too?[16] If we are to take Walzer's statement as accurate in its entirety, then we are essentially crippled in pursuing the main aim of this paper right from the start. Instead this paper prefers to begin from Zinecker's assertion that civil society can "become a democratic actor… this can result in non-democracies transforming into democracies under the pressure of such temporary democratic civil societies"[17]. Leading us to begin contemplating Mohammed Al-Jabiri question "is it possible to establish a civil society in a non-democratic form?"[18] This is a subsequent question that this work seeks to continue answering throughout the paper.

It is important to note that the association of democracy with civil society has not always been the case. Civil society has had an uncertain emergence into, and ambiguous meanings within Western discourse. Over the course of the usage of the term Browers highlights that it has "been associated with differing sets of principles and practices by thinkers working in different political and ideological contexts"[19] both within Western and non-Western discourse and it continues to be under much debate today.[20] These differing sets of principles are evident amongst the variations in meaning since its introduction into discourse amongst the early Greek philosophers and then again by the European Enlightenment thinkers which influenced nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers including Hegel and Gramsci. We can also see a divergence in meaning amongst Japanese Marxists in the 1960s, in Latin American in the 1970s, Eastern European thinkers in the 1980s and the re-introduction of the concept into mainstream Western discourse in the 1990s.[21] Since this period in Western discourse the 'good governance'

agenda became common practice amongst development policy makers to use the concept of civil society as a means of promoting democratic institutions to countries where civil society "appears weak or non-existent."[22]

Interestingly if we look at the two overarching approaches to the current conceptualisation of civil society we can see a division between Western European/American liberal democratic tradition and the 'rest of the world'. For the former "it is perceived as strengthening the existing democratic system, acting as a watchdog against intrusions of the state into the realm of the private and the public"[23] and for the majority of the rest "civil society is seen as a system changing force",[24] whether against external forces or internal regimes. This division highlights a distinction in the role of civil society which may also point towards the type of state in which a civil society exists – although of course this is not always going to be the case. The key here is that civil society's role is forced to be one of resistance when the state in which it exists is no longer playing its role in being 'of the people, by the people, for the people.'[25] This leads us into the discussion of the conceptualisation of civil society as resistance, largely emerging from Gramsci's thought. It also brings us back to the key theme in civil society discourse on the autonomy of civil society from the state, which is particularly important for civil society to be capable of fighting on the 'battlefield'[26] against the state when necessary.

Conceptualising Civil Society as Resistance

While Gramsci [27] saw civil society as being in essence an *aspect* of the state he also saw the importance of striving for autonomy from the state. This autonomy would be achieved via the establishment of certain institutions through which society was able to maintain representation and organisation of itself. Such institutions for Gramsci included educational, cultural, professional and even religious institutions. It would be when the state began to repress civil society and restrict its autonomy that resistance was necessary from within this realm. Consequently Gramsci's theory of political change was built largely on his notion of civil society which was vital in its role in challenging state power, particularly when dealing with a strong state.

John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government* describes the arousal of such a reaction of resistance and rebellion by civil society in its resistance to a tyrannical system as an opposition, "not to persons, but authority."[28] It is when the authority or government ceases to be *just or civil* and is no longer able to sufficiently meet the needs and aspirations of its people, when it no longer fulfils its function, it is the role of civil society to "protect the property and liberty"[29] of its members by working towards dissolving that government through rebellion. This is a worthy task even if it means the short terms effects of such a rebellion are likely to create a more difficult, anarchical state of being. This task has been undertaken in the hope that it will eventually lead to a more desirable state in the future, one that both individual and society are able to agree and accept, with the establishment of a social contract, as to how things *ought* to be.

According to Gramsci civil society would itself also need to go through its own transformation in order to reach a point where it could act as a counter hegemonic power, since over time civil society itself could fall into the trap of sustaining the hegemonic power. For Gramsci, this process of transformation must take place on a cultural and political level, a rethinking of itself by its own organic intellectuals. Once civil society had begun its transformation into its role as resistance, it would be at this point where activism would become prominent and primary to the role of civil society in its fight against an authoritarian state that attempts to control every aspect of its existence. It is at this juncture that the actions and aims of civil society diverge between the traditional or primordial conception of civil society of maintaining or sustaining representation and justice to one that is involved in direct practical activism and rebellion arising out of necessity, as instruments of resistance and struggle against oppression, in an attempt to demand its right to exist. Acting predominantly within, as Gramsci suggests, the cultural and political level.

This transition in the role of civil society can take many forms, depending on need and situation, from non-violent means including the use of persuasion through the avenue of the arts and new media, symbolic public acts, declarations and petitions, the production of leaflets and pamphlets, the arrangements of mass protests, assemblies and strikes, social, economic and political non co-operation, unruly behaviour or civil disobedience, to a full blown armed and violent resistance. While there certainly exists an abundance of violent resistance within the Syrian

situation, it is the activities of Syria's non-violent resistance that will be explored as we go on.

Civil Society as Resistance: Non-Violent Resistance within Non-Violent Movements

Before we move on to the case study on Syrian civil society and the non-violent resistance within it, post uprising, it would be useful to outline precisely what we mean by the notions of non-violent movements and non-violent resistance. Non-violent resistance (NVR) or civil resistance (which is often used in reference to the unarmed, non-military character of non-violent movements) are commonly seen as a strategy adopted to achieve political and social change that involves using active "non-violent methods…civilian led action" which "is increasingly frequent as a method by which ordinary people seek to change circumstances they find intolerable."[30] Furthermore it can often be seen to be a means of expressing grievances that are held widely amongst the general population.[31] According to Véronique Dudouet it is an effective tool amongst "marginalised communities" in their attempt to "redress structural imbalance and claim rights to justice or self-determination"[32] It is also important to note that such resistance can be opposed to both physical violence and structural violence.

The relationship between civil society and non-violent movements becomes evident if we explore both in terms of their role in resistance to "oppression, domination and any other forms of injustice"[33]. In a similar fashion to the conceptualisation of civil society as resistance of which Locke speaks, the non-violent 'theory of consent' holds that a ruler can only remain in power as long as its subjects voluntarily obey, and as such when a ruler no longer operates justly "the essence of NVR rests on withdrawing this consent through non-cooperation or civil disobedience towards unjust laws, so that governments can no longer operate."[34] This role remains in the hands of the citizen, linking NVR and civil society even further. It becomes possible then to say that the activities of the non-violent movements occur, more often than not, within the sphere of civil society – particularly if we conceptualise civil society as resistance.

It is within civil society's role as resistance, which is often carried out by non-violent movements, that one of civil society's inner spaces is vital

that of its *political voice*. While there have been attempts by some scholars to separate civil society from politics their relationship is undeniable civil society is a political project.[35]Without a relationship to politics civil society would have no place in protecting and defending the liberty of society. In order for civil society to be able to fulfil its role it requires a political voice – which represents the voice of the active citizen. As Zinecker points out "political liberties – freedom of speech and association – materialise only in civil society."[36] In this way, it is the political voice of civil society that expresses its discontent for that which is intolerable and it is precisely this political voice that Syrian civil society was denied, as we will begin to see in the following section.

The Case of Syrian Civil Society: Syrian Civil Society Pre-Uprising, Post-Bashar (2000-2011)

Syrian civil society prior to the uprising in early 2011 was largely subdued, having to act within the constraints of a regime that restricted their voices and activities. The regime attempted to control nearly every aspect of civil society's existence through its adoption of a very limited conception of civil society. Many, if not all of the arenas that would fall under the realm of civil society were controlled by the State. This included the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of people's lives, including, in the case of the Syrian state, also religion which has the potential to act within all four arenas. Unlike civil society in the ideal, which would have the role of safeguarding and defending society, Syrian civil society had no real control over these realms. The problem within contemporary Syria therefore was not a lack of understanding of the concept of civil society, but rather a lack of power over or within it. In this case, rather than in the ideal of civil society as being distinct from the state while at the same time interacting with and potentially influencing it, Syrian civil society under Ba'athist rule, was overwhelmingly controlled and directed by the state.

It is precisely this absence of power and control within civil society that is of interest to this paper. In essence, it is the lack of a *political voice* within civil society that was most damaging to this realm. While there were certain elements of Syrian civil society that had some degree of presence and even autonomy, the existence of a political voice was limited in every respect and in every realm.[37] The power to influence, change or control the practices or activities within these realms was

ultimately in the hands of the government. A populist corporatist form of associational life did begin to emerge and gain power and authority in Syrian society. In addition, there was also the existence of a more primordial civil society, groups one would be part of from virtue of birth and not choice per se – such as kinship, the tribe or religious affiliation. There was also a significant association of religious charities, both Islamic and Christian, that had a prominent role in society. However, all were required to undertake their activities under the conditions handed to them by the regime. This was done in large part to benefit the government by outsourcing certain areas of its work, particularly in areas falling within the remit of work undertaken by charity organisations that supported the poor, elderly, disabled, the young and women. Of course, these areas were carefully chosen, particularly with regards to their potential to challenge the regime or benefit it. In light of this, whilst this paper acknowledges the fact that certain areas[38] of civil society, within certain conceptualisations, did exist within Syria, for the purpose of this paper this line of discourse will be put aside and focus placed on the lack of a *political voice* of Syrian civil society, its impact and finally the relationship between the uprising and the emergence of a political voice.

The Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society

If we are to take civil society as the space in which democratic polity is enacted then the lack of a political voice within this arena can clearly be seen through Yassin Al Haj Saleh's description of Syrian public life, where he suggests that there was, "no space for internal political life, no space for public conversation or for any type of independent political organisation. Indeed, it was impossible for groups of Syrians to gather even in private homes to discuss public matters. The Syrian people lived in absolute political poverty, forbidden for more than forty years the right to assembly and the right to speech."[39]

This description indicates a society that was largely depoliticised, living within, as Robin Yassin-Kassab described, a 'kingdom of silence'.[40] While under Hafez Al Assad's presidency any undertakings of civil society's political activities were overwhelmingly suppressed, the coming to power of his son Bashar in 2000 saw the potentiality for change. While no one was under any false estimations that there would cease to be a commitment to the policies of the 'Immortal Leader', many saw the new president as a promise towards much needed economic and

political liberalisation and modernization. Accountability, transparency, development and reform were key words throughout his addresses, particularly when it came to the realms of education and culture. Assad stated, "our educational, cultural and media institutions must be reformed and modernised in a manner that... renounces the mentality of introversion and negativity". [41] Although some were sceptical of any real change occurring, many remained hopeful.

It was during the early phase of Bashar's presidency that the Damascus Spring became visible with the emergence of the phenomena of the 'salons', the civil society meetings and discussion groups which spread predominantly across Damascus.[42] The interests of these meetings revolved around issues of civil society and political reforms and consisted largely of a certain strata of Syrian society, its writers, poets and intellectuals.[43] While these were the people who organised and initially attended the meetings the events grew in popularity and gained attendees from varied sections of Syrian society. Alan George stipulates that it was the aim of these associations to "revive the institutions of civil society and achieve balance between their role and that of the state in the context of a real partnership between them in the higher national interest."[44] This led to numerous high profile attempts to press the government for reform, including the Statement of the 99, and the subsequent Statement of the 1,000 and the Damascus Declaration much later in 2005.[45] At no point did these initiatives call for an outright change of regime but were interested in working with the government to bring about reform *over time*. While initially these gatherings were tolerated, the government soon changed its position and arrests and detainment followed. According to Robert Rabil this was sending a "clear message to the public that it would not tolerate any reform it could not control".[46] Any attempts that were made to push for an independent civil society were interpreted as a threat to the stability and security of the state and as such were suppressed. It became obvious that the hard line of Hafez Al Assad would be upheld by his son (and the 'old guard').

As a result, the majority of activities occurred in secret, between close knit circles, that were deemed trustworthy. This forced many to cease their attendance, further dividing and alienating different sectors of society. Furthermore, the logistical limitations placed upon such groups and gatherings created even more problems, where according to research by Wael Sawah, "activists have been unable to meet and discuss party policy, which has remained in the hands of small circles of leaders, and

have been without the means to engage in healthy political life inside the party or in society, which [has] affect[ed] the performance of the civil society itself."[47] This strategy worked to cripple the movements' success and its ultimate aim. As Michel Kilo highlights, the aim of the movement to revive civil society was based on an attempt to bring the people of Syria into the fold, in order for the movement to cease to be an elitist group that was not in touch with Syrian reality. He states,"either we could work as an elite and found a new political party. Or we could work in a different way, offering knowledge, ideas, experiences, reflections and emotions [to that part of society] which is now outside of politics: to help society restore itself politically through a cultural project that we offered."[48]

Whilst at the start this strategy proved successful with the inability of the movements to sustain themselves and act freely enough to enable them to encompass and represent the majority of the Syrian population these weaknesses were only amplified. According to Kamal Al Labwani[49] this was because they remained on a level that was too symbolic. They were unable to penetrate mainstream society, and without the support of or mobilization of the masses, these movements would remain powerless to achieve the change for which they strove.[50]

The Syrian Government's Civil Society

While the government was suppressing the intellectual and civil society movements in the years following the Damascus Spring, it also pursued its own agenda, attempting to create its own narrative and conception of civil society. It sought to bring the debate on civil society to the foreground of mainstream discourse within Syria, particularly following the establishment of the Syria Trust for Development in 2007.[51] The issue of civil society was put on the agendas of both the 10th (2006-2010) and 11th (2011-2015) Five Year Plans, which were interested in creating workshops and initiatives to further investigate and develop civil society in the advancement of Syria as a nation.

GONGOs & a Business-Centred Civil Society

These initiatives included such things as entrepreneurships for the younger population, the development of locally based and EU-Syrian partnership projects that would support the advancement of rural districts, rights of women, higher education standards, and the promotion of culture as a means of increasing the role of civil society. One of the most significant initiatives was the introduction of laws granting a modern legal framework to civil society and its non-governmental organisations.[52]. The problem with this, however, was the government's control over which organisations may or may not be considered an NGO and furthermore how much power the government had over the activities of the NGOs (as such Government Organised Non-Government Organisations, GONGOs).

The focus of the various NGOs work pointed towards a very limited and carefully constructed conception of civil society. This conception was based on the (controlled and permitted) activities of NGOs and one which largely remained in the realm of economics, providing more freedom and flexibility exclusively to business and enterprise. While certain initiatives addressed some important issues, including women's rights and poverty, a great deal of work undertaken was never put into practice. For example, the work undertaken by NGOs on women's rights, who were fighting for "the right of a Syrian woman to pass their nationality to their children" and for laws against "certain social issues including laws against honour killings and marital rape" never came to fruition, "despite certain cosmetic changes to the constitution that occurred."[53] As a result, this did little for social freedom and nothing for political freedom which were overwhelmingly neglected.

For Joshua Landis, these initial efforts could have been viewed as a gesture of a government that wanted to "open up more space for civil society to grow, breathe and develop."[54] However, as many academics have brought to light including Mary Kaldor [55] and Yahya alAous, [56] the simplistic association of civil society with NGOs only works to limit the activities of civil society within the confines of what the state deems acceptable and legal and permits the state to act to restrict those who may choose to act outside of those confines. Furthermore, as Hinnebusch highlighted, the dominance of economics in Syrian civil society would result in the construction of "a business-centred civil society"[57] by a growing new bourgeoisie which would lead to demands for a greater rule of law and a limiting of state power. While this business centred civil society was developing and gaining elements of power within Syria, the

interests of the business elite rarely converged with the interests of the intellectuals within the civil society movements[58] and certainly did not with average Syrians.[59]

It is precisely here, with the lack of representation of those within society, where Syrian civil society was unable to act in its ideal. The increased interest in civil society by the Syrian government failed to put its attention on one vital element of giving autonomy to this realm. The one dimensional conception of civil society that the regime espoused, which attempted to *appear* to represent the needs of the people, was insufficient in meeting the demands of an indigenous and representative civil society that would have the ability to call for real social and political reform. Indeed as the Syrian thinker Burhan Ghalyun put it years earlier, the likelihood of the Syrian state to ever meet the needs of a free civil society was minimal given that, "the socially alienated state fears its own society and views every move or whisper coming from civil society as political opposition, a rejection of the state authority and a direct threat to the existence of the community, the nation and the revolution. As a result, the state has turned inward, toward its own coercive forces, which are developed at great expense, not to provide for the needs of society, but to better crush it."[60]

Syria's Civil Society Post-Uprising

It would be overly simplistic to assume that the lack of autonomy and freedom granted to Syrian civil society was the cause of the uprising in 2011. It would also be erroneous to assume that it played no role either. A combination of social, economic and political factors contributed to the emergence of the uprising, which have be explored extensively by a number of authors.[61] However it was the lack of a political voice within civil society over an extended period of time that prevented people from having their needs heard and therefore met. In this way, it was the government's inability to meet the needs of the people and the government's determination to supress people's expressions, viewed all too often as opposition as Ghalyun pointed out, that lead to the initial uprising with the emergence of the peaceful protests and also to the suppression of them.

Syria's Active Non-Violent Movements

In a similar fashion to the demands of the movements of the Damascus Spring, the initial protests were not calling for outright regime change. Instead, as outlined by Hassan Abbas, they sought economic, social and political reform, with a desire to work with the government towards the establishment of "a new social contract".[62] Nevertheless, with the increase in violence perpetrated by the government against the peaceful protestors, armed resistance inevitably emerged. This was followed by the development of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which lacked real organisation and an established central command. This made it easier for foreign extremist groups to enter Syria and hijack the uprising. Regrettably, it is here that the dominant narrative of the mainstream media and of academic and political discourse has remained. The work undertaken by those in the non-violent movements (NVM) are rarely a significant feature.[63] Despite the fact that the NVMs are the muted story that was not allowed to move beyond demonstrations into a fully engaged civil resistance, their work has persisted in the face of hostility, kidnappings, detainment and death perpetuated by both the regime and extremist groups active on the ground.

These NVMs are by no means homogeneous. There are hundreds of groups that emerged across Syria that vary in their activities and their means of organisation. Activist Omar Aseel and members of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement have created a comprehensive mapping of these groups, the numbers and nature of which have changed significantly over the duration of the situation.[64] Another recent study, *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014* examines a multitude of these groups across various areas of Syria and explores their varying identities, activities and struggles.[65] Their differences in ideology, activity, organisation, interaction with external forces, etc. are dependent on numerous factors including their location, the presence of extremist groups, their ability to cross borders and their access to funds. There is also significant diversity among the members of these groups, Syrian citizens who come from all classes, sects and religions, many of whom had no previous experience of activism. Although, as Al Achi puts forward, "in the past, most Syrians shunned civil society initiatives because these were the very activities stopped by the Ba'ath Party. The revolution forced Syrians to reconnect with each other and to begin working together effectively".[66]

Activities of the Non-Violent Movements

While a great deal of these groups came together to provide humanitarian relief to the besieged areas, their roles have developed far beyond this. The establishment of civilian led Local Co-ordination Committees (LCC) and Local Councils in many of the non-government controlled areas were, according to Al Achi, "among the earliest political networks to form cells across Syria. Their template for collective action helped spread the tactic of nonviolent civil disobedience during the first year of the uprising."[67] According to Rana Khalaf et. al. some of the tactics they adopted included organising demonstrations, managing public relations, developing strategies and building up networks of contacts and engaging in fundraising.[68] In addition to these forms of undertakings some of the key areas of their work can be seen to fall into several categories.

Media

With the development of media centres across Syria, the LCC became key in the dissemination of information both within Syria between different groups, towns and cities and internationally. Furthermore, the emergence of the citizen-journalist, following the expelling of foreign correspondents and news agencies from the country, enabled an unrivalled access to and dissemination of photographic images and video footage of the events taking place on the ground. In addition, Omar Alassad sees the establishment of informal news agencies breaking the "long history of censorship and disinformation" and "opened a hole in the wall of media restrictions behind which Syrian society lived".[69] This media freedom led to the development of a number of opposition media outlets, including numerous newspapers and radio stations, predominantly functioning online. Such examples include Radio SouriaLi established in October 2012 "in an attempt to bypass censorship and reach out to the largest number of Syrians, both within and outside the country, despite their limited resources" [70] and the publication of a local newspaper in January 2012, *The Grapes of my Country*, [71] by a women's group in Darayya, Damascus, who work towards promoting "the principles of the civil state and civil society".[72]

The dominance of new media and the online nature of a great deal of the communication within the uprising has been in part a result of a number

of issues including, the restriction of access to and from Syria; an effect of the younger generation of the *now* activist; and also in its reliability in the dissemination of information, film, documentaries and other various forms of artistic creative expression. Most importantly, it would appear that the use of new media and new technologies, in the virtual realm enabled such NVMs to continue to work, as one research paper stipulates, "clandestinely, even in areas under control of extremist armed groups"[73] in order to ensure their interaction could continue "with the Syrian diaspora and the international community"[74]. In many ways, even when the regime attempted to put restrictions on their ability to communicate, with the cutting off of mobile phones and the internet, they were still able to communicate more freely than they ever had been before the uprising began[75].

Art & Culture[76]

Not everything has remained in the virtual realm. Graffiti, from which the uprising began,[77] has become, "despite extreme danger, little by little, wall by wall" one of the most "powerful forms of resistance".[78] An example of the use of graffiti is the works of the *Lovers' Notebooks* on the walls of Saraqeb, Idlib. Upon the liberation of the city from regime forces in late 2012 many began to "celebrate their new-found freedom by painting the walls of their city"[79] depicting the experiences of their lives and using quotes from famous Arab poets. However with the increased presence and dominance of extremist groups, many of the works were painted over and the activists' ability to continue their work was made impossible, with many having to flee the country. Some of them do however continue their work in exile, recently releasing a film on the subject of the *Lovers' Notebooks*.

The creative and artistic expression of those within the NVMs extends beyond graffiti and has involved the production of art in its numerous forms, including film, music, comedy, comics, cartoons, poetry and literature. For instance, the publication and distribution of pamphlets and underground intellectual literature, the making and production of posters and magazines and organising symbolic public acts. One of the most internationally visible acts of expression are the satirical banners, often in English, from the town of Kafranbel. The messages on the banners not only reflect the struggle of the people of Kafranbel and the rest of Syria but also highlight the hypocrisies of the international community, feature

international current events and use international cultural symbols and icons in an attempt to universalise and humanise their struggle. Another example is the Damascus street campaign s carried out by *Save the Rest*, which attempts to highlight the plight of the prisoners of conscience held by the Syrian regime. They distribute pamphlets across the city which are disguised as folded 500 Syrian pound notes with information about the suffering; some with messages from the prisoners themselves.[80]

Rebuilding of Institutions[81]

A large proportion of the work undertaken by the NVM is concerned with rebuilding the economic, legal, civic, social, cultural and moral foundations for a functioning civil society with a political voice. Part of this process is about developing strategies for rebuilding democratic communities by liberating minds, encouraging intellectual and creative thought and action, promoting reconciliation and attempting to counter pressure from extremist groups. Many of these NVM groups have also, highlights Khalaf et.al., "contributed to containing the process of fragmentation along ethnic, sectarian, political and ideological lines, and continue to do so today despite the prevailing climate of violence".[82] They also found that these groups introduced various public services including the distribution of aid, medical services and education, maintenance of the judiciary system and management of waste collection in areas that had previously been under regime control.[83] Courts and security services were set up in many areas [84] and trade unions and students groups were also established to counter the decades long restrictions of these groups under the Ba'athist umbrella. Other forms of organisation were also developed including such things as youth networks, development and rights based organisations.[85]

The conduction of educational workshops has also been a priority for the NVMs, including running workshops on media and communication skills, humanitarian and medical assistance, legal awareness and many others. For example, the organisation 'Building the Syrian State' runs leadership and democracy building workshops[86] with the aim of arming the people with the ability to rebuild the country and not leave it in the hands of the government or foreign forces. Interestingly, some of the most popular workshops were based on Gene Sharp's[87] teachings for civil disobedience and resistance.[88]

Inevitably, the need for legal assistance has also emerged and as a result an organisation which began as a Facebook group soon developed into the Free Syrian Lawyers Association. According to the group who work between Turkey and Syria, they attempt to, not only represent the Syrian people in need of legal assistance, but also to "hold the revolution to higher standards" by supervising "FSA interrogations of captured army soldiers, monitor rebel 'courts' and provide representation to defendants accused of supporting the government."[89] According to one of the founding members of the organisation, "the ultimate aim is to set up temporary criminal courts in all liberated areas."[90] In addition, there is the Syrian Civil Defence, known as the White Helmets, a group of "2,221 volunteer search and rescues workers from local communities who risk their lives[91] to save others"[92] following attacks and bombings. According to their website, they "save people on all sides of the conflict… deliver public services to nearly 7 million people, including reconnecting electrical cables, providing safety information to children and securing buildings".[93] They also state that they are "the largest civil society organisation operating in areas outside of government control" which pledges "commitment to the principles of 'Humanity, Solidarity, Impartiality'".[94]

The Imagery and Image of the Non-Violent Movements

As touched upon previously, many of the activities of these groups were an attempt to remind people of the original aims and values of the uprising. A spokesperson from *Kartoneh*, the anonymous collective of artists and activists who produce banners in Deir Al Zour, highlights this sentiment regardless of the struggles they have faced "we did not carry weapons, despite the siege… we still insist on expressing ourselves in the same simple way in which we started".[95] An interesting feature of a great deal of the activities of the NVMs is the juxtaposition of the imagery and symbolism adopted by the various groups to the cult personality imagery and symbolism of the regime. They have purposely, as Charlotte Bank highlights, steered "clear of creating new icons"[96] and leadership figures and instead have adopted images of the children and youth of Syria, symbols of the breaking away from the fear, paralysis and silence that their society was riddled with for so long and instead focus on "ideas based on choice, not force"[97] as Zaher Omareen states.

The NVMs, over the course of the conflict, have had to adapt and reinvent themselves with the evolution of events and they will continue to do so as the conflict continues. One of the findings of Khalaf et.al. in terms of the identity of the NVM groups found that while a number of them could not be seen as "progressive" as such, many still tended to be, "secular, political (in the sense of holding governance structures accountable), socially responsible (calling for an inclusive, pro-poor economic system that provides opportunities for all), pluralistic (demanding democracy, justice, equality and respect for all segments of society), and interested in cooperating to speak out against their oppressors with a strong, unified voice."[98]

Interestingly, given the importance identified in this paper of the understanding of a particular concept or notion, one of the issues that arises from Khalaf et al.'s research is the "confusion" of some of those within the non-violent groups, surrounding "their understanding of development notions such as democracy, freedom, women's rights, human rights and secularism".[99] Before having the opportunity to really explore their positions on these ideas the extremist groups are exploiting this 'confusion of identity'[100] by selling their own ideas of a solution as a preferable alternative to the hardships many of those on the ground are facing on a daily basis. This is particularly the case when those on the ground have little option in the face of minimal international support. At this point, many are aware of the fact that they are unable to stop the armed and increasingly extremist aspect of the situation, with numerous of their own members having turned to the armed fight. However, for those who remain and for those who continue to join, it is understood that there is an indispensable need to focus on a situation post conflict, which necessitates action today. Unfortunately, with the increase in violence against and threat to those within the NVMs by the regime and by the extremist groups, many have been forced to leave Syria. In spite of this they continue their work in their newly established places of residence.

Discussing the Emergence of the Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society

Unlike in the works of Locke, the recent rebellion in Syria differs on a number of points. As we have seen, while the initial uprisings did begin in the hope that they were seeking a more desirable state in the future, they did not begin with demands for the dissolution of the government – that was a subsequent demand in the face of indiscriminate and sustained

violent repression by the government. More importantly, the Syrian people did not have a *free* and *just* civil society that was able to effectively aid them in their emancipation from the oppressive regime. Indeed it could be argued that it was the very absence of a *free* civil society with *power* that has resulted in the chaotic situation in which Syria finds itself. Any semblance of a civil society, as has been shown, never had a political voice that had a role within, or relationship with government, which would subsequently have enabled them to have the power to fully achieve what Locke puts forth as the role and duty of civil society at such a juncture.

In addition to this restriction faced by civil society in Syria, one of the shortcomings of the civil society movements in the early 2000s was a lack of real engagement with the conception of civil society itself. The movements were aiming for an almost replication of a civil society according to the traditional understanding of the concept, one in which the institutions of civil society are free to act and fulfil their role in society as a whole. However, the institutions that Gramsci saw as pivotal in the hands of civil society had no semblance of the necessary autonomy in Syrian reality. Religious institutions found themselves tightly wound up with the regime and its appointed officials, professional institutions were limited to Ba'athist organisations as were most of the educational institutions until more recently. Cultural institutions, which the regime advertised as 'humanity's highest need'[101] remained firmly in the hands of the regime which saw the need for, as Miriam Cooke put forth, "absolute control over the production of culture."[102] While the ideal of civil society should indeed be striven for, given the repressive nature of the Syrian state and the obstacles such movements faced, it would seem necessary to contemplate a conceptualisation of the concept that would more closely meet the needs of the situation. By no means is this an undermining of the work, dedication and sacrifices made by those earlier movements, which in many ways laid the groundwork and prepared the way for those who have been participating in the uprising over the last four years.

The uprising has been able to overcome the weakness of the earlier movements of being dislocated from Syrian reality and thus the Syrian populace, as seen with the mobilization of the masses, which Labwani laid down as the foundation for change.[103] Even amongst the total devastation of areas and the chaos that has taken place, people came together to act within a space of civil society that did not exist before, a

realm of civil society as a means of expression, development, co-ordination, community but mostly as resistance. In this way, the gradual weakening of the traditionally dominant autocratic Syrian state along with the gradual work undertaken by the earlier civil society movements have, as Sadowski puts forward, provided "new opportunities for civil society to expand, develop and assert its independence".[104] In the hope that at some point in the future it will be in a position to act in ways that a civil society is meant to, in the ideal.

It is now, from within the uprising and more specifically from within the non-violent movements of the uprising that civil society as resistance can be seen to be developing and spreading, both within Syria and outside of it – by Syrians forced into exile. It would appear that the transformation of civil society that Gramsci demanded in order for political change to occur, is underway. Syrian civil society is transforming itself from one living under constraints to one that is able to create its own identity – an identity of resistance, against the once hegemonic state and also now against the tyrannical Daesh,[105] extremist groups, and other armed groups fighting for control and power. It has been in the absence of the state and its control that civil society has been able to develop in an extraordinary fashion, despite the suppression they have faced from these armed and/or extremist groups.[106]

A significant proportion of the activities undertaken within the Non-Violent Movements of the Syrian uprising highlight a brewing of a critical and dynamic consciousness in the 'mentalités' of the Syrian *now* activist and subsequently in the understanding and development of Syrian civil society. They are now, as Zaher Omareen puts it, "armed with their own instruments, which can contribute to undermining *all* authority that is not based on genuine democracy." [107] This culture of resistance, opposition and protest is now deeply entrenched and will not easily be lost. Gramsci's version of civil society as resistance has become a familiar and creative tool within this uprising upon the realisation, as put forward by Halasa et.al. that "creativity is not only a way of surviving the violence, but of challenging it".[108] Fundamentally, it has been the pursuits of the NVMs that has enabled many Syrian people to, as Daniel Gorman describes, "demonstrate that they are in possession of the very attributes that the regime denies them – agency, identity, diversity, intelligence, beauty and humour… art can be non-violent defiance… it challenges and undermines narratives of power, no matter where they originate."[109]

Moreover, many of the activities that have been undertaken are done so through the sharing of ideas, dialogue, debate, contestation and in decisions being made within a collective space, described by Mezar Matar, as a "committee of citizens".[110] In fact, it is only as citizens and through true citizenship that a diverse society such as Syria can be held together and with which it has been undeniably denied. True citizenship then, according to Abbas, can only be built upon the establishment of a "political, legal and cultural framework" which must entail "three essential elements: the right to acquire it; the rights and responsibilities it entails; and participation in public life".[111] This in hand necessitates fully functioning relationships between "the citizen and other citizens; the citizens and the state; and the citizen and common space".[112] Essentially these relationships are the underpinning of a social contract between state, society and its citizens.

In Syria's pre-uprising state, the framework and elements, that Abbas puts forth as a precondition of true citizenship, did not exist. This absence consequently lead to the absence also of a true citizen that was able to act, publicly, within the remit of civil society. As such the relationship between citizen and state was never possible, without consequence at least. And the relationship between citizens and the common space, while existing in certain areas, was deeply limited, particularly if that common space was also a public space. It is within this space, of civil society, that a citizen's political voice must be heard, but was not. In contrast while the relationship between the potential citizen and the state under the current circumstances in Syria is not possible, the relationship between citizens and that of citizens and the common and public space is one that is beginning to develop. It is within this common (and public) space of which Abbas refers that the political voice of civil society has been growing, with the emergence of the expressions of the social freedoms fundamental for a practicing "active citizen".[113] They are now capable of providing the vehicle from which a 're-knowing' of Syria can take place. In essence this active citizen has become as such due to the emergence of his political voice. And while as it stands his voice is not heard by the *acting* government, the struggle faced is a worthy task in the fight for how things *ought* to be in the future, through the establishment of a social contract between a society, *its* citizens and *its* future state.

Conclusion

These changing relationships between citizen, state and civil society then leads us back to some of the questions raised at the start of this paper regarding the relationship between democracy and civil society. Looking at it as a question over the state inside of which a civil society exists, we can see that this paper has so far argued that the limitations placed upon civil society by a non-democratic state such as Syria has severely undermined the existence of an autonomous civil society with a political voice. This has not been out of a lack of desire or attempt by society but as a result of the suppression of an active political voice. On the other hand if we explore the state of civil society post-uprising, we can take the emergence of an active citizen with a political voice, acting within an emerging civil society, outside of a democratic state, as a suggestion of the potentiality of the existence of an active civil society without the presence of a democratic state. At the same time, this has only been possible under the conditions of the uprising which limited the ability of the state to control it. As such it has been the emergence of the common/public space that has enabled civil society to gain a political voice, *beyond the state*. The hope is that this common and public space that is emerging within Syria (and also for Syrians outside of it) is creating the space from where a democratic polity can be enacted, for as Hinnebusch highlights, "only through such a political incorporation of an autonomous and inclusive civil society can democratization advance."[114] As such, the aim ultimately would be for this autonomous and inclusive space to become the arena, with its interaction with a future state, from which a social contract could begin to be established, which would ultimately lead the way for the foundations of a democratic state to begin to be built. To surmise then we can say that 1) the relationship between a free citizen and a free civil society are deeply intertwined and interdependent, 2) that civil society has the potential to transform a non-democratic state into a democratic one and as such 3) that democracy is not necessarily a condition for civil society – although it does help civil society more effectively and finally that 4) civil society is a condition for democracy.

Looking Forward

The research undertaken for this paper revealed that while some works acknowledged a change in Syrian civil society and its gaining of a

prominent role outside of the government controlled areas nearly all of them were still discussing it within the limited remit of non-government organisations.[115] In light of this, there is a pressing need for a reassessment of the concept if one is interested in a civil society that has the power to have an impact in society and in the state. As such, there needs to be a critical engagement with the concept itself in an attempt to provide a more fluid conception of civil society that demands as its foundation, a political voice.

Similarly, the international community needs to refocus its attention on establishing a broader understanding of Syria's oppositional movements. An understanding that extends beyond the armed and political opposition and beyond that which fits into their own strategic interests. More importantly, is the acknowledgement that the civil society advocates and movements that we have been exploring are seen as a vital element in any comprehensive plan for Syria. Their role would be necessary during the conflict with the aim of resolving the current crisis and also in the future rebuilding of the country.

Dudouet is firm in her belief that nonviolent resistance should "be seen as an integral part of conflict transformation, offering one possible approach to achieving peace and justice… through its dual process of dialogue and resistance – dialogue with the people on the other side in order to persuade them, and resistance to the structures in order to compel them."

As for the rebuilding of the country their role is possibly even more vital, for as McGee states "civil society institutions are not simply an indicator of the flourishing of liberal democracy, but rather they are also instrumental in realising the transition towards such a system".[116] This echoes the sentiment of Zinecker who holds civil society as a potential "democratic actor" with the ability to transform non-democratic situations into democratic ones.[117] In this way, it is amongst these NVMs that an alternative lies to the dominant and often violent players that dominate the narratives of this conflict. Instead those inside and those forced outside of the country need to be supported in order for them to be in a position to play their role in the transformation of Syria from a non-democratic state into a democratic one.

Endnotes

1. Al-Achi is an activist, a spokesperson and leading member of the Local Coordination Committees and senior program manager at the NGO Baytna Syria.
2. Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.110.
3. Al Haj Saleh, Y. (16th November 2014) *Forty Four Months and Forty Four Years/ 1-Two Blindfolds.* Internationale Online.
4. Ibid.
5. Kaldor, M.(2003). Keane, J. (1998). Van Rooy. (1998) and others.
6. Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.
7. Van Rooy, A. (1998) "Civil Society and the Aid Industry". Earthscan, London. p.30.
8. Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.
9. Putnam, R.D. (1993). "Making democracy work". Princeton University Press, Princeton.
10. This leads us to the inner space of civil society, which we will touch upon further on in the section, however it is important to note here that civil society should not be dealt with as an utopian concept, as an end in itself – but rather should be viewed as a process as well as a goal, knowing it too has its limitations and may never be fully achieved in the ideal.
11. Rudolpf, S.H. (May 13 2000). "Civil Society and the Realm of Freedom". *Economic and Political Weekly.*
12. Havel, V. (1993). *Summer Meditations*. Vintage Books, USA.
13. Keane, J. (1998). "Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions". Stanford University Press. p. 114.
14. Walzer, M. (1991). *The Idea of Civil Society: A Path to Social Reconstruction*. Dissent. 38:293-304. p. 302.
15. Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.
16. Ibid.
17. Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.
18. Al Jabiri, M. (1993). Ishkaliyyat al-dimuqratiyya wa al-mujtama' al-madani fi al-watan al-'arabi. (The Dilemmas of Democracy and Civil Society in the Arab Nation). Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi. 168:4-15. Cited in Browers, M.L. (2006). *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities.* Syracuse University Press, USA. p. 92.
19. Browers, M.L. (2006). *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities.* Syracuse University Press, USA. p.5.

[20.] For a detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of civil society in Arab discourse refer to author's forthcoming publication *Conceptualising Civil Society in Arab Thought*.

21. Lewis,D. (2001).Civil Society in Non-Western Contexts. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29052/1/CSWP13_web.pdf

[22.] Ibid.

[23.] Rathzel, N. & Uzzell, D et.al. "The Space of Civil Society and the Practices of Resistance and Subordination". *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 154-169.

[24.] Ibid.

[25.] Gettysburg Address, US President Abraham Lincoln, 1863.

[26.] Gramsci viewed civil society as a battlefield, a space where consensus with the ruling block is created as well as challenged. Quoted in Rathzel, N. & Uzzell, D et.al. "The Space of Civil Society and the Practices of Resistance and Subordination". *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 154-169.

[27.] Gramsci, A. (2005). "Selections from the Prison Notebooks". Lawrence & Wishart Ltd

28. Locke, J. (1689). *Right to Revolution* in *Second Treatise of Civil Government. http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch3s2.html*

[29.] Ibid.

[30.] Chenoweth, E. & Gallagher Cunnigham, K. "Understanding Nonviolent Resistance: An Introduction". *Journal of Peace Research*, 50 (3) 271-76.

[31.] Roberts, A. (2010). Civil Resistance and Power Politics. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

32. Dudouet, V. "Nonviolent Resistance in Power Asymmetries". http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/dudouet_handbookII.pdf

[33.] Ibid.

[34.] Ibid.

[35.] Gramsci, A. (2005). "Selections from the Prison Notebooks". Lawrence & Wishart Ltd

[36.] Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

[37.] Sawah, W. (2012). *Syrian Civil Society Scene Prior to the Syrian Revolution.* Knowledge Programme Civil society in West Asia. Hivos: People Unlimited. Netherlands.

[38.] For a more detailed discussion on the nature of Syrian Civil Society pre uprising see Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014). *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014.* Badael Project / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. And Yassin-Kassab, R & Al-Shami, L. (2016). Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War. Pluto Press, UK.

39. Al Haj Saleh, Y. (16. November. 2014). *Forty-four Months and Forty-four Years/ 1Two Blindfolds.* http://www.internationaleonline.org/

[40.] Yassin-Kassab, R. Literature of the Syrian Uprising. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). *Syria Speaks: Art & Culture from the Frontline*. Saqi Books, UK. p.141.

[41.] George. A. (2003). *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*. p.129.

[42.] Some of the most famous of these salons included Riad Seif's National Dialogue Forum, the Jamal Al Atassi Forum and Al Kawakibi Forum.

[43.] Individuals and groups who may be referred to loosely as Syria's oppositional intelligentsia.

[44.] George, A. (2003). p. 35.

[45.] All of these initiatives were essentially demanding an end to the state of emergency, an amnesty for all political prisoners and a return of those in exile, the establishment of a state of law which would include such things as political and intellectual pluralism, freedom of the press, expression and assembly and the liberation of public life.

[46.] Rabil, R. (October 2003). *Reform in Syria? Prospects and Assessments.* The National Interest.

[47.] Sawah, W. (December 2009). *The Dialectic Relationship between the Political and the Civil in Syrian Civil Society Movement.* Arab Reform Initiative.

[48.] George. A. (2003). *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*. p. 33-34.

[49.] Kamal Labwani is a doctor and artist and a prominent member of the Syrian opposition movement.

[50.] Joe Pace, interview with Kamal al-Labwani, posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Sept. 2, 2005.

[51.] Syria's first lady, Asma Al Assad was one of the main patrons of this organisation.

[52.] Star, S. (3 March 2010). *Syrian Civil Society Empowerment 2010: New Directions for Syrian Society.* Syria Forward Magazine, Issue 37.

[53.] Al-Om, T. (2015). *Syria's Arab Spring: Women and the Struggle to Live in Truth*. Chapter in Routledge Handbook on the Arab Spring. Sadiki, L. (ed). Routledge, UK.

[54.] Landis, J. Quoted in *Syria: A Kingdom of Silence*. (9 February, 2011). Al Jazeera English Online.

[55.] Kaldor, M.(2003). *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War.* Polity Press.

[56.] Al-Aous, Y. (April 2013). *Feminist Websites and Civil Society Experience*. Chapter in Syrian Voices from Pre-Revolution Syria: Civil Society against All Odds. Kawakibi, S. (ed). Knowledge Programme Civil society in West Asia, Hivos, People Unlimited. Netherlands.

[57.] Hinnebusch, A. (1993) *State and Civil Society in Syria*. Middle East Journal, Vol 47, No. 2. Pp. 243-257.

[58.] Although, there are exceptions to this, including the role of Riad Seif who is a prominent oppositional figure, held post within parliament and was also a prominent businessman who inevitably benefited from the opening up of Syria's economic realm.

[59.] In fact, a number of those within this business centred civil society have remained supporters of Assad throughout the uprising.

[60.] Ghalyun, B. (1992). p. 744-745. Cited in Browers, M. (2006). p. 111.

[61.] Nasser, R. et. al. (2013). Socio-Economic Roots and Causes of the Syrian Uprising. Syrian Centre for Policy Research. And Yassin Al Haj Saleh in a number of interviews available online, including: Syria is a Unique Symbol of Injustice,

Apathy and Amnesia. (January 2016). And Yassin-Kassab, R & Al-Shami, L. (2016). Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War. Pluto Press, UK.

62. Abbas, H. Between the Cultures of Sectarianism and Citizenship. in Halasa, M. (2014) p. 56.

63. See the following articles for more information on the absence of NVM in discourse: Al-Om, T. (7 June 2014). Don't Ignore Syria's Non-Violent Movements. The Guardian Online. Qayyum, M. (24 March 2014). Syrian Non-Violent Movements Do Exist. Huff Post Politics. Khalek, R. (9 September 2013). Syria's Nonviolent Resistance is Dying to be Heard. Al Jazeera America.

64. This mapping can be viewed at http://www.alharak.org/nonviolence_map/en/

65. Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014). *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014.* Badael Project / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

66. Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.104.

67. Ibid.

68. Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

69. Alassad, O. Popular Collision. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p 113.

70. Syrian Creativity: Radio SouriaLi Broadcasts Over the Internet. (7.June.2013). Syria Untold. http://www.syriauntold.com/en/2013/06/syrian-creativity-radio-souriali-broadcasts-over-the-internet/

71. The publication is still operating online today.

72. The Grapes of My Country: Syrian Journalism Baptized in Blood. (6. November. 2013). Syrian Untold. http://www.syriauntold.com/en/2013/11/the-grapes-of-my-country-syrian-journalism-baptized-in-blood/

73. Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

74. Ibid.

75. The use of satellite phones became popular during these periods of blackout.

76. There is a vast array of examples of the creative undertakings of those within the NVMs that deserve to be explored, however only a few will be mentioned. My selection is by no means a sign of their importance over others, just ones that have stood out in my mind. The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution provides an exhaustive selection of examples of the creative expressions of those within the Syrian uprising accessible at: http://www.creativememory.org/?lang=en

77. It was the detainment, torture and murder of the young boys in Dar'aa for their scrawling of slogans taken from the Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrations that lead to protests across the country. As such with the drawing of graffiti and its subsequent consequences being the ember that set alight to the people's uprising graffiti has become a significant element of artistic expression within Syria.

78. Stencilling Martyrs. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.285.

79. Walls of Saraqeb: The Vitality of Colors in War-weary Syria. (28. February. 2015). Syria Untold. http://www.syriauntold.com/en/creative/walls-saraqeb-vitality-colors-war-weary-syria/

80. Save the Rest: Campaigning Inside Assad's Stronghold. (5. February. 2015). Syria Untold. http://www.syriauntold.com/en/event/save-rest-campaigning-inside-assads-stronghold/

[81.] According to Khalaf et. al. one of the main challenges for establishing these alternative institutions and organisations is a "lack [of] a solid basis on which to build," especially for those within the secular organisations that were rarely allowed to function under the regime. As mentioned previously, religious charitable organisations were often given some level of approval to undertake their activities and as such have established relationships with which they can continue to work. Those attempting to establish the secular organisations on the other hand are having to build these institutions from the very foundations.

[82.]

[83.] Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

[84.] Although this is becoming increasing difficult with the spread and domination extremist groups, particularly ISIS.

[85.] Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

86. Nonviolence in Syria. (October 2013). Peace News. http://peacenews.info/node/7373/nonviolence-syria

[87.] The global growth in practical activism (or at least an interest in it) is also evident with the large increase in translations of Gene Sharp's book From Dictatorship to Democracy from six languages prior to 2003 to twenty two by 2008 and over 30 by 2012.

[88.] Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.106.

89. Syria's Legal Fight amid the Gunfire. (3. March. 2013). Garden Court. https://gclaw.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/syrias-legal-fight-amid-the-gunfire/

90. Syria's Legal Fight amid the Gunfire. (3. March. 2013). Garden Court. https://gclaw.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/syrias-legal-fight-amid-the-gunfire/

[91.] Since their emergence 84 volunteers have lost their lives in the process, according to their website.

92. White Helmets, Syrian Civil Defence. Twitter Page. https://twitter.com/syriacivildef

93. White Helmets Website. https://www.whitehelmets.org/

[94.] Ibid.

[95.] Banners in the Colour of the Euphrates. Kartoneh. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.62.

[96.] The Art of Persuasion. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014) p.75.

[97.] Omareen, Z. The Symbol and Counter-Symbol in Syria. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.101.

[98.] Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

[99.] Ibid.

[100.] Ibid.

[101.] Cooke. M. (2007). *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official*. Duke University Press. p. 35.

[102.] Ibid. p.9.

[103.] Joe Pace, interview with Kamal al-Labwani, posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Sept. 2, 2005.

[104.] Sadowski, Y. (1997). *The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate*. p. 7. In *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*. Eds. Beinin, J. & Stork, J. I.B Tauris, London, UK.

[105.] The Arabic acronym and derogatory term used to refer to ISIS.

[106.] For a detailed discussion of the struggles faced by civil society organisation such as the Local Councils see the work undertaken by Khalaf, R. in Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building During Conflict. Syria Studies, Vol 7, No.3.(2015).

[107.] Omareen, Z. The Symbol and Counter-Symbol in Syria. Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.101.

[108.] Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.vii

[109.] Gorman, D. From the Outside Looking In. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.232.

[110.] Matar, M. Cartoons by Kafranbel. Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.102.

[111.] Abbas, H. Between the Cultures of Sectarianism and Citizenship. in Halasa, M. et.al. (2014). p.54-55.

[112.] Ibid. p.55.

[113.] Ibid. p. 56.

[114.] Hinnebusch, R. *State and Civil Society in Syria*. Middle East Journal. Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 243-

[115.] Again, as I have mentioned before, while such organisations are not the problem in and of themselves, the focus on them as the sole representation of civil society is greatly problematic and damaging. As such, while such organisations have indeed been increasing in number this is not to be taken as the only symptom of an expanding and developing civil society.

[116.] McGee, T. (June 2012). *Syria: Promoting Civil Society in the Face of Civil War*. Civil Society, Human Rights, Syria.

117. Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology,* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

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4

What the West Owes Syrians: US and European Arms Sales to the Middle East 2011-2014

(2017)

Diana Bashur

While the last two years have seen heated discussions in Europe and the US about the costs of hosting Syrian and other refugees, debate is lacking about another aspect of Western countries' involvement in the region's conflicts: the extent of arms sales to the Middle East. Between 2011 and 2014 based on conservative estimates Europe earned €21 billion from the arms trade with the Middle East while it spent €19 billion on hosting approximately one million Syrian refugees. During thatsame period, the US earned at least €18 billion from weapons sales, while accepting only about 11,000 Syrian refugees.

This study aims to address, as much as data availability allows, the balance between Westerns countries' income from official weapons export to the Middle East and the cost of hosting Syrian refugees fleeing a conflict that has witnessed imbrications of most of the region's countries. Accordingly, we will assess the value of official weapons sales between arms producing countries and the Middle East between 2011 and 2014. The focus will be on trade with Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Turkey (abridged as JUQKKT), countries that have close links with the Syrian armed opposition. We then compare arms sales revenues with the cost of hosting Syrian refugees seeking protection in arms-exporting countries[2] while taking note that comparing earnings from thearms trade with the costs of hosting refugees does not addressor assume away the immorality of weapons sales. We grouped weapons manufacturers and transfer countries under the 'Friends of Syria' banner – in reference to the group formed in 2012 by former

French President Nicolas Sarkozy composed of France, UK, US, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the rest under Eastern Europe. We assess JUQKKT's entire weapons purchases consisting in both the build up of their national militaries as well their weapons imports intended for delivery to the war in Syria. In our view, itis as important to consider the replenishment of JUQKKT's national arsenals, which are key to the repressive regimes contributing to the wars and crackdown campaigns of the region. Indeed, over the 2012-2016 period, there has been an unprecedented build-up of the military arsenal of Gulf countries and Turkey with investments significantly increasing the capabilities of their armed forces.[3]

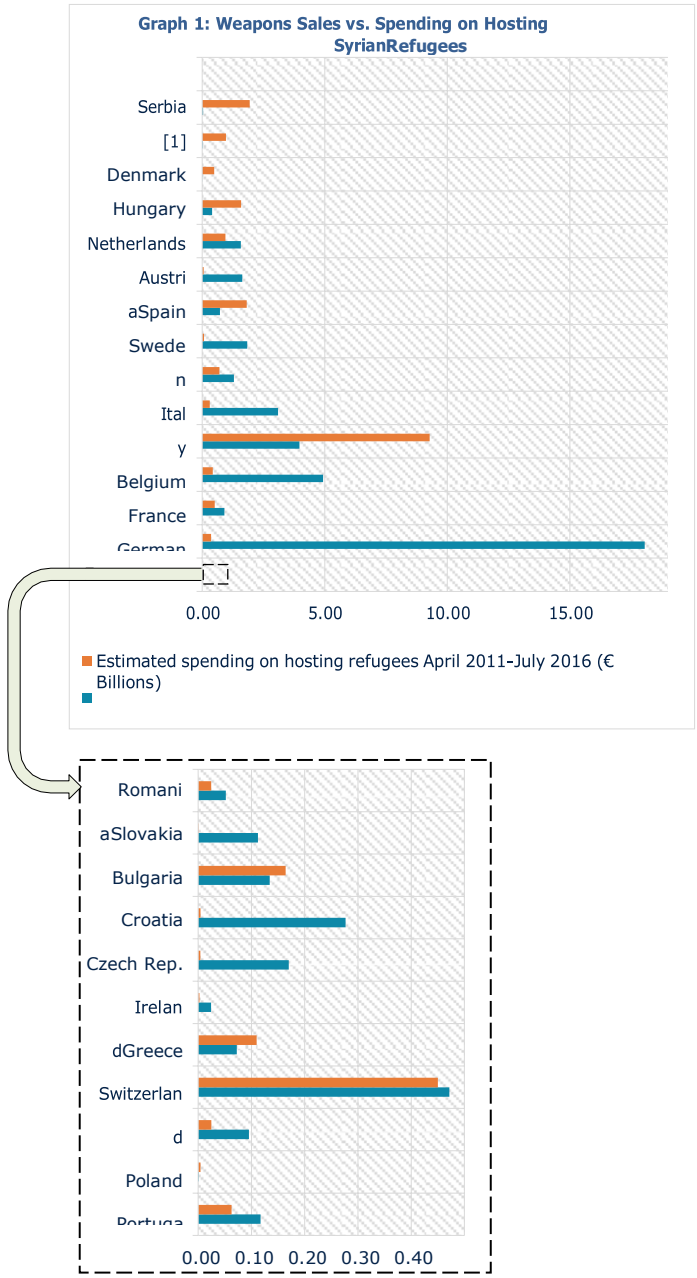
The focus on Western countries does not imply that they are the only weapons exporters to the region. However, reliabledata on arms exports from China, Russia and Iran are not readily available. Nevertheless, we do try to provide some plausible estimates based on the very limited data available.[4] While this prevents us from including these three countries in our calculations, it does not impact our main premise of the indirect but foreseeable link between Western arms transfer to the Middle East and the wave of refugees.

We based our findings on official national reports, which record approved weapons export licenses rather than actualweapons shipped to the importing country (except for the case of Canada where records reflect actual weapons exports). The difference lies in that while export licenses may be approved in a given year, delivery may only occur several years down the line due to extended production cycles of military equipment. By extension, this also indicates that, even if export licenses cease to be approved today, weapons will continue to flow to the region for years to come. Furthermore, we note that official arms sales figures are conservative estimates knowing that at least 2%[5] of the arms trade is unaccounted for and is conductedthrough behind-the-door deals. As we will also show, there is strong evidence of countries exporting to JUQKKT without it being reflected in their national records.

In calculating the cost of hosting refugees starting from April 2011[6], we assumed that governments have continued to support refugees from the

time of their asylum applications up until the end of the period under study (July 2016)[7]. Also, for countries where specific data on the cost of hosting refugees is not available, in particular East European countries, we used Spain's per capita cost as a proxy given closer costs of living in southern Europe to those in Eastern Europe.[8]

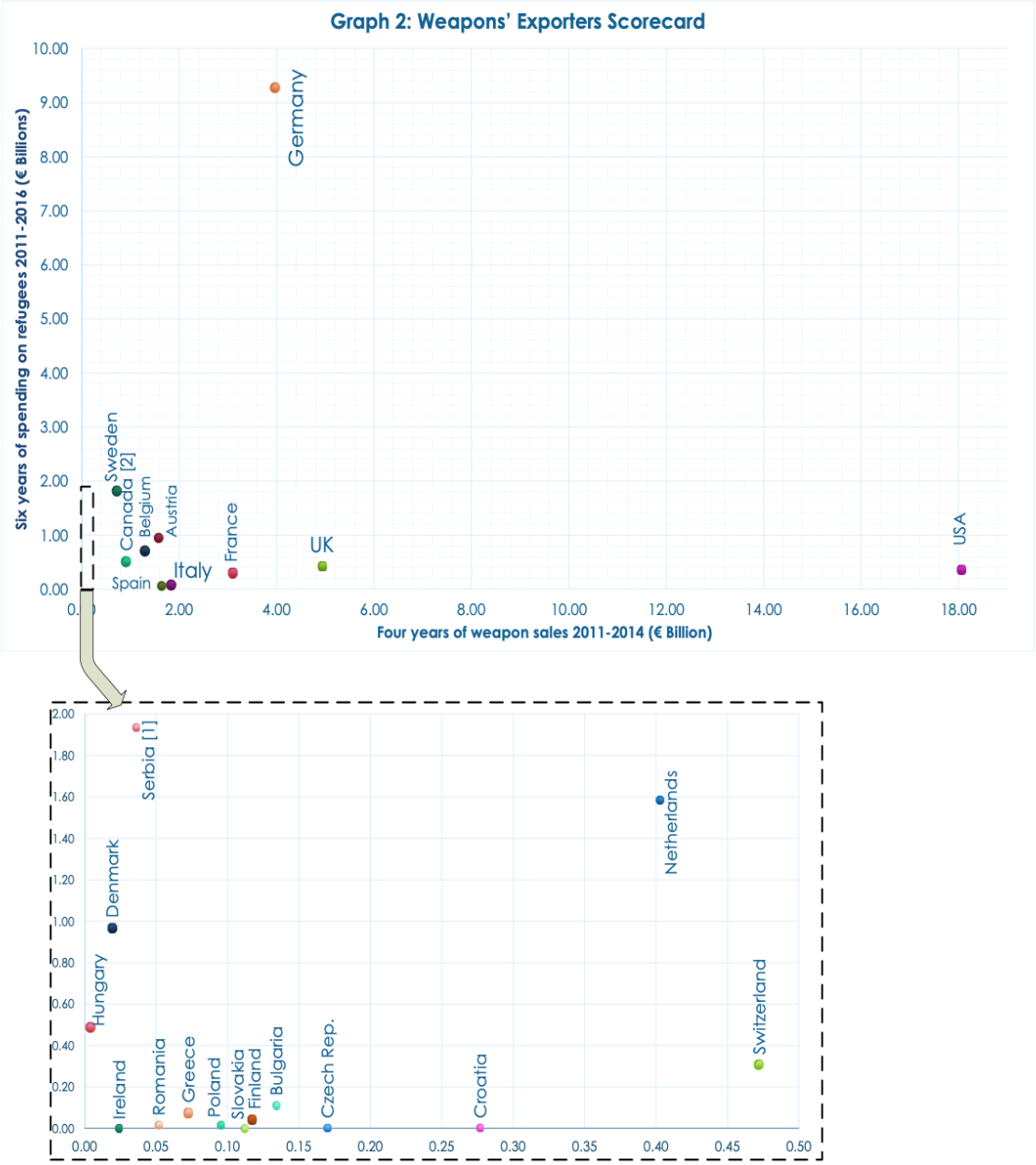
The following table, graphs and Appendices developed by the author will form the basis of our discussion.[9]


Graph 1: Weapons Sales vs. Spending on Hosting SyrianRefugees
Serbia
[1]
Denmark
Hungary
Netherlands
Austri
aSpain
Swede
n
Ital
y
Belgium
France
German
0.00
5.00
10.00
15.00
Estimated spending on hosting refugees April 2011-July 2016 (€ Billions)
Romani
aSlovakia
Bulgaria
Croatia
Czech Rep.
Irelan
dGreece
Switzerlan
d
Poland
Portuga
0.00 0.10 0.20 0.30 0.40

Country	**Number of Refugees**	**Income from Weapons 2011-2014 (€ Billions)**	**Ratio of Income from Weapons vs Cost of Hosting Refugees**	**Ratio including 2015-2016 RRPs** cf. Footnote 9
Slovakia	64	0.11	283.56x	81.88x
Croatia	448	0.28	100.22x	100.22x
Czech Rep.	417	0.17	66.07x	39.55x
USA	11,883	18.05	49.58x	8.29x
Spain	9,562	1.64	27.81x	22.08x
Italy	3,291	1.83	24.10x	19.05x
UK	9,897	4.93	11.52x	4.87x
France	12,142	3.09	10.03x	7.83x
Poland	787	0.10	5.72x	5.72x
Finland	1,752	0.12	2.74x	1.56x
Belgium	16,384	1.30	1.84x	1.65x
Canada [2]	25,000	0.91	1.78x	1.24x
Austria	40,949	1.58	1.66x	1.62x
Switzerland	13,282	0.47	1.54x	1.32x
Bulgaria	18,167	0.13	1.20x	1.19x
Greece	12,138	0.07	0.97x	0.97x
Germany	401,018	3.97	0.43x	0.38x
Sweden	109,044	0.72	0.40x	0.40x
Netherlands	32,289	0.40	0.25x	0.22x
Denmark	19,738	0.02	0.02x	0.02x
Serbia [1]	314,327	0.04	0.02x	0.02x
Hungary	79,116	0.00	0.01x	0.01x

Table 1: Country Ranking

Ranking of countries in terms of ratio of income from the arms trade vs. spending on refugees. Countries included in this table are those with more than €100 million in weapons exports or with more than 10,000 asylum seekers. Most countries earned several times more from the sales of weapons than they spent on refugees: the highest profits go to Slovakia which made 283 times more, while the US earned 50 times more and Spain 28 times more. Greece broke even and others such as Sweden, Slovenia and Portugal spent slightly more on refugees.[10]



Based on our calculations, since 2011, Europe, the US and Canada have spent around €20.1 billion to host approximately one million Syrian refugees over five years. At the same time, Western arms manufacturers are benefitting from an increase inmilitary equipment supplied to the

Middle East, a considerable number of which has ended up in the war in Syria. Comments by UNHCR's Europe Director are quite telling: the weapons industry "kills and creates refugees"[11].

Friends of Syria: Traditional proponents of the weapons industry

The primary source of weapons to the Middle East remains by far the United States, which has historically at best mis-assessed the consequences of its foreign policy across the region. Leading European democracies are second to the US in arms trade to the region (until 2014) and are quick to entertain the largest Middle Eastern arms purchasers. Looking closer at governments' policy in terms of the arms trade, it seems that international law and national regulations become malleable.

With the onset of the 'Arab Spring', Western governments and think tanks were enthusiastic about the prospects of democratization in the Middle East. Nevertheless, one year after the 'Arab Spring', EU and US licensed arms sales to the region increased by 22%[12] and 300%[13] respectively.[14] Several Gulf regimes, troubled by the tide sweeping the region, launched a counter-revolutionary campaign. The West played right into this campaign through, among other ways, the supply of military equipment. Arms imports by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait increased respectively by 212%, 245% and 174% between the periods of 2007-2011 and 2012-2016; UAE's purchases increased by 63% with continuous high levels of imports since 2001.[15] The war in Syria represents an extension of this trend: since the start of the conflict, Western-made weapons have been transferred to various Syrian opposition groups fighting the Syrian regime as well as each other.[1]

The Obama administration's involvement in the Syrian war has been criticized for being 'hands off'. At the same time, official involvement includes direct delivery of non-lethal weapons to rebel groups. Evidence indicates that Washington also seems to relinquish the transfer of lethal equipment to its Arab allies, yet tacitly approves Syria as final destination.[17] Evidently, US manufactured TOW missiles,[18] previously sold to Saudi Arabia and Turkey, frequently appear in videos shot by Syrian rebels. We would thus argue that America's imbrication in the war is rather substantial: in February 2017, the Financial Times reports[19] of a

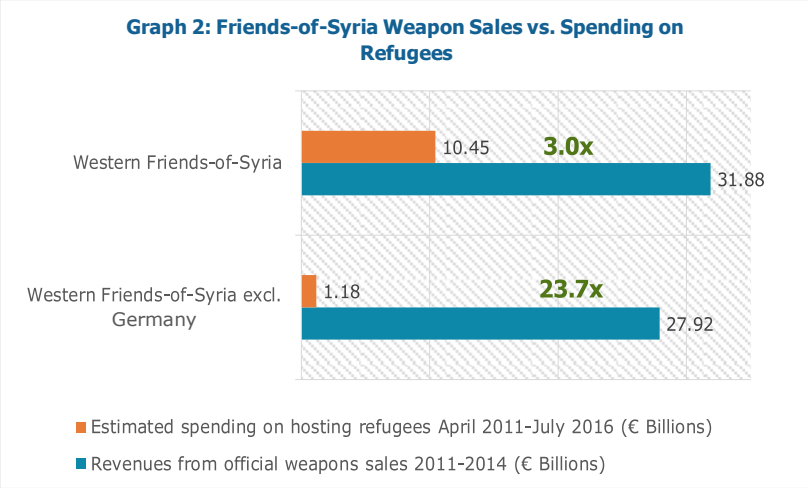
Syrian rebel commander who was on the one hand coordinating weapons transfers and salary payments to the Free Syrian Army (a loosely defined group) in Syria while also acting as a CIA informant. The commander explains that regular planning meetings with US and other representatives were held at the covert operations room in Turkey known as Müşterek Operasyon Merkezi, modeled after the one in Jordan. There, commanders "regularly inflated their forces' numbers to pocket extra salaries, and some jacked up weaponsrequests to hoard or sell on the black market. Inevitably, much of that ended up in ISIS hands. Other groups cut in Jabhat alNusra on deals to keep it from attacking them." According to the now unemployed commander, the CIA and everyone else was aware of such practices, which were "the price of doing business."[20]

Furthermore, one of the latest revelation of US contribution in sustaining the war comes in the form of a leaked audio recording[21] of former Secretary of State John Kerry who acknowledged "putting an extraordinary amount of arms in [rebel hands]" before noting that the US could send even more weapons but that it could be destructive for the armed opposition as it would drive "everyone [to up] the ante". In addition, the war has benefited US weapons industry: at an annual conference, Lockheed Martin's Executive Vice President Bruce Tanner is recorded[22] explaining the benefit from the war in Syria where he highlights the 'unexpected' upsurge in demand for support of the F-22 Raptor aircraft and other products in follow-up to the shooting down of the Russian aircraft by the Turkish air force. He added that Lockheed Martin, through its equipment, aims to heed the consequent increase in danger for US over-flights of Syrian territory. He also underscored that thecompany's increase in earnings is due to UAE's and Saudi Arabia's involvement in the war in Yemen.

Along the same lines, reports surfaced in 2012 that Syrian rebel groups[23] used Swiss-made hand grenades initially sold to the United Arab Emirates. As a result, Bern decreased its arms exports to UAE from €132 million in 2012 to €10 million the following year, yet increased it again to €14 million in 2014. Weapons produced in Belgium were also transported[24] to the various warring factions in Syria. Switzerland, which

prides itself in being a harbinger of peace, earned between 2011 and 2014 from weapons sales to the region 1.5 times what it spent on hosting 13,000 Syrian refugees. Similarly, while Belgium's revenues from arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE amounted to €1.18 billion, it spent €0.71 billion on hosting 16,000 Syrian refugees. For other arm producing countries, these ratios are astoundingly higher as will be shown below.

We note here that the EU implemented an arms embargoas well as other restrictive measures on Syria from May 2011to May 2013, with several amendments and extensions[25]. Its aim was mainly to prevent the export of equipment used in the violent repression by government forces while allowing thesupply of non-lethal equipment to the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces. The European Council declared in May 2013 it would review its position before 1 August 2013, which however never took place. We note that this arms embargo was quite lax in nature, as it has been continuously breached. Based on an interview with the formerHead of the European Union Delegation to Syria from 2013 to 2016[26], the EU decision not to reconvene on the subject points to a tacit policy of consent on the status quo of weapons deliveries to the Syrian National Coalition and their armed affiliates on the ground. Also, according to the former official, the embargo's two-year timeframe at the time of adoption was set based on the misguided perception of the imminent fall of Bashar Al-Asad.



Based on our findings, 'Friends of Syria' earned €31.88 billions in

weapons sales to JUQKKT and spent €10.45 billionson hosting Syrian refugees. Discounting Germany's numbers, the US, France, UK, and Italy made €27.92 billion in sales versus €1.18 billion spent on refugees, i.e. they earned 23 times more from weapons sales.

Western European and US officials defend weapons sales on various grounds. For the German Chancellor, the market is strategic: the Merkel Doctrine[27] defends the export of weapons as an *essential instrument for peacekeeping* in countries where Germany is not directly active but has vested interests. Accordingly, the Chancellor calls for sustained arms deliveries in order for partners to carry out common objectives. This includeda 2011 deal, unthinkable under previous governments[28], selling 270 modern tanks to Saudi Arabia, with tacit Israeli approval. Furthermore, German commentators may worry that were Germany to refrain from exporting weapons, other counties will not hesitate to. German journalist Jürgen Grässlin argues[29] however that the opposite is in fact true: when the Dutch parliament refused to export used Leopard tanks to Indonesia,Germany jumped in and approved the same deal. In the meantime, German opposition groups have called for a blanket ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia over its human rights violations. This drove the Chancellor and Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel to "critically review" arms sales to Riyadh and decided in 2015[30] to focus exports to Saudi Arabia on "defensive" militarygear, including all-terrain armored vehicles, aerial refuelingsystems, combat jet parts, patrol boats, and drones. Still, German exports to Saudi Arabia increased[31] from €179 million to €484 million in the first half of 2016. While Germany has been applauded for taking in the majority of Europe's Syrian refugees (about 400,000), it should be pointed out that Germany's weapons industry has and continues to profit from conflicts in the Middle East prolonged by arms exports. One could argue that Germany's perceived generosity in hosting refugees comesat a high cost to Syrians.

Other arguments for military exports advance *threats to the domestic labor market* in case of implementing restrictions on the weapons industry. As such, not only industry-affiliated think-tanks but also mainstream media explicitly endorse the sale of weapons: long-time CNN news anchor, Wolf Blitzer[32] expressed concern about the

possibility of halting sales to Saudi Arabia. In his view, the consequent risk of job losses across US defense contractors by far outweighs the moral argument ofsupporting Saudi war crimes in Yemen. Beyond the moral aspect, Wolf Blitzer overrates the industry's job creation potential. In many countries in fact, the arms industry is a dying sector in need of government subsidies: in Germany, the industry employs 100,000 people while the renewable energy sector, where skills could be transferred, is currently creating 300,000[33] jobs yearly. In the case of the US, allocating nationalspending to the clean energy, health or education sectors would create between 50 to 140%[34] more jobs than spending it on the military. Other officials counter-intuitively advocate for Westernweapons sales based on *humanitarian grounds*. UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said[35] that were the UK to stop supplying Saudi Arabia, "other Western countries […] would happily supply arms with nothing like the same compunctions or criteria or respect for humanitarian law [as the UK]". Some UK ministers have also said that Saudi Arabia, which has cleared its own military from any violations in the war in Yemen, is best placed to investigate its own alleged war crimes with BorisJohnson adding "the Saudi government has approached thismatter with great seriousness[36], and the seriousness it deserves". Moreover, the UK's former business secretary Vince Cable recently said he was mislead[37] by the Ministry of Defense in signing off on the sale of laser-guided Paveway IV missiles to be used in Saudi Arabia's bombing of Yemen. Cable initially blocked the export license due to concerns for civilian deaths, yet was promised "oversight of potential targets" which the Ministry now denies.

Lastly, for some politicians, the case for weapons exportsis made on a *purely monetary* basis. Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron boasted[38] of his efforts to help sell "brilliant things" such as Eurofighter Typhoons to Saudi Arabia, on the same day the European Parliament voted for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia over its bombardment of Yemen. His successor, Theresa May carried over a position in defense of weaponsexports and said that London's close relationship with Riyadh played a vital role in the fight against terrorism and that the Saudi regime's co-operation was "helping keep people on the streets of Britain safe."[39] Ironically, politicians who are themost candid about using the threat of refugees as a scaremongering tactic are also the most ardent

defenders of the weapons industry: UKIP's Nigel Farage is a case in point.

In the case of France, ties with Saudi Arabia seem at an alltime high[40] with President Hollande awarding Crown Prince Mohammed ben Nayef the Légion d'Honneur for Riyadh's efforts 'fighting terrorism and extremism'. With over €3 billion in sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey, France[41] has spent ten times less (€0.31 billion) on hosting approximately 12,000 Syrian refugees. For Italy, Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, propones exempting defense equipment manufacturers from paying VAT[42] and allowing the industry to apply for EU research grants. Italy made an astounding 24 ratio in arms sales compared to its spending on 3,300 Syrian refugees.

The majority of Western leaders in countries with powerful military industries defend their weapons manufacturing companies. They seem to however disregard any correlation of their national arms exports with refugees fleeing conflicts. Rather, for the most part, they express a varying range of contempt, disdain, or increasingly, xenophobia towards the waves of people seeking refuge. In countries welcoming asylum seekers, refugees are expected to assume the mantel of indebtedness towards their hosts, despite the fact that they are asylees by necessity and in part as a consequence of their hosts' economic gains.

New kids on the block: Revival of E. Europe's weapons industry

Through the recent boost in arms trade to the Middle East, EastEuropean countries have opened the doors to weapons stock from former Yugoslavia and have revived their domesticweapons industries. At the same time, refugees on their soil aretreated with considerable levels of discrimination.

An investigation[43] published in July 2016 by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and the OrganizedCrime and Corruption Reporting Project indicates that eight East Europeans countries (Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, CzechRepublic, Montenegro, Slovakia, Serbia and Romania) havesince 2012 approved weapons and ammunition exports in

valueof just under €1.2 billion to Saudi Arabia (€806m), Jordan(€155m), UAE (€135m) and Turkey (€87m).

As indicated by the investigation, Saudi Arabia, the largestpurchaser of these deals, does not count East Europeans countries as a traditional source for the replenishment of its military arsenal – it rather opts for more modern US equipment[44] such as the Abram battle tank. Yet, since 2012, there is a surge of arms exports from Eastern Europe to Riyadh, which arguably isnot intended for the country's national forces. In fact, the BIRN report indicates that these East European exports, mainly destined for Syria, are distributed by Saudi Arabia to its regional allies, Jordan and Turkey[45] who steer two command hubs transferring the weapons by road or through airdrops into Syria. Gradually, ex-Yugoslav-made weapons started appearing[46] in the hands of a plethora of armed groups around Syria's battlefields. This has been documented by Eliot Higgins, an investigative journalist and researcher specializing in open-source investigations, writing under the name of Brown Moses[47], who has mapped the weapons' spread throughout the conflict.

Accordingly, Belgrade, Zagreb, Bratislava and Sofia have become main export hubs to the Middle East. Specifically, in 2015 Serbia agreed to €135 million of arms[48] export licenses to Saudi Arabia. Back in 2013, Serbia had rejected similar requests for fear weapons would be diverted to Syria; these were worth $22 million based on Serbia's national reports.[49] Also in 2013, the Serbian government denied four arms and military equipment import applications from the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Belarus, and the Czech Republic. These import worth $9.9 million were intended for re-sales (in the form of exports) to Saudi Arabia.[50]At a press conference in August 2016 following the BIRN investigation, Serbian Prime Minister AleksandarVucic said that, while he was defense minister in 2013, he "probably received" intelligence that arms could end up in Syria. "Do not ask me what has changed. In 2015, I was not defense minister and I can't know [what happened]. I will take a look," he said. Vucic was candid about the benefit of the arms trade and said at the 2016 press conference: "I adore it whenwe export arms because it is a pure influx of foreign currency."

Serbia's involvement in the seemingly lucrative production and transfer of weapons to the Middle East is also attracting new partnerships[51]: in 2013 UAE invested $33 million inthe first phase of a joint development project of the Advanced Light Attack System missile system, one of the most modern land forces. The project will consist of a total of $220 million invested over a period of four years. Moreover, and as an additional point of interest regarding the indirect forces at play in the Syrian theater, a Serbian-owned consortium,[52] CPR Impex, one of the region's most important arms brokers,[53] and Israel's ATL Atlantic Technology bought Montenegro Defence Industry (MDI) in February 2015. Since August 2015, MDI arrangedexport deals of 250 tons of ammunition and 10,000 anti-tank systems to Saudi Arabia in value of over €2.7 million. At the time of writing, MDI is under investigation by Montenegro's special prosecution for organised crime and corruption over it'salleged arms trading with Libya, Ukraine and Saudi Arabia, and the credibility of the end-user certificates, especially with countries under an international arms embargo.[54] We note that prior to 2015 and since 2006[55] (availability of reports), Montenegro had not conducted any significant arms trade with the Middle East except for Israel, where the end user country was stated to be Afghanistan, Iraq or USA, and with Yemen in2010. We also highlight here that the recent rapprochement between Serbia and the UAE has been achieved thanks in part to the close involvement of Mohammed Dahlan,[56] a former Palestinian official close to UAE's top leadership, who facilitated the arms trade between both countries. In 2015 Mohammed Dahlan and his family (as well as his political connections and business partners) were awarded Serbian citizenship as a "sign of gratitude for" the rapprochement with UAE. Dahlan and his wife were also awarded Montenegrin citizenship in 2010.[57]

In Bratislava, public broadcaster Slovak Radio and Television reported that in 2015 Slovakia exported to Saudi Arabia 40,000 assault rifles, more than 1,000 mortars, 14 rocket launchers, almost 500 heavy machine guns and more than 1,500 RPGs. The Prime Minister defended the arms deal noting"if we don't sell [arms], somebody else will, but don't come crying to me if a lack of arms deals causes the loss of jobs for our people."[58] Slovakia welcomed 64 Syrian refugees costing Bratislava

€400 thousands, translating into a 284 ratio of weapons sales to cost of hosting refugees.

For Croatia, data indicates that in 2013 and 2014 Zagreb sold over €155 million in ammunition to Saudi Arabia and €115 million to Jordan.[59] We note that such deals do not follow regular trade patterns as, specifically for Jordan and based on official reports, there is little history of weapon exports between Zagreb and Amman: previous arms deals consisted of fifteen pistols worth USD $1053 sold to Jordan in 2001. More recently, the OCCRP reports that in December 2012 alone, exports to Jordan amounted to over USD$6.5 millions.[60] TheNew York Times also reported 36 round-trip flights conducted between Amman and Zagreb from December 2012 throughFebruary 2013 where Jordanian cargo aircrafts airlifted a large Saudi purchase of infantry arms from Zagreb to Amman.[61] As Croatia's national reports do not indicate any exports to Jordan in 2012 one can safely assume the existence of under-the-table deals, which go unreported. A considerable amount of Croatian-made weapons has been documented in the hands of rebel groups such as the Al-Nusra affiliated Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement. More recently Elliot Higgings confirmed that both ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra are using Croatian-made weapons, although "how they acquired them is unclear. They could have been looted from other groups, sold between groups, or provided directly."[62]

As for Bulgaria, the largest state-run arms producer, VMZSopot has also hit the jackpot: after being insolvent in 2008, theplant has been working at full capacity since 2015.[63] It paid off around €11 million in debt and has created 1,200 new jobs. Furthermore, sales growth went from around €19 million in the first half of 2015 to around €86 million in the first half of 2016.VMZ Sopot's net profit surged to around €600,000 from a net loss of €35 million in the same period. While Bulgaria took in 18,000 Syrian refugees, a 2015 report by the German Pro Asyl foundation entitled "Humiliated, ill-treated and without protection" provides shocking accounts from asylum seekers in Bulgaria.[64] Refugees are subject to inhumane and degrading treatment by police and prison guards including extortion, abuse as well as torture.

Based on reports by Balkan Insight, Bulgaria's government issued export permits for munitions and military equipment sales worth €85.5 million to Saudi Arabia in 2014 — including ammunition worth €65.4 million, large caliber weapons valued at €12.5 million and small calibre weapons (€5 million).[65] According to Ben Moores, a senior analyst at defence consultancy IHS Janes, such type of weapons were "very unlikely to be used by the Saudi military" but are very heavily used in Yemen, Iraq and in Syria. The director of the Britishbased consultancy group Armament Research Services also confirmed this in pointing to "notable quantities of arms and munitions produced in Bulgaria […being] documented in Syria."

As is the case with Croatia, Saudi Arabia has not been a major customer for Bulgarian weapons until 2014. Accordingto a former Bulgarian military officer, the flights between Sofia and Tabuk, Saudi Arabia transported Bulgarian weapons, which were shipped by land to a distribution center in Jordan for Syrian opposition forces. In a BBC interview in late October 2015, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir openly acknowledged his country's supply of arms to Syrian opposition fighters aimed at "[contributing] to changing the balanceof the power on the ground." Furthermore, Bulgaria was considerably involved in the US "Train and Equip" program intended to ready Syrian rebels whom Washington vetted as "moderate" for battles against the Syrian regime and ISIS. The US Special Operations Command, in charge of the US military support to Syrian rebels contracted a Bulgarian based company for over €24.6 million in December 2014 to supply foreign weapons and ammunition.

Through indirect transfer of considerable weapons quantities to rebel factions, East European countries have acquired an unexpected but important role in the war in Syria, one drivenby monetary benefits. Nonetheless, East European countries arequick to encourage and push Syrian refugees towards continental Europe while accepting a symbolic number of asylum seekers. We note that this block of countries does not hold known political or strategic interests in the Middle East, neither now orin the past when they have been historically absent from the region's major conflicts.

With regards to Russia, Moscow has historically been a major weapons supplier to the Syrian government – despite limited availability of data – we know that at least 10% of its arms exports went to Syria. "Russia reportedly has $1.5 billion worth of ongoing arms contracts with Syria for various missile systems and upgrades to tanks and aircraft, reportedly doublingthat investment in small arms sales since the beginning of the Syrian civil war". Furthermore, military training provided by Russia since the beginning of the conflict ought to also bequantified. Despite the very direct role Russia has played in theSyrian war, the country has currently only accepted 1,395 Syrian refugees on temporary asylum and has even deported one Syrian refugee.[66] Still, Russia's armed forces benefited fromthe war in Syria: in his February 2017 speech at the Lower House of Parliament, the Russian defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, reported that 162 samples of modernized armament have been tested during the war in Syria, including new jets Su-30SM and Su-34 as well as Mi-28N and Ka-52 helicopters.[67] Syria also has been the testing ground for high-precision munitions, sea-based cruise missiles, used for the first time in combat. Furthermore, the defense minister noted that close toall of the flight personnel of the Russian Aerospace Forces, 86% of them, including 75% of the crews of long-range aviation, 79% of tactical aviation, 88% of military transport and 89% of army aviation, have received combat experience in Syria.

Cases of one-time weapons exporters & regular component suppliers

In the previous sections we have highlighted how Middle Eastern countries have purchased record high amounts of weapons from traditional and non-traditional arms manufacturer and directed considerable amounts of those to their allies in Syria. In this section, we will aim to provide a brief overview of some covert transfers and flows of weapons into Syria. Such an overview will be non-exhaustive by definition given the underground nature of and limited availability of sources on the subject. We note that such transfers are not accounted for in national export figures and form a significant part of the illicit weapons trade sustaining the war in Syria. This further underscores the premise of the conservative estimate of nationalarms trade figures, which we relied

upon for our study.

Transfers by third party states under civil strife

There is evidence of weapons transfer from countries with ongoing conflict where government authority is limited and exports controls are lackluster. As such, Libyan missiles, looted during the 2011 upheaval were reportedly bound for Syria through Lebanon: according to an investigation by the UNPanel of Experts on Libya, Lebanese authorities seized on 27 April 2012 a shipment of various arms and ammunition on board the Letfallah II cargo ship near the port of Tripoli, Lebanon. The Panel concluded that Belgian-made FN Herstal FAL rifles found on the ship are "likely to be part of materiel deliveries made by Qatar during the uprising [in Libya]" which had "since been illicitly transferred out of Libya, including towards other conflict zones". According to the Panel, these rifles were loaded with a type of Pakistani ammunition that had been previously supplied by Qatar to Libya and had also been found on board the Letfallah II. Knowing that Syria did not purchase Belgian FN Herstal FAL rifles after 1969, the use of post-1969 models by the Syrian armed opposition groups and ISIS fighters suggests they may have come from an external source.[68]

Similarly, according to a 2014 study conducted by the Small Arms Survey on the proliferation of Man Portable Air Defence Systems in Syria[69], some MANPADS in rebel hands were smuggled into Syria, including Chinese FN-6 systems not known to be exported to the Syrian government. Sudan was identified as a possible source of such missiles, which were reportedly purchased by Qatar and shipped through Turkey. Sudan is in fact among a handful of known importers of FN-6 MANPADS and in view of the widespread proliferation of Sudanese weapons and ammunition among armed groups. Similarly, the Conflict Armament Research (CAR) report of February 2015 documenting material seized from ISIS during the battle of Kobane between 2014-2015 provides evidence of Chinese rifles, which had their identification obliterated.[70] The same configuration of weapons had been found in South Sudan.

IED components consistently supplied to ISIS

According to Amnesty International, the majority of weapons seized by ISIS originate from looted Iraqi government stock. Still the group's large arsenal seems to originate from 25 different countries.[71] Following two years of investigation into ISIS' weapons in Iraq and Syria, Conflict Armament Research revealed in its February 2016 report that Turkey is the most important source of components used to manufacture the majority of ISIS' improvised explosive devices (IEDs).[72] These consist of chemical precursors including a mixture of aluminum and nitrate-based fertilizer such as ammonium nitrate, as well as containers, detonating cord, cables, and wires. The investigation found that such elements were manufactured by or sold through 13 Turkish companies/intermediaries before beingacquired by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. CAR notes that most of the companies involved serve the Turkish market and do not export goods to Iraq or Syria. The report also highlights the speed at which ISIS forces acquire IED materials, at times as little as one month following their lawful supply to commercial entities, which speaks to the lack of monitoring by nationalgovernments and of companies alike according to the report.[73] While the trade itself is conducted lawfully, it is the smaller commercial entities transferring the materials to groups affiliated with ISIS forces, which "appear to be the weakest links in the chain of custody." Additionally, in a related report on ISIS' weapons manufacturing in Mosul, CAR research "provides stark evidence of an extremely robust procurement network" with consistent acquisition of identical products from the same sources, "almost exclusively from the Turkish domestic market."[74]

Private individuals trading weapons

News articles abound with evidence of arms also being smuggled into Syria through private deals. Balkan Insight reported on one such case: Bulgarian weapons were reported to be trucked into Homs in August 2012 and paid for by a Syrian businessman in the amount of €1.4 million for AK-47 rifles, grenade launchers and ammunition.[75] A former Syrian opposition fighter said he was involved in 12 transfers of Bulgarian weapons as of 2013, the largest of which was worth €6.4 million. The

shipments were delivered at the Turkish-Syrian border in two trucks and were arranged by Syrian and Turkish nationals with connections to Bulgarian arms dealers.

Transfers possibly in breach of international weapons embargos

The Conflict and Armament Report of 2015 documented various Iranian cartridges, which the People's Protection Units(YPG) ceased from ISIS forces in Kobane. Most of these cartridges have been manufactured in 2006, with some as recentlyas 2013. Their presence outside Iran may indicate a violation ofUN Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006), which prohibitsIranian exports of weapons and related products to all countries.[76]

In addition to weapons transfers sanctioned by national governments in support of rebel factions in Syria, arms and component smuggling and transfer from private groups andcompanies into Syrian territory add to the plethora of entities with stakes in the war in Syria. The acknowledgment of these illicit activities by governments and halting the flow of weapons and funds sustaining the war would be the first step in containing the drain of Syrians from Syria.

A Dishonest Debate – for the most part

Weapons industries are by and large applauded for turning the wheels of the economy at home. Little scrutiny is however carried out over the consequences it is creating elsewhere in the world. In the last few years, with unprecedented quantities of weapons sold to the Middle East including those transferred to Syria, the conflict has driven millions of Syrians to seek refuge in Western countries. Aware of the consequences of weapons proliferation, European politicians may have opted for a tradeoff: making their taxpayers shoulder the short term cost of hosting refugees in exchange for profits to the arms industry. With reality of wars hitting closer to home, time may be opportune for a different debate in Western capitals.

According to the former economic adviser to the president of the

European Commission, Philippe Legrain, refugees are in fact unlikely to decrease wages or raise unemployment for native workers. Most significantly, calculations indicate that while the absorption of so many refugees will increase public debt for the EU by almost €69 billion between 2015 and 2020, during the same period refugees will help GDP grow by €126.6billion.[77] In fact, a €1 investment in welcoming refugees can yield nearly €2 in economic benefits within five years. Legrain also highlights how refugees could solve an impending demographic challenge in Europe. Along these lines, Portugal considers the refugee influx as an opportunity to revive some regions of the country.[78] Lisbon is in fact offering to welcome up to 5,800 more refugees in addition to the 4,500 it already agreed to take in as part of the European Union's refugee quota system. Portugal has 'only' sold €500,000 worth of weapons to the Middle East.

We thus deem the debate over the flows of refugees and the heavy burden on societies as flawed. Some European and North American societies unjustly blame refugees for fleeing war and seeking stability. By hosting them, they draw asylum seekers into financial and/or emotional indebtedness towards these societies. Yet these same societies, for the most part, disregard Western countries' complicity in cashing in on the wars refugees are escaping. Even more so, the question remains as to the distribution of profits from the global arms trade between national governments brokering the deals and arms manufacturers, knowing that it is the former who covers the cost of resettling refugees.[79] Rather than at refugees, anger and protest should thus be directed towards the weapons industries and the revolving doors linking them to policy makers. The latter oughtto face greater opposition to the war-profiting policies they espouse.

While this study focused on the case of Syrian refugees and the war in Syria, other conflicts in the Middle East deserve as much scrutiny. Arms sales by the US, Canada, Germany, UK and France feeding conflicts in Iraq, Yemen and Libya should also be taken into account in calculating the debt the West has towards the Iraqi, Libyan and Yemeni people. The sole reason keeping Yemenis from joining Syrian refugees in Europe and beyond is that Yemen is landlocked by Saudi Arabia on the one hand and

by a naval blockade on the other. Over 3 million Yemenis are currently internally displaced and over 14 million are food insecure.[80]

The sustained economic, political and military support of Western democracies to Arab rulers of the Middle East, ranging from the repressive, autocratic and most regressive regimes, remains the main guarantor for drawn-out wars and sustained impoverishment of the region's populations. Such continuous support trumps any inherent cultural or religious characteristics, which may be advanced as endogenous reasons for the Middle East's seeming inability for progress. Western military equipment guaranteed to the Gulf is an essential element of the Gulf-led counter-revolution aimed at repressing citizens andresidents of these countries. The concentration of national resources in the military industry and away from more productivesectors limits the advancement of these societies. Such militarization is both fueled by and feeds the region's escalatingpower interplays and contributes to the cycle of violence and subjugation, ensuring an omnipresent -or at minimumlooming threat of war. As we have outlined, there is considerable monetary return from the military aspect of such support. Still, the West and its local clients seemingly agree on the ensuing political benefits which remain as important: citizens of Gulf countries do not get to question the standing of their rulers and the unabated flow of oil to the West, while the deep-rooted support of the Palestinian cause against Israeli occupation and oppression remains subdued.

Endnotes

1 This paper is an expansion on an article by the same title, initially published on Jadaliyya.com

2 Our analysis relies on research of open-source data and includes news articles, official EU andOECD data and analysis as well as research by think tanks and NGOs dedicated to the study of the arms trade. We welcome any further information by readers, which may not be available openly to the public.

3 "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2017, p. 10

4 We note that Russia and China's main export destinations since 2011 and until 2016 are, respectively, India, Vietnam, China, and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia. The Middle East accounted for 8.1% of total Russian exports over the same period and 1.7% of China's over 2012-2016. Iran's weapons imports remained at a very low level

between 2012 and 2016 due topartial arms embargo imposed by the United Nations as well as economic pressures. The first significant import of major arms by Iran since 2007 was in 2016: Russia delivered four air defense systems, which does not fall under the UN arms embargo. "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2015" and "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", SIPRI Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2016 and 2017, http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1602.pdf and https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Trends-in-international-arms-transfers-2016.pdf

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[6] Start of UNHCR data availability on Syrian asylum seekers in Europe.

[7] Please refer to Appendix 2 for detailed calculation. We note however that countries vary in the provision of financial support to refugees. As an example, the strongest discrepancy is between the US and European countries: in the former, refugees receive government financial support for the first few months of their resettlement, while it lasts for several years in the EU once asylum is awarded.

[8] Spain's cost of €3329 for hosting one refugee for one year was thus applied to Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

[9] On the question of including Western countries' contributions to RRPs: RRPs refers to the yearly UN Regional Response Plan, which is an inter-agency plan to cover the needs of refugees fleeing Syria and people in host communities in Syria's neighbors (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt) who together took in over 4.8 million refugees. Reliable and consistent data is limited on actual RRPs disbursements (versus pledges) for all donor countries under study and for the entire 2011-2016 period. For reference, we included actual disbursements available on OCHA's Financial Tracking Service for the RRPs of 2015-2016 in Table 1. This limitation in data does not impact our analysis as our calculations aim to address the question of hosting refugees in arms exporting countries rather than in Syria's neighbor countries. While taxpayer money is the source of both (support of refugees at home and in countries around Syria), the question of financially supporting Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt for hosting Syrian refugees has not been an issue of debate in Western capitals. In this sense, this study rather aims to contribute to the Western debate over the wave of refugees at home.

[10] Notes from table: [1] Looking at UNHRC refugee figures Serbia has registered in an outstanding 300,000 asylum applications between 2011 and 2016. Belgrade's situation seems to represent a special case however as it so happens that, when neighbors such as Hungary and Croatia – located along the refugees' route to Western Europe sealed off their borders, Serbia had little choice but to accept refugees present on its territory hoping to cross the border. In comparison, according to Serbian Interior Minister Stefanovi, *"only 500 refugees requested asylum in Serbia, and 250 refugees stayed."* Yet, Amnesty International reports that the number of people apprehended crossing the Serbia-Hungary border has risen by more than 2,500% between 2010 and 2015 (from 2,370 to 60,602). This has resulted in a sharp jump in the number of asylum seekers in Serbia. As a result, the EU announced it will provide Serbia with over

€3.8 million for expanding temporary shelters and addressing waste disposal, sanitary and other needs. More recently, Serbian President Tomislav Nicolic said that Serbia is looking to host between 5,000 to 6,000 migrants (all nationalities combined), while noting that if the EU was not *"angry with Hungary for the way they treated migrants, it will not be angry with Serbia either"*. Based on these discrepancies in information, the 300,000 registered refugees figure does not seem reliable, and we choose to depict Serbia as an outlier in the study. Sources: "Serbia happy to help EU, ambivalent about refugee hub status", *Euractiv.rs*, Smiljana Vukojcic, 10 September 2015; "Fears of humanitarian crisis in Serbia as refugees stream in", *Euractiv.rs*, 31 July 2015; "Nikolić: Serbia may shut its border as well", *B92.net*, 3 October 2016.

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[69] "Fire and Forget The proliferation of Man-portable Air Defence Systems in Syria", *Small Arms Survey*, Issue Brief, Number 9, August 2014, p.9-10, Syria.pdf. We note that the study suggests that current evidence of MANPADS held by rebels in Syria is based on blurry videos on social media and unidentified sources in news articles and thus lacks systematic documentation such as serial numbers and concludes that "public knowledge of the sources and suppliers of these weapons will remain limited." Other research groups confirm stronger evidence as to the source of the equipment as will be shown.

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5

Coercive Control in Conflict: Implications for Syria

(2018)

Joanne Hopkins

> Today the phone threats start up again in the most awful way. I am terrified to be so closely monitored … a single nod makes me shut my Facebook account … less than fifteen minutes after posting a comment I get a phone call from him … all these thoughts make me an even more nervous creature. So they will not come into contact with my extreme anxiety, I steer clear of my friends …[1]

This quote is from Samar Yazbek and it describes her experience of living and working in Syria as a journalist in 2011. The actor exercising this form of coercive control is not an intimate partner, but an agency of the state. Yet this quote could be just as easily attributable to many of the descriptions given by survivors of domestic abuse of their relationships; where the abusive partners exerts power and control over the other, dictating how they might live their life, and ensuring subservience through fear. In many cases this abuse is psychological, and many victims do not see themselves as such. They either normalise this behaviour or simply do not recognise it. The violence they experience is intertwined with physical violence: isolation, degradation, mind-games, micro–regulation, monitoring and checking against an unpredictable and ever changing 'rule book.'[2] Yazbek's description fits the scenario of someone in a controlling relationship with an abusive intimate partner, where the abuse takes the form of psychological bullying, which, is recognised as within the continuum of violence of domestic abuse. In fact, it is about life in Syria.

This paper will explore how the concept of coercive control, which has been recognised in UK legislation as a criminal offence since 2015 and is currently used exclusively to describe a form of abuse within intimate partner relations, can be extended to help us understand the continuum of violence experienced by men and women in the Syrian conflict. The use of physical violence by the state in this conflict is well documented, as well as the state's systematic use of torture, imprisonment and rape. However, for post 2015 Syria, there is also a need to understand the way that the state and other ac-tors have employed a strategy of creating an atmosphere of fear alongside the physical acts of violence. This fear has formed part of the authoritarian regime's mechanism of rule for decades and has been reinforced by the violent suppression of any dissent, but since the Syrian conflict erupted it has been used by the regime as a strategy of war. This paper therefore argues that the international can learn from the local in this particular context.

The term 'coercive control' was developed by Evan Stark in his work *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women*, first published in 2007. In December 2015, it became a criminal offence in UK law. Coercive control is currently, first and foremost, a 'domestic' crime in 'domestic' legislation. But while Stark developed this concept to describe dynamics in intimate partner relationships and he himself is skeptical about its wider utility, in his own work, he talks about the concept being one of 'entrapment' and deprivation of liberty. He also compares the experience of coercive control to the experience of 'capture crimes' or of being held hostage and draws parallels with the experience of prisoners of war (POWs), both in terms of the be-haviour itself and the impact it has on the victim. So, within the existing concept as framed by its creator there are indications of synergies between the 'domestic' in a non-conflict situation and the behaviours of actors in war and the potential to stretch the definition beyond intimate partner violence. I want to explore the ways in which this can be applied to the experiences of those in the current Syrian conflict and how this concept can be used to help academics and policy makers to improve our understanding of the impact of conflict on people who are currently displaced or resettled, but also on those seeking to return to Syria in the future to rebuild the country.

I will begin by setting out my own positionality and placing this paper in the context of my ongoing research. This is followed by a discussion of Stark's definition of coercive control and the process by which it became a criminal offence in the UK. The rational for employing this concept in

the discipline of International Relations is emphasized, particularly as a way of improving our understanding of the experience of war. The discussion subsequently moves to an ex-amination of what international law says regarding 'controlling be-haviour' and the sorts of psychological violence that Stark describes and the difficulties of interpretation and enforcement. Finally, I apply this conceptual framework on the Syrian conflict to illustrate how the definition can be stretched, before bringing us back to the domestic environment to make a link between the two through the 'Reclaim the Night' movement.

My primary concern is to explore the impact of the 'fear' of sexual violence in the Syrian conflict. Here, I share the view of Stark, that by focusing on other forms of violence, we are not seeking to diminish the importance or deny the fact of physical violence. In-stead, I intend to make the case that, in both the domestic and inter-national arenas of conflict, the fear of violence is a specific psychological weapon that is being deployed by agents and alongside a range of other physical tactics. The fear thus generated in this continuum of violence is so extreme that it prevents the individual from escaping from the relationship they have with their perpetrator and therefore they are trapped. This makes the behaviour they experience a crime of entrapment or liberty. A question asked of many survivors of domestic abuse, and of those claiming asylum, is 'why did you not leave'? The point at which a person can flee from this violence, or the reason why they do not, can be entirely understood by the psychological grip they are trapped in, often unknowingly, and the culmination of years of controlling behaviour which is normalised. The point where this becomes intolerable is the point when the survivor chooses to leave; often harm against children or other parties provides the tipping point. The murder of children who had put anti Ba-shar slogans on the city walls of Daara in March 2011 is widely regarded as having acted as a similar catalyst for protest in Syria.

The importance of understanding this element of the continuum of violence, is around the impact on liberty and freedom. The generation of the fear of an act of physical violence may have the same im-pact on a victim as if the physical act did occur. The effect of this on human behaviour, movement and decisions to flee or fight, is important in understanding what has happened to people in Syria. The sociologist Liz Kelly has studied the impact of sexual violence on survivors and concluded that a victim's level of fear derives as much from her perception of what could happen based on past experience as from the

immediate threat of the perpetrator.[3] Stark similarly states that in coercive control, the idea of physical harm planted in the victims' mind can have more devastating effect than actual violence.'[4]

It also helps to explain what people would need to see happen before Syria can be reconstructed and peace built. Miriam Cooke in her 2017 book *Dancing in Damascus* describes meeting a leading Syrian intellectual:

Like all Syrians I have met….[he]…is committed to imagining a new political system that will give each individual freedom, dignity and a clear understanding of what it means to be a real citizen.[5]

Compare this to what a domestic abuse survivor says when questioned about what she wanted from her future: "A future free from fear, not having to look over my shoulder all the time, to be mentally and financially independent but most of all to stop feeling ashamed of who I am."[6] In understanding what is needed to support this ambition, there is scope to put in place the structures and strategies that allow this to be realised. What can be learnt from the domestic experience to help us to do this in a future Syria?

The objective here is to demonstrate how coercive control is used to achieve the same outcomes as physical violence in conflict: sectarian violence, displacement of certain peoples and the restoration of authoritarianism in the face of uprising. And therefore, show how the psychological violence in conflict is like coercive control in that it is part of the weaponry at the disposal of the perpetrator, whether that is a husband or a boyfriend or an agent of the state or non-state actor, the outcome is the same. They achieve domination and control. The victim does what the perpetrator intends.

My academic pursuits are only part of my 'position'. In addition to being a PhD student, I am a Senior Civil Servant in the Home Office in the UK and I have 17 years' experience of work in Immigration, Crime and Policing. Of relevance to this work, I was responsible for the UK Government's 2010 strategy to end violence against women and girls and have recently supporting the work to resettle Syrian families in the UK

as well as broader priorities around asylum support and integration. I am now Director of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Hub in Wales looking at how we support organisations to understand the impact of trauma in childhood and increase awareness of how to prevent it.

A better understanding of the different experiences of violence in war will support the development of academic research and pro-vide some challenge to existing literature about how 'psychological' violence and the provocation of an emotional response has a place in International Relations (IR). This work will also contribute to a new developing strand of research in feminist IR that considers emotion and war. By including the voices of artists, authors and poets, I hope to demonstrate the importance of their work in helping us to under-stand what it feels like to experience conflict, and to push against the perception that fiction, for example, can be a source for IR theorists to examine. I hope that my research will also support those of us working on UK government policies to better support the integration of Refugees from conflict zones, in this case Syria. It will help us to ensure the right 'domestic' services are available to those who want or need them, but also build on our improved understanding of how coercive control impacts on people in the domestic sphere to support those we seek to help be part of our society. Drawing out the parallels of what the victims and survivors experience, may help us to do so.

So, what exactly is 'Coercive Control'? According to Stark, it may be defined as follows:

an ongoing pattern of domination by which male abusive partners primarily interweave repeated physical and sexual violence with intimidation, sexual degradation, isolation and control. The primary outcome of coercive control is a condition of *entrapment* that can be hostage-like in the harms it inflicts on dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood as well as to physical and psychological integrity.[7]

An important aspect of coercive control is its gendered nature. Stark is clear that coercive control is gendered because:

it is used to secure male privilege, and its regime of domination/subordination is constructed around the enforcement of stereotypes. 'Domination' here refers to both the power/privilege exerted through coercive control in individual relations and to the political power created when men as a group use their oppressive tactics to reinforce persistent sexual inequalities in the larger society.[8]

In 2015, eight years after his work on coercive control was published, Stark was appointed as an expert advisor to the UK Government as it decided to make coercive control a criminal offence. This represented a fundamental shift in UK policy. In 2010, the publication of the strategy to end violence against women and girls in the UK was celebrated by the leading organisations which campaign for the rights of women, victims and survivors of domestic abuse, for bringing together all forms of gender-based violence in a single strategy; something they had been demanding for 30 years. Significantly, this strategy barely mentions coercive control. This situation has changed over the preceding years, and changes of government. And as the focus changed to become more criminal justice orientated, there was a move by the sector to push for a specific offence to recognise coercive control as a form of violence within the continuum of violence in the domestic space. It recognises the harm caused by coercion or control, and that the cumulative impact on the victim and a repeated pattern of abuse can be more injurious and harmful than a single incident of violence.[9] This is an important context to under-stand for this paper, as although the UK government has recognised domestic violence and all forms of violence against women and girls for many years, the criminal offence of coercive control is relatively new and somewhat controversial. The difficulty prosecutors and the police face in getting convictions for this form of violence even where there is physical evidence has brought into question whether convictions could be secured for something that is even more difficult to 'prove'. Despite this concern, however, what the offence has done is helped highlight the fact that abuse is not just a physical at-tack, and the impact of these other forms of violence are part of the whole picture of abuse. If we understand this, we can provide the right support. This is a similar situation to the international setting, where it is clearly difficult to get justice at the state level for physical acts of violence let alone psychological. Nevertheless, it can and should be done.

In December 2015, the new offence came into force in the UK. The accompanying statutory guidance provides the UK cross-government definition on which the offence is based as:

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their re-sources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.[10]

Taken on its own, without an accompanying explanation around this being in the context of 'intimate partner' violence or what we understand as the domestic setting, it seems as though that this definition could also describe the experience of those living in the shad-ow of the *shabbiha* or secret police in Syria, as described by Yazbek at the start of this paper (further explored below). The statutory guidance also sets out a set of 'behaviours' that one might expect to see demonstrated in a case of coercive control.

Types of Behaviour

The types of behaviour associated with coercion or control may or may not constitute a criminal offence in their own right. It is important to remember that the presence of controlling or coercive behaviour does not mean that no other offence has been committed or cannot be charged. However, the perpetrator may limit space for action and exhibit a story of ownership and entitlement over the victim. Such behaviours might include:

- isolating a person from their friends and family;
- depriving them of their basic needs;
- monitoring their time;
- monitoring a person via online communication tools or using spyware;
- taking control over aspects of their everyday life, such as where they can go, who they can see, what to wear and when they can sleep;
- depriving them of access to support services, such as specialist support or medical services;
- repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless;
- enforcing rules and activity which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise the victim;
- forcing the victim to take part in criminal activity such as shoplifting, neglect or abuse of children to encourage self-blame and prevent disclosure to authorities;
- financial abuse including control of finances, such as only allowing a person a punitive allowance;
- threats to hurt or kill;
- threats to a child;
- threats to reveal or publish private information (e.g. threatening to 'out' someone).
- assault;
- criminal damage (such as destruction of household goods);
- rape;
- preventing a person from having access to transport or from working

This is not an exhaustive list.

Figure 1.

Coercive Control and 'capture crimes' – there is already a link

One of the central positions of the concept of coercive control is its clearly articulated link to other capture or 'liberty crimes' where a person experiences a deprivation of his/her liberty, such as those detained as hostages, prisoners of war and torture victims. Stark argues that coercive control resembles the violence used in capture crimes in three main ways: it is designed to punish, hurt or control a victim; its effects are cumulative rather than incident specific; and it frequently results in severe injury or death.[11] From the perspective of a victim of coercive control, Linda Gordon describes her 'capture' as being a 'battered woman's socially constructed inability to escape.'[12] Or that it is the 'victim's agency that is the principal target.'[13] The whole idea of coercive control is to create an environment similar to that experienced by prisoners of war, but instead

of a generic conformity to authority as might be expected from a hostage, prisoners or those detained under the mental health act, it is destined to enforce a per-son's obedience, where an individual exerts power that forces another to conform to what they want them to do.[14]

The World Organisation Against Torture draws a parallel be-tween the context of a victim of torture by a state official, and a domestic victim of coercive control. The torture by a state official typically takes place when the victim is in incommunicado detention, at the unsupervised mercy of his interrogators or captors and without access to the outside world. Battered women, because of their domes-tic situation live isolated of family and friends and others who might support them. [15]Victims of coercive control are effectively 'hostages at home' suggesting abuse is a political crime like terrorism.[16] In his work, Stark also considers the terms used by other sociologists to try to categorise this sort of violence. They are an interesting mix of words that bring together the 'domestic' and what we might term more 'international' phraseology, particularly in the current uses of the word. Stark describes how we have moved, in the domestic sphere, from an emphasis on 'repeated assault' to an understanding that abuse is a continuous process that includes structural elements and has cumulative effects. He gives an example of this work in the shift made by sociologist Michael Johnson, who in recognition of this relationship, renamed his categories of violence to 'situational violence' and 'intimate terrorism.'[17]

This signals not only a shift to the structural understanding, but also an example of how definitional stretching can be achieved; and a clear link to what we are seeing in modern conflicts such as Syria where there are many actors ranging from the state, to individual military leaders, opposition fighters and actors such as Daesh (whom we would term commonly as terrorists). The distinction between 'situational violence' i.e. conflict where violence is used, and intimate terrorism is helpful as it brings into scope the possibility of discussing the coercive and controlling tactics used that are not covered by 'fighting' for example.

I had the privilege to spend some time with Stark during his re-cent visit to the UK and took the opportunity to ask him directly what he thought about the concept of definitional stretching to include the behaviour of actors in conflict, particularly around the threat of sexual violence. His response was cautious, but he did offer, in a similar way to the shift that

is mentioned by Michael Johnson, that perhaps what I was describing was 'sexual terrorism.' Where he thought there was a difference, however, was in the impact on and coping strategies employed by victims. In his view, refugees are more resilient, and their main concern is not whether they themselves will be assaulted but rather with keeping their children safe from the 'situational' violence and finding a way to make new lives for them.

This is not a mistaken conclusion; but Stark admits to not having interviewed asylum seekers or refugees; I would suggest that this assumption is based on what others have related to him. Having interviewed many people in this situation, I have observed that they will say to officials that the safety and education of their children is the most important aspect for them; but they are often hiding the im-pact their experience has had on their own health or their own needs. It is often further down the line, when safety and education is se-cured, that the wider impact of their experience is realised. And even then, through reasons of fear, or from the normalising of their experience, they are unable to articulate what has happened to them. For example, the inherent fear and distrust of authority, is a barrier to discussing anything that may appear critical of their political experience for fear of informants. So much so that often refugees prefer to use Arabic speaking, rather than Syrian, translators. Also, it may only be after living outside of the geographical region and having an experience of different societal or cultural norms that refugees from Syria realise that behaviour that they have taken for granted is not 'nor-mal'. The impact of this realisation may manifest in mental health or behavioural problems which carry a stigma in all societies; the challenges of asking for this help already exists and to link cause and effect perhaps years later.

I asked the same question about the potential for definitional stretch relating to coercive control of Gill Hague, at Bristol University, who set up the Violence Against Women Research Group. She saw scope in looking at definitional stretching, but urged caution, stating that we should be looking at this in 'baby-steps'. The time it has taken to get an understanding of coercive control, and what it means in a very limited number of Western schools of thought will mean that the challenge of broadening it may be a step too far too quickly. She felt that there was much more to do to improve under-standing of Violence Against Women and also felt that it may not be the right time to introduce something else into the conversation. Although her concern was more from an activist

point of view rather than whether this is something that should be looked at academically, which she supported. Nazand Begikhani, who is an expert of violence against women in Kurdish Iraq, signaled that she thought that this type of violence (psychological, mental) was already in international law, and that it had been recognised at an international level. She was unsure what more was required.

There has been some work in recent years that does already make the connection between 'negative experiences' and the impact on children, that does explore the impact of psychological violence. In Wales and Scotland, there has been more of a public health focus on 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACES). By framing the issue of the impact of negative experience, whether that be of conflict and living in a war zone and all that is witnessed there, as a health issue there is scope to explore the psychological impact of coercively con-trolling behaviours in conflict as part of the wider understanding of conflict. Public Health Wales recently published 'Preventing Violence, Promoting Peace – A policy tool kit for addressing interpersonal, collective and extremist violence'. The report talks about the impact of distinct forms of violence but also introduces the concept of 'life course' violence:

'Acute impacts of violence (i.e. in the immediate aftermath of victim-isation) include significant physical injury, disability and death. Globally, interpersonal and collective violence are estimated to have caused around 580,000 deaths and more than 33 million years of healthy life lost in 2015. From a life course perspective, violence and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can impair social and emotional development, limit individuals' life opportunities and result in early death …'[18]

There is clearly an interest and scope to include coercive control in conflict as a form of violence, and ACE, that could fall into further research in the public health space. This is also supported by the re-port by Save the Children in its 2017 report 'Invisible Wounds' where the impact of the experience of war manifests itself as 'toxic stress. These experiences include the daily fear of death in conflict but also the impact of witnessing and experiencing a combination of things such as loss of education or feelings of grief. At six years old, this is the only life many of these children have experienced,

I will now turn to the question posed by Dr Begikhani; what is there in International Law and international statutes and conventions that supports the assertion that coercive control, or at least recognised elements of it, are already 'offences'?

What does International Law state?

In seeking to understand the extent to which the ideas contained within coercive control are already incorporated within international law, it is useful to start with the Geneva Convention, particularly the fourth Convention (1949) which includes:

- *violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;*
- *taking of hostages*
- *outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment*

Although the Convention references torture and degrading treatment, it is not explicit that this should include coercive control. In many cases the victim does not see themselves as such, until it is too late and other forms of physical violence have caused physical harm or even death. If a behaviour is not yet recognised for the harm it causes, then it is unlikely to be picked up in such a broad definition. For example, in domestic legislation the reason it is an explicit offence is to ensure that we understand that this behaviour is not acceptable. Without it, it is unclear whether it would be considered and what threshold would need to be reached.

For more recent developments, I have looked in detail at the 'International Protocol on the Documentation and investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict', which came out of the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Protocol itself includes reference to the psychological repercussions of sexual violence for survivors and witnesses, and a reference to the gender-based nature of it and the prevalence against children. Similar to the argument that Stark makes about the structural nature of coercive control, the protocol makes clear

that "historical and structural inequalities that exist between men and women, and the different forms of gender-based discrimination that women are subjected to all over the world, contribute to the women and girls being disproportionately affected by sexual violence in conflict setting."[19] The protocol help-fully goes on to recognise that sexual violence as a crime under international law is often committed as part of a broad pattern of violations against individuals and communities, that includes sexual and non-sexual crimes.[20] So here we have a recognition, in addition to what we know is a crime under international law, that there is a broader set of 'behaviours' that seem to reflect at least in part the definition of coercive control as an 'ongoing pattern'. What needs to be explored further, however, is what is included in this list of 'violations', and how does it compare to the language used in the coercive control descriptions and types of behaviour.

The protocol is cautious when discussing what may already be in statute and states that in certain circumstances, sexual violence constitutes a crime under international law; a war crime, a crime against humanity and /or an act of genocide and can be investigated and prosecuted at both the national and international levels. Therefore, we need to look at the interpretation of international law and how it is enforced to see where these circumstances are, and where in these 'crimes' there is scope to include the 'broader pattern.' First there is the context of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and ad hoc tribunals. This was then codified and advanced in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and then advanced again by the Special Court for Sierra Leo-ne (SCSL).

The protocol makes clear that although it has a focus on the provisions set out in the Rome Statute, many of them have not yet been litigated or resolved. It points out that jurisprudence of the ad hoc and hybrid tribunals, such as the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia and the SCSL may provide the only available guidance.[21] However, what is of interest here is whether there is any-thing in existing international law that reflects the coercive control concept, so the Rome statute seems a sensible place to start. If we consider what is contained under the heading of War Crimes (article 8.2), Crimes Against Humanity (Article 7) and Genocide (article 6) there are some elements that may be useful. Under Article 8.2 (B and c), there is specific reference to 'Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading

treatment' in 8.2 (c-13 there is also 'Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, and intentional starvation and deprivation of objects indispensable to survival.' Crimes against humanity (Article 7) lists four areas of specific interest: Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, and enforced dis-appearance of persons and 'other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.'[22]

A thorough examination of the details of the Rome Statute and its interpretation are outside the scope of this study. An examination of interpretation of guidelines, however, is needed to determine where there may be opportunities to use this legislation to include psychological violence. At a high level, it appears that there is reference to the sorts of behaviours that are synonymous with some of those identified in domestic legislation. What is important about the Rome Statute is that it covers individuals acting within the state, not just the state itself. And, crimes against humanity can apply in the absence of a formal conflict. But initial work of the ICC, established by the Rome Statute has shown that it is easier to prosecute under some categories than it is others, for example, in terms of the evidence that might be available and whether the acts committed were behind closed doors or a mass publicly witnessed atrocity classified as genocide. In the case of the more public events it is still difficult, but perhaps less difficult to prosecute them for the activity that takes place out of the public space. The evidence point is helpful; and one faced in the enforcement of the domestic legislation on coercive control. But there are instances where victims of this form of abuse have been able to provide evidence, most famously on one of Stark's cases, keeping a notebook of daily tasks, which was compelling evidence of the domination and control that the victim was being subjected to. But leaving the difficulty of evidencing the crime to one side for the moment, it is instructive to return to the argument put forward by the World Organisation Against Torture. Because in our attempt to find something applicable in international law, it is important to consider what the Rome statute gives us in terms of torture, even if trying to prosecute for this may be a more difficult route.

The United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cru-el, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) defines torture as:

For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a per-son for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.[23]

What is interesting about this definition is that it clearly identifies that perpetrators of torture are either a public official or conducting their activity with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or someone acting in that capacity. That would not necessarily cover the range of actors in conflict who may be perpetrators of behaviour that an international definition of coercive control might apply to. For example, in the Syrian conflict it would cover the state actors and secret police and the tactics they employ; it would not pick up those labelled 'rebels' or actors such as Daesh, or indeed groups or gangs who do not wear any identifying insignia. Turning again to the Rome Statute, the definition of torture in Article 7.2(e) says:

"Torture" means the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused; except that torture shall not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions;[24]

This seems to provide a more encompassing definition that may be helpful to try to make a comparison on the behaviours listed in domestic legislation. However, to be able to take any action under Article 7 or where torture is listed as a war crime of genocide, the perpetrator must be a national of a state party to the Rome Statute, the alleged crime took place on the territory of a state party, or a situation is referred to the court by the United Nations Security Council. In the case of Syria, it seems very unlikely that this would happen under any route.

International law at the moment does recognise, at a high level, the impact of psychological torture and whilst this is helpful, what it does not do is recognise the cumulative effect of controlling or coercive behaviour or provide clarity to those who enforce it, as to what behaviours constitute an offence. The testing of the existing law is essential to understanding what is needed, and it is still easier to do this through publicly witnessed acts of physical violence.

Coercive Control in the Syrian Conflict

The conflict in Syria provides a very current example of an international application for the concept of coercive control. Stark describes coercive control as being so extensive and penetrating that there is a sense of 'omnipresence.'[25] He also refers to the 'injection of high levels of fear into the ordinary round of everyday life'[26] and the devastating psychological effects of isolation; the incapacity to 'not know what you know' or what he terms as 'perspecticide'[27] where the perspective of what is right or wrong is taken away. All this is recognisable in the documented experiences of Syrians as the Arab Spring took place in 2011, and the country descended into war. But elements of it can also be found prior to that.

Three examples of literature that illustrate these very aspects in relation to Syria are examined here. The first example is the work of Nihad Sirees who describes in his 'semi fictional' book 'The Silence and the Roar' the sense of an 'all seeing' omnipresent government, which forces all citizens to carry identification and does spot checks, and coerces the people (described as masses) to take part in marches to celebrate their leader. He describes in detail the sense of fear and his isolation as a journalist. His experience at the hands of the secret police, whom he describes as 'military security goons', and the time he spends dodging them, demonstrates the power that they wield. Power in this case is created by the threat of physical violence if he failed to comply with their demands to work for them in the propaganda machine. He does not experience any physical violence until later in the book, but his understanding that physical violence will be a consequence of an arrest is clear. He describes the actions of the secret police towards a man in charge of the photocopying of posters of the leader, which became spoiled and resulted in six months torture. And lastly the marriage of his

mother, under duress to a prominent minister, to force him to comply with the request to work in the communications department rather than continue as a journalist.[28] But most interesting of all is the author's description of the society in which he lives, which echoes the language in Stark's description of the domestic perpetrator of coercive control:

People must not think about the leader and how he runs the country; they must simply adore him, want to die for him in their adoration of him, Therefore the leader creates a roar all around him, forcing people to celebrate him, to roar … people are coerced into the streets in order to chant … the leader seeking to cove himself with a roaring halo….as a means of covering up and suppressing any other sound. With this roar, he aims to cover up violent crimes he unleashed against his rivals in the underground dungeons of the security apparatus, those places located far out of sight but which everyone knows about.[29]

The other two examples can be found is the works of two female journalists in Syria, both now resident in France: Janine Di Giovanni and Samar Yazbek. Notwithstanding the risks associated with journalism in a conflict zone anyway, both describe life in Syria as one as predicated on fear, dominance and control. Janine Di Giovanni describes instances of psychological pressure, where there is a fear of a family member being raped. This concurs with a recognition in the statement ahead of the 2014 Global Summit on Sexual Violence which called for recognition for such acts as psychological torture, stating, '…we must also recognise that men and boys are victims of this crime, as are those who are forced to witness or perpetrate this violence against their family or community members.'[30] In *Dispatches From Syria: the Morning they Came For Us*, Di Giovanni provides a voice for Syrian women in particular. One describes the specific tactics of the *Shabbiha,* or secret police acting for the regime (which translates as ghosts).

Their tactics were largely to incite fear within communities; to enter towns and villages after the government troops had been fighting nearby, and spread the word that that they would rape the women… daughters, mothers, cousin, nieces. It's a convenient way to ethnically cleanse an entire region. Fear can be generated so easily.[31]

In 'A woman in the Cross Fire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution', Samar Yazbek describes, in similar terms again to Stark's de-scription of how a perpetrator creates 'the injection of fear into everyday life', and how it has become normalised. She describes how "…without realising it people subsist on fear, which has become as automatic as breathing."[32] She describes the omnipresence of the security forces who are described as "sprouted out of the ground" and how the 'earth split open with [them].'[33] Stark also talks about surveillance and monitoring as being a key part of the continuum of violence and likens it to tactics used to intimidate Prisoners of War or hostages, but in Yazbek's work we can similarly see a comparison to her situation as a journalist being controlled by the secret police. In the same way, the intention is to ensure omnipresence and enforcing behaviours; as Stark describes it, letting the victim know she is being watched or overheard, which cause isolation both of the victim and by the victim. Yazbek endures cycles of violence, detention, intimidation, threats both physical and sexual, and threats against her daughter. She turns to Xanax to cope.

Conclusions

My objective was to demonstrate a need to better understand the im-pact of coercive control in the international space, not only as a weapon or war, but also as a means to govern a nation, or to incite violence or behaviours that are desired to further the aims of those in, or exercising power over others. If we understand that connection between acts of violence associated with the domestic space, and how those same behaviours form part of a continuum of violence in conflict that is more than the 'situational violence' that Johnson de-scribes.

Syrian writers often talk about the fabric of Syrian society, and how that has been destroyed; I do not think that Stark's offer of 'sexual terrorism' as a descriptor for this is the right terminology; but the use of the word terrorism does describe the impact of this violence. It is intimate; there is a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim that is different to that of a perpetrator of random acts of violence. There is also a continuum, and I would argue a mechanism that held the fabric of society together when required, but also when a tipping point is reached, provokes an action and reaction that has destroyed a country. In intimate partner violence, the relationship can continue for years, until something happens; sadly, in many cases resulting in extreme violence and death.

Having looked at both 'situations', what differentiates the two is less clear to me at this stage than it was when I started.

However, in discussing the 'sexual terrorism' concept, Ann Flitcraft offered another insight which I will conclude this paper with. I talked about women in conflict living in constant fear; she reminded me of the reason behind the formation of the 'Reclaim the Night' movement in the UK. Liz Kelly visited Leeds at the time when the Yorkshire Ripper was committing his crimes against women in the city. She describes how she 'sensed an atmosphere of fear amongst women…83 percent of women restricted their move-ments'[34]. For her, this increased her awareness of how strong the fear of attack can be and the enormous effect it has on freedom.'[35] The Reclaim the Night marches were a response to that loss of freedom, and anger at the seemingly slow response of the police, and differential treatment of the female student victims over the prostitutes. The result was a series of coordinated marches across the UK in opposition to the police advice of the time that women should stay indoors and not go out at night unless accompanied by a man. Women took to the streets en masse with flaming torches. We see this act of defiance when women are able to leave abusive relationships, or even when they are forced to kill their abuser. We also saw it in the defiance and protest marches against the regime in Syria in the spring of 2011 and the foundation of movements like 'Syrian Women in Sup-port of the Uprising'. Time will tell whether Syrian women will be able to reclaim their lives, not just the night, and whether a specific offence of coercive control will ensure women in the domestic sphere can do the same. If they can, then those principles of freedom, dignity and a sense of identity are the cornerstones of a society, including post conflict Syria, that must be in place for the future.

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Figures

Figure 1. Types of Behaviour as set out in Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship Statutory Guidance Framework (2015) p4

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6

The Weaponization of Syria's Reconstruction: A Preliminary Sketch

(2019)

Omar Imady

Introduction

It is indeed instructive that discussions of reconstruction often fail to provide a definition, or at the very least a general explanation, of what exactly they mean by the term. The assumption appears to be that the term is so readily understood to not require an explanation. Another common characteristic of such discussions is a preoccupation with how international, regional and national players are attempting to advance, or undermine, reconstruction. The focus on how various parties are interacting with a process, however, should not be confused, as often is the case, with a focus on the actual process. While the former is consumed with context, the latter attempts to shed light on agency. To focus on agency is to invariably focus on yet another conspicuously neglected subject, the actual communities that have been the victim of partial or wholescale destruction. Not only do discussions of Syria's reconstruction generally remain loyal to these shortcomings, they additionally reflect a very determined attempt to weaponize the idea of reconstruction in various ways and towards various ends.

The weaponization of Syria's reconstruction started as early as 2012, and by 2016, with the end of the battle for Aleppo, it had accelerated rapidly, reaching full culmination with the passing of the 'Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act' (February 5. 2019). The focus here is on how this weaponization was achieved conceptually, rather than

operationally (i.e. social media dissemination). This form of weaponization may be termed 'conceptual weaponization' as it provides the ideas, facts and statements that are subsequently used by social media activists to reinforce their messages. The aim is to shed light not only on how distant the idea of reconstruction ultimately is from the realities it was meant to be preoccupied with, but also on the ex-tent to which reconstruction became a front for the political and economic empowerment of various factions and players.

Conceptual Weaponization

The weaponization of political discourse, though now associated with the internet and social media, is an ancient craft, and examples of how it was articulated can be identified long before the internet arrived. Granted, the subject is very broad and complex, but a preliminary sketch of a very specific branch of weaponization is attempted here. Conceptual weaponization involves the creation of an understanding of a political term, an understanding that is closed (i.e. it does not allow for multiple interpretations), entrapping (i.e. it is integrated with inbuilt incentives), and exclusionary (i.e. it is predicated on the creation of an enemy).[1] The language used by 'The Covenant of the League of Nations' to describe the idea of the 'Mandate', including that of France over Syria, illustrates all three characteristics:

Article 22:

"To those colonies … which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant."

The idea of the mandate is conceptually closed in the sense that its nature and purpose are treated as though they were irrefutable facts. It is entrapping because it is promising unconditional authority to the countries administering the mandate (i.e. Britain and France), and civilizational advancement to the populations they are being authorized

to administer. And it is, finally, exclusionary in the sense that it implies that those who don't subscribe to this understanding are *a priori* hostile to the development and best interests of the populations it oversees and working against what the international community has decreed.

Reconstruction as utopia

The first major usage of the term reconstruction is found in the narrative of the American Civil War (1861-1865).[2] Even then, the term carried just as many myths (deliberately crafted, and at times possibly well-intentioned) as it does today. The myth, in mid-nineteenth century America, was that a post-war union can be reconstructed or, that the north was genuinely interested in its reconstruction. The actual way within which the term was understood by the victors was that the South (not the union) had to be radically reconstructed. The 1867-1868 Reconstruction Acts organized the South into occupied military districts and conditioned the restoration of the ex-Confederate states to the Union on the condition of ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment (which gave ex-slaves full citizenship). The myth, however, was not only that the victors were uninterested in the reconstruction of what *was,* but on a far more important level, the myth was that the victors could in fact succeed, irrespective of their victory, in reconstructing the South on their terms. Even one century later, the Civil Rights movement encountered a South that was culturally very hostile to the type of reconstruction the North had earlier envisioned. So, in this sense, the term reconstruction carries a double illusion; not only is the proclaimed objective not the real objective of those who are using it, but even the real objective is ultimately very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

From its earliest usage, the term 'reconstruction' implied restoration, or a return to a previous, often idealized, reality. At its most basic level, it implied the rebuilding of structures that were destroyed during war, and at a higher level of sophistication, it implied a rebuilding of not only physical structures, but of political, economic and social frameworks, which, in their totality, constituted a specific moment in time that 'reconstruction' would restore.[3] Because reconstruction is an activity, a method, and not an objective in itself, it cannot possibly be the

destination. Hence, the focus shifts almost naturally from the process to the new reality it is seeking to actualize. When describing this new reality, the tendency is to speak in terms of a utopia that not only never existed, but which seems difficult to actualize under the best conditions and even in countries that have not undergone violence and destruction. Conceptual weaponization is achieved when features of these utopias become the standards upon which any planned reconstruction effort is judged. If it does not con-form, it is labelled (politely) as an instrument of recreating the conditions that led to conflict, or (less diplomatically) as complicit in war crimes against the Syrian people.

The National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) provides one of the most elaborate explanations of this post-reconstruction utopia. NAFS was launched by UN ESCWA in 2012 with the aim of engaging " ... Syrian experts and stakeholders in developing policy alternatives for Syria in preparation for a post-agreement phase." The Principles for a vision of 'Syria 2030' were reached through an extensive exercise lead by Syrians from across the political spectrum. In their totality, these principles encapsulate the utopia that the reconstruction of Syria will give birth to. They may be synthesized and paraphrased as follows:

1. A political agreement that guarantees "a comprehensive transition" towards a Syria where "a culture of democracy is built and practiced, mutual political trust is re-established among the main political players, and the rule of law, equality and citizenship is established."
2. The right of the displaced and the refugees to "a safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homes (or to any other location inside the country they voluntarily choose to return to)."
3. A national reconciliation unto which all "Syrians are invited and encouraged to contribute".
4. A just and balanced development that directly contributes to stability, peace building and reconciliation at the local and the national levels that is tangibly manifested in the availability "of rehabilitated social and physical infrastructure" and; that "empowers people, especially the most vulnerable and poor, to attain their basic needs.

5. A governance framework that allows "the national administrative structure to be comprehensive, participatory, transparent, accountable, result-based, and achieve gender equality."

On the surface, these principles provide a vision of an inclusive, democratic Syria that one would at least hope the vast majority of Syrians would concur with. On a more subtle level, however, these principles not only create false expectations in terms of what reconstruction can result in, but they also validate the assumption that 'reconstruction' is an actual legitimate pro-cess that has a credible record, and that the only concern is whether or not it will be guided by an appropriate vision. The catastrophic failures of reconstruction in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, are clearly here irrelevant or at the very least are regarded as examples of what will *not* happen in Syria.

The Syrian regime has its own vision of reconstruction, which is deliberately vague, but equally utopian. In various speeches and interviews, the Syrian president made scattered references to reconstruction.

"… the more arduous challenge lies in rebuilding, socially and psychologically, those who have been affected by the crisis. It will not be easy to eliminate the social effects of the crisis, especially extremist ideologies. Real reconstruction is about developing minds, ideologies and values. Infrastructure is valuable, but not as valuable as human beings; reconstruction is about perpetuating both." (Interview with the German Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper 17/June/2013)

And again:

"The rebuilding of minds and the reform of people is the major challenge rather than the rebuilding of the infrastructure. When they started this war against us, they knew they would destroy the infrastructure, and they knew that we would rebuild it, but what is much harder is how to interact with the intellectual structures and we must not fail in confronting this challenge." (Asad's speech, 18 February, 2019 – my translation)

Asad's emphasis on the rebuilding of human capital under-scores the regime's concern with the fact that even if Syria is physically rebuilt, this will have no impact on the extent to which millions of Syrians will reman fierce enemies of everything the regime stands for. Hence the emphasis on rebuilding the intellectual foundations of Syrian society implies a type of reconstruction akin, in sensibility (though clearly not in nature), to what the North had in mind after the American civil war. The South had to be culturally restructured, and in Asad's mind, Syria, Syrians opposed to the regime in particular, require intellectual restructuring.

A far more elaborate utopia was identified by the particpants in Sochi (January 2018). Here reconstruction is seen as the grand summation of what all Syrians (represented at Sochi) aspire to. Twelve major principles that sound more like the manifesto of a political party are articulated:

1. Sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic.
2. Syria's national sovereign equality and rights regarding non-intervention.
3. Syrian people shall determine the future of their country by the ballot box.
4. Syrian Arab Republic shall be a democratic and non-sectarian state.
5. Syria to be committed to national unity, social peace.
6. Continuity and improved performance of state and public institutions.
7. A strong national army that carries out its duties in accordance with the constitution.
8. Commitment to combat terrorism, fanaticism, extremism and sectarianism.
9. Respect and protection of human rights and public freedoms.
10. Value placed on Syria's society and national identity, and its history of diversity.
11. Fighting poverty and providing support for the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

12. Preservation and protection of national heritage and the natural environment.

We even have negative utopias, that is utopias that identify what reconstruction should not involve but are ironically just as utopian in what they assume can be achieved in lieu of the model they are concerned with negating. In *Beyond fragility: Syria and the challenges of reconstruction in fierce states*, *Steven* Heydemann writes:

"Thus, the aim of post-conflict reconstruction is not to return war-torn societies and states to their pre-war condition, but to make use of the space that violent conflict is presumed to create to put in place institutions, norms, and practices that address the causes of violence and provide a basis for effective governance and sustainable peace."

What all these utopias have in common is the closed nature of their logic. It is closed because there is a circular link between their assumptions and conclusions. They do not, for example, question whether or not their vision can be achieved, how it will be achieved, or if it has been achieved elsewhere. Their premise is that it is *required*, for various reasons, and hence it should be pursued. More importantly, they all come with direct and indirect warnings that caution us from the dangers of not adhering to their prescriptions, from the recreation of the climate conducive to conflict, to the strengthening of the regime and its allies.

Reconstruction as an Opportunity

As early as February 2012, the idea of 'preparing' for the reconstruction of Syria starts to gain currency. The only challenge was how to make this idea more attractive. The message purports to be an invitation for the international community to be prepared to assist Syria once the war is over. In actuality, the message involves articulating an opportunity, a multi-layered opportunity that has something in it for everyone. It is first an opportunity for Syrians opposed to the regime to cast themselves as trusted experts who are in a better position to provide such expertise than their international counterparts. In August 2012, a group of Syrian intellectuals created a think tank, *The Day After; Supporting a*

Democratic Transition in Syria or TDA. TDA aimed at providing "a detailed framework of principles, goals and recommendations … for addressing challenges in six key fields: rule of law; transitional justice; security sector reform; constitutional design; electoral system design; and post-conflict social and eco-nomic *reconstruction* [emphasis mine]." With time, the dimensions of the opportunity become clearer to the organized opposition, and by November 2012, the term begins to be invoked with more assertiveness: "The incoming or transitional government in Damascus will confront not just the physical and social destruction of the war effort, as well as its collateral effects on regional stability, but also the deep legacies of a 40-year dictatorship. Its urgent domestic tasks will include … recon-structing infrastructure and the state apparatus …" The 'opportunity' here is for the opposition to prove itself credible and worthy of becoming the new leadership of Syria. The myth, no doubt, is the idea that members of the opposition have any experience in building, or rebuilding, anything akin to what they aspire to undertake. Once again, the 'double illusions' apply both the professed message and the actual message are equally detached from reality.

Reconstruction is foremost, however, an opportunity for the Syrian regime to signal the end of the conflict and for the initiation of its international rehabilitation. Yet, without a price tag placed on it, the opportunity remains not adequately attractive, nor weaponized. The price tag required is a financial one. Other types, like the survey conducted by UNRWA in mid-2013 which estimated that it would take around 30 years for Syria's economy to recover, are not helpful and will be duly ignored by players across the board. In June 2013, we are informed that a six member UN team lead by Abdallah Dardari, Syria's ex-Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, has arrived at the first estimate of what it would cost to reconstruct Syria: $60 billion. The figure is first repeated, then is systematically increased "… the country would need at least $80 billion to put the economy back to what it was prior to the uprising …"; "Syria's interim minister: $100 billion needed for reconstruction"; "Rebuilding damaged physical infrastructure will be a monumental task, with reconstruction cost estimates in the range of $100 to $200 billion"; and the final number is left to be identified by the president himself:

"Syrian President Bashar Assad estimated Thursday that it may take up to $400 billion to reconstruct Syria after the conflict …"

On the surface, these numbers are attempts to capture dam-age and, in turn, the costs of rebuilding. The sources responsible for their initial computation (e.g. ESCWA, the National Agenda for Syria, etc.) are generally technical bodies, well intended and as objective as it is possible when it comes to a subject as in-flamed as Syria. The point here isn't to cast doubt on why such numbers were calculated, but rather on how these numbers are subsequently weaponized to achieve very different objectives. As those who have actually gone through the economic exercise of calculating them would assert, these numbers tell us nothing about how they will be, or can be, used to finance the rebuilding of anything. At best they measure the value of what was destroyed. The logical fallacy of the idea of reconstruction is that you can in fact rebuild if only you had the resources required. This assumption was dramatically disproven in Afghanistan and Iraq, and, according to at least some economists, it didn't even apply during the implementation of the Marshal Plan. Reconstruction efforts in post-WWII Europe were never fully dependent on US assistance, and more often than not, were primarily based on local resources. The primary success stories took place where there was something already on the ground, a thirsty potential already attempting on its own to reconstruct, and then, subsequently, benefitting from a financial contribution that it was ready to do without. The US spent around $13 billion dollars to reconstruct Europe, (now equivalent to approximately $100 billion); already less than what the US has so far spent on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Indeed, corruption depleted the vast majority of these resources, and much of the same applies on the reconstruction of Iraq. In fact, it would not be difficult to show how the higher the number allocated for reconstruction, the more likely it will be misused. The point here, however, is that all of this is well understood and purposely employed by the various political camps fighting over Syria. The premise appears to be is that the higher the price tag, the more attractive the invitation is (i.e. a country that requires $400 billion to reconstruct is far more attractive than a country that requires $100 billion). Indeed, some of the headings almost read like an investment opportunity: "A Los Angeles banker, the

head of a Middle Eastern investment bank and retired General Wesley Clark plan to announce Monday the formation of an investment fund to help re-build Syria." Not only is it an investment opportunity, it is one which many are deemed 'unworthy' of: "Talking about the re-construction of Syria's war-torn regions, President Assad said companies from different countries have already offered their services in rebuilding Syria. While French and Swiss firms are among those ready to participate, the Syrian government will do its best to give Russian companies the best contracts …" After all, the price of being part of such a lucrative opportunity is to have supported the Syrian regime, or, at the very least, to be willing to suspend all the rhetoric and activities that question its legitimacy.

Reconstruction as punishment

In more practical terms, reconstruction can also be weaponized to exclude, or include, legitimise or demonize.[4] The Syrian regime understood this well and proceeded to enact laws to rede-fine demographically and economically post-war Syria into what Asad described as "a healthier and more homogeneous society." Though as noted above, these top down approaches to social realities consistently fail, the suffering and dispossession they can result in is very real. Take for example the town of Darayya, located 8 km south-west of the centre of Damascus, and belonging administratively, to the Rural Damascus governorate. In August 2016, the town fell to regime forces, and the remaining population were resettled in Idlib (7700), and Herjaleh (600). It is un-clear what happened to the original 78,000 (at the very least) inhabitants of Darayya. It seems likely that long before August 2016, thousands left the town to either other parts of Syria, or left Syria altogether. What concerns us is that Darayya today is largely vacant of its original indigenous inhabitants and, hence, to speak of a reconstruction program in Darayya would be to normalize a demographic distortion. Yet, in early 2017, a com-mittee for the reconstruction of Darayya was formed under the Prime Minister's Office. Much of the same would apply on numerous other towns in Syria, stretching from Ifrin, in the north-west, to Daraa, in the southeast.

Reconstruction that is based on demographic distortions is similar to reconstruction that is based on physical distortions. While the former targets people who moved into an area after its original inhabitants have been displaced, the latter redefines an area entirely. Southwest of Damascus, and not too far from Darrayya, is an area known as Basateen el-Razi. Prior to 2011, the area was home to thousands of people who were too poor to af-ford regular houses, and who therefore built their shacks and ramshackle houses in the fields behind the houses of the Mezzeh highway. Today, a 'reconstruction' program has been initiated that aims at replacing these houses with skyscrapers and shop-ping centres. It would be entirely different if the indigenous in-habitants of Basateen el-Razi were the actual beneficiaries of such a program. As it stands, the program recreates a new physical reality and ignores the future prospects of returnees which, as studies have confirmed, in the vast majority of cases return to their own homes (even if such homes were partially damaged).

In the same vain, several decrees, from Law number 66 (2012) to Law number 10 (2018), have created a situation where the indigenous inhabitants of an area will find it even harder to return to their towns and villages and repossess their homes, and land. The idea that a refugee or a displaced person must some-how provide proof of ownership of a house that is most probably damaged or destroyed, and which was most probably built with-out legal documentation, amounts to (at the very least) a strong disinvitation to return. Since Syrian refugees and the displaced already face numerous other obstacles that make their return difficult, these decrees make the hard even harder, and legitimize their inability to return.

On the other side of the spectrum, reconstruction as an instrument of punishment was also employed by the West, the US in particular. The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act was first initiated in July 2016, and on the 15th of November 2016, it unanimously passed the House as The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act (HR 5732). After dying in previous congresses, another version, H.R. 1677 (115th), passed the House on May 17, 2017. It was considered by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on September 26, 2018, and on the 3rd of October 2018, an up-dated text of the bill was published. On the 19th of January 2019, it passed the House, yet again, as the 'Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act of 2019'. Finally, on the 5th of February 2019, it was passed by the Senate. The language of the Act that pertains to Syria is consistent with the objectives of punishment and exclusion:

- Requires the President to impose sanctions on foreign individuals if the President determines that the foreign individual knowingly engages in any of the following activities (Title III, Subtitle A, Sec. 312):

- Knowingly provides significant financial, material, or technological support to, or knowingly engages in a significant transaction with the Government of Syria;

- Knowingly sells or provides significant goods, services, technology, information, or other support that significantly facilitates the maintenance or expansion of the Government of Syria's domestic production of natural gas, petroleum, or petroleum products;

- Knowingly, directly or indirectly, provides significant construction or engineering services to the Government of Syria.

The Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act is very clear on what should not take place, but it is not concerned with what should

take place. Clarity on what should not happen and ambiguity on what should, has been a common feature of American foreign policy in Syria, and it is reminiscent of how the US interacted with the use of chemical weapons. The Syrian regime should not use chemical weapons, US officials strongly proclaimed, but its use of other forms of killing (e.g. barrel bombs) is ignored. In the same vain, countries should not support the reconstruction of Syria, but how the suffering of the refugees and the displaced will be alleviated is not an American security interest nor is it relevant to an Act that, by its very name, is concerned with strengthening American policies.

Conclusion

When the history of the Syrian Uprising is finally written, one of the important aspects of this history will be the way in which certain ideas were weaponized by various actors. Such a history may begin with the regime's *mu'amirah* or conspiracy theory that portrayed the protestors as agents of a foreign plot who practiced *jihad alnikah* or sexual jihad, move on to the opposition's use of *sa'it al sifr* or zero hour to dramatize the immanent end of the regime, and would include how the West used an incremental (verbal) delegitimization of the regime ('from Asad should step down' to 'Asad must go') creating in the process the illusion that such delegitimization techniques are capable of impacting the regime's survival. The latest, though unlikely to be the last, is the idea of reconstruction, an idea that carries with it the illusory promise of a phase beyond war where Syria's rebirth would take place. What is perhaps distinct about reconstruction is the extent to which it was about the regime's legitimacy, as opposed to its continuity. Past examples of weaponization were significantly instruments of actual war, when at stake was the very survival of the regime. Reconstruction, on the other hand, belongs to a battle over the regime's international rehabilitation.

The significance of *The Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act* lies in the blow it delivered to the regime's attempt to restore its legitimacy through reconstruction. As noted above, the Act was first contemplated in mid-2016, and it took until February 2019 for it to be passed by the Senate. In only three months, (February-May 2019), the

reconstruction of Syria has already started losing the coverage and momentum it enjoyed until early 2019. The Syrian regime's success in the weaponization of ideas during the war phase of Syria's uprising may explain some of the peculiar aspects of the president's latest speech, delivered only days after the passing of *The Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act.* Rather than emphasize victory and moving beyond the war, as he had done in earlier speeches, Asad actually proclaimed that Syria was still at war, in fact it was now fighting four distinct wars. Perhaps the regime is sensing that it was far easier to weaponize the war than it is to weaponize the peace.

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7

The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries: Opportunities for Syria

(2020)

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Abstract

The Ba'ath Party has dominated the political sphere in Syria since the rule of Hafiz Al-Assad. It prevented any kind of social or political practices or organizational experiences at any level, except under the approval and full scrutiny of the regime. This kind of oppression continued after Bashar Al-Assad took over the presidency in 2000, which in turn played a crucial role in the opposition's evident inexperience after the 2011 Uprising. Supporters of the Uprising were looking for structured, organized leadership to represent and develop their movement, but the opposition formations, official and nonofficial, proved incapable of fulfilling that role.

Opposition political parties, whether longstanding or nascent, Islamist or secularist, have deep organizational problems. None has presented a clear vision, strategy, or project to help the people achieve their demands. In general, parties have been beset by poor institutionalization, with a lack of clear organizational structure, and an absence of lucid decision-making processes. While parties are supposed to be spaces for plural thinking and acting, individualism prevailed, with incoherence and inconsistency existing between parties' ideologies and their members'

practices, and between members themselves, exacerbating the tribal and confessional loyalties and tendencies that served to undermine collective national identity. Therefore, instead of taking their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens, and building a common national identity, parties conceded those roles to follow narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas. As a result, they have been incapable of attracting and mobilizing grassroots, especially the young.

While those shortcomings differed in degree from one party to the other, all of them shared the factor of excluding grassroots whilst taking "cadre-party" form. In doing so, political parties have squandered the momentum of the Uprising and the vital power of organized masses. Not only that, but it also shattered the potential competencies of activists and participants, turning their zeal into total apathy. On the other hand, the mobilizational incapability of those parties was one of the reasons, along with the regime's brutal repression, that led to the Movement's militarization, followed by its radicalization at a later stage. Subsequently, parties lost the trust of the people and thus their legitimacy and representational capacity, which they replaced by seeking legitimacy from regional and international powers.

Syrian opposition parties, who appeared to be preoccupied with their intra- and inter-party struggles, should look for new resources and practices to re-legitimize their role. They need to grow into major players through grassroots engagement, rather than through foreign power endorsements. It is necessary for the Syrian people demanding democratic transition to be part of the discourse about key issues of their political future.

This paper advocates that using internet technologies towards adopting the digital party model might represent the solution to re-engage the masses in the political process, allowing for public participation and inclusiveness in the decision-making process. The format of the digital party could well precisely represent the inclusive tool and innovative solution that is needed with its open, easy membership, participatory platform, allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-

making processes. Although using the digital party model will not instantaneously solve all the mounting problems of apathy and distrust, it might yet provide the type of organizational change that will help narrow the gap between the elites and grassroots and affect positively parties' roles and performance.

Background: Political Context before 2011 Uprising

1. Hafiz al-Assad (1970-2000)

Hafiz al-Assad took power in Syria in 1970 by a military coup. He ruled Syria with an iron fist, prohibiting public freedoms and political activities. The ruling party was the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Political regulations were monocratic, restricting all opposition parties and dissident movements, but tolerating the existence of mock parties under a "progressive national front."[1] These rules restricted opposition activities and prevented the establishment of opposition parties, which resulted in Ba'athists dominating the political sphere.

Ba'ath Party apparatus was one of the key instruments – in addition to the army, security services, and state bureaucracy – through which the regime controlled the country. Party members had priority over any other candidates in obtaining jobs or state-related positions. This allowed the party apparatus to take control of all key strategic functions within the state.[2] With more than 2 million members in 2000, and 2.8 million members in 2012, who were organized in a hierarchical structure, and spread all over the country, and nearly all the state institutions, the party controlled all state critical and non-critical occupations.[3] In addition to the hierarchical arrangement of Ba'ath Party members, other citizens were also organized in syndicates, federations, unions and other associations, according to their profession or background. This system of organization operated regardless of whether citizens were members of the Ba'ath Party or not, though with a semi-mandatory condition that Ba'athists presided over those syndicates. The goal was to keep the masses under the full surveillance and dominance of the state and to extend the scope of the Ba'ath party's base.[4]

Indeed, the possibility of forming an institutionalized network independent from the state's control was slim to none. Efforts to create an active civil society, especially an organized one, were halted. Even syndicates, which were supposed to be potential focal points for organizing grassroots initiatives after the revolution, were rendered ineffective. While they were ostensibly created for people to network, organize their endeavours, and represent their interests, the purpose became subverted towards a means for the state to assert hegemony over the society, divide it, and prevent any vital movements or activities.[5]

As for the political opposition, like the conditions of oppositions under repressive regimes, the situation was ominous. Anyone engaged in any action associated with political opposition, or even suspected of being involved in such conduct, was incarcerated, tortured, or expatriated.[6] Hence, the opposition was completely deprived of practicing politics before the Revolution, except for some exiled individuals. This, to some extent, explains the debilitated performance of the opposition after the Uprising.[7]

1.2. Bashar al-Assad (2000 until the 2011 Uprising)

Bashar al-Assad's succession to the presidency in 2000, with his promises of reforms in his inaugural speech, generated optimism that the young president might represent a new era of political and economic improvements. Intellectuals and political activists started establishing political forums as free spaces for raising awareness, holding open discussions, and formulating civil and political demands. The objectives revolved around political freedom, including lifting the 1963 state of emergency, releasing political detainees, instituting regulations for establishing parties and a plural party system amongst others. However, this period, the so-called "Damascus Spring", did not last long; from July 2000 to February 2001 in fact, after which the regime cracked down on these forums and imprisoned participants.[8]

Another important vigorous surge of the opposition occurred during the years 2005-2006, with the announcement of the "Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change", signed by several opposition figures and

formations. This was an attempt to unite the opposition and, inter alia, recommence the demands of the "Damascus Spring". The regime ignored the opposition demands of reform, arresting several leaders and members of the coalition, under the allegation that the opposition and its demands were a Western conspiracy aimed at weakening the Syrian state.[9]

The oppression of the opposition continued without any indication of imminent positive changes until the eruption of the 2011 Uprising, after which the regime initiated superficial reforms to quell popular demands.[10] Reforms involved lifting the emergency state and introducing some constitutional reforms, including the re-writing parts of the constitution. Most notably this involved the removal of Article 8 of the former 1973 constitution, which stated that the Ba'ath Party was the leading party of the society and the state, replacing it with an inclusive article which granted political pluralism while discarding Ba'ath Party exclusivity to leadership of the state. Furthermore, it explicitly allowed the establishment of new parties under specific conditions.[11]

1.3. The Syrian Uprising of 2011

At the beginning of 2011, anti-government uprisings erupted in Syria after the Arab Spring swept through several Arab countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. People took to the streets in peaceful demonstrations but were confronted by brutal armed forces of the Syrian regime, resulting in hundreds of killings and arrests.[12]

In late 2011, the peaceful protesting developed into armed conflict as the spiral of the Syrian regime's violence continued unabated. The regime's viciousness triggered the masses to step-up their demands from general political and legal reforms into regime change.[13] The conflict worsened in the following years and developed into a mixture of civil and proxy wars involving regional and international powers.[14]

The brutality of Assad's regime forced a substantial part of the opposition, as well as civilians, to leave the country owing to the threat of arbitrary detention, execution, and enforced disappearance. According to the United Nations, there are over five million registered Syrian

refugees in the year 2020.[15] While a significant number of those refugees, expatriates and displaced people could be opponents of the current Syrian regime, no official statistics exist on the political preferences of those refugees, despite it being worthy of study, bearing in mind refugees' relevant security concerns, especially when located in countries with positive bilateral relations with the Syrian regime.

Displaced opposition activists found themselves scattered in different countries, without being able to participate effectively in the political discourse anymore, rendering different social media platforms the only channels for participation. Meanwhile, the political scene had been seized by a few officially nominated opposition coalitions, starting with Syrian National Council (2011),[16] then National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (2012),[17] and more recently the High Negotiations Committee (2016).[18]

Various non-official political opposition formations have been established since the onset of the Uprising, but almost none can be described as "grassroots" organizations, in the sense of taking on the role of organizing the masses, mobilizing them, linking leaders and activists, and benefiting from the potential of opposition activists. Moreover, the opposition – official and non-official – failed to represent grassroots demands and were unable to achieve a framework of cooperation for advancing objectives during critical stages of the Uprising.[19] One could argue that an integrational outline for the opposition with a national agenda would have prevented any struggle over the question of grassroots representation, which many political opposition formations claimed without any established lines. Such an outline could have also reassured the international community, which was wary about the lack of a proper replacement for the current regime, a credible alternative that might have led the country during a critical transitional period.[20]

2. Types of Political Parties after 2011 Uprising

At the onset of the Syrian Revolution of 2011, activists started to organize the popular movement through small coordination bodies (*Tansiqiat*), which acted as secret cells to cope with the organizational needs of the

popular movement, especially given the geographical and demographical breadth of the demonstrations. *Tansiqiat* used social media platforms to organize and spread information about gatherings and protesting points, among other activities. These activists, who articulated the demands of the Uprising, emanated from the middle-classes, from diverse professional backgrounds and ethnicities. Demographically, they were spread all over Syria and, in the case of dissident expatriates, also abroad.[21]

However, new sophisticated political configurations replaced these revolutionary-type civil networks and pre-political organizations. This replacement is ascribed to two fundamental reasons. First, the popular movement's demands for an organized political representation and leadership.[22] Second, the international community's pressure for organized and unified opposition. The transformation from grassroots-resistance style groupings into organized political-elite style configurations gave birth to what became termed "opposition". The replacement of a civil-revolutionary act with the organized-political act had the consequence of converting the conflict to revolve around a new power binary of "regime-opposition" instead of the binary "regime-people" as before.[23]

Away from the formal coalitions, unofficial formations were initiated under different designations – party, movement, current – without any clear basis for distinction.[24] In doing so, some of them simply tried to avoid the description "party" as it had negative connotations from the past, while others tried to avoid the entailed accountability.[25]

A party can be defined in numerous ways. According to Sartori, "In general, parties are defined in terms of (i) actors, (ii) actions (activities), (iii) consequences (purposes), and (iv) domain. But parties can also be defined with exclusive respect to their function, to their structure, or to both; or in the light of the input-output scheme; and in still other ways."[26] For the purpose of this study, parties will include all these formations, except for self-declared civil society or non-political organizations.

Various parties have been founded based on ethnic, national, and religious identities, amongst others. For example, the Kurdish-nationalist formations – formal and informal – have manifested themselves noticeably on the political scene.[27] For the purpose of this paper, parties after the 2011 Uprising will be categorized in two ways. Firstly, chronologically, considering the Uprising as the focal event. Secondly, by the ideologies those parties embraced.

2.1. Parties' Classification on a Chronological Basis

2.1.1. Longstanding Parties(Initiated before the 2011 Uprising)

Longstanding opposition formations dominated the political sphere after the Uprising. They were comprised of old parties and political figures who were working covertly before the Uprising. Some of those longstanding parties kept their original formation, with some changing their names while keeping the same former structure and practices, while others entered new alliances and coalitions forming new bodies.[28]

However, those parties that retained their pre-Uprising structure found they were unable to interact with the grassroots or to guide them because of their old-fashioned practices and ideologically controlled attitudes towards key national issues. In addition, a legacy of leader-dominated parties frustrated the opportunity to build consensus across parties and political groups, which resulted in polarization among the opposition.

Nevertheless, there was the opportunity that those parties and figures could have served as the starting point for an institutionalized leadership of the masses if they had acted in an inclusive non-partisan manner. They had the basic requirements, such as political experience, rudimentary organizational structure, and wide networks inside and outside Syria however, they failed to act in a non-partisan manner.[29]

2.1.2. Nascent Parties (Initiated after the 2011 Uprising)

A growing number of nascent parties were initiated after the Uprising. Most of these newly established parties imitated older remaining parties

with no modernization at any level. The old structures of leadership within the opposition parties had a palpable effect on those parties, to the extent of carrying on the legacy of enmities towards each other, viewing the "other" as a political enemy rather than political opponent. This caused deep polarization and fragmentation within the overall political opposition scene.[30]

Some of these organizations can be termed "couch parties", in that their membership was so small as to be able to fill only a single couch.[31] Such parties tended to be short-sighted, fragile, with short life spans, and prone to splintering. Notable characteristics included no political experience, vision or plan along with overlapping or similar announcements, initial declarations, objectives and policies.[32]

Not only were these parties characterized by such shortcomings, but many were also established with the support and financing of different regional and other international countries, rendering them mere branches or representatives of those powers and their agendas, rather than the interests of the Syrian people.[33] Consequently, any deficiency in the financial resources of those parties' patrons often led to these parties' transformation or merging into other formations, or even vanishing.[34]

In general, both long-standing and nascent parties were beset by poor institutionalization, with no founding constitution nor bylaw or clear organizational structure, and with no binding statement of party principles or clear decision-making processes. Nevertheless, even when the principles of the founding statements and procedures of some parties were clear, the plans for delivery were absent. While parties are supposed to be spaces for plural thinking and acting, individualism prevailed with incoherence and inconsistency existing between parties' ideologies and their members' practices, and between members themselves. Both types were incapable of attracting and mobilizing the grassroots, especially the young, because of the tribal and confessional loyalties that served to undermine collective national identity. Yet, this did not prevent many of those parties from claiming a representational role without any clear basis.[35]

2.1.3. Parties' Classification on Ideological Bases (Islamist – Secularist)

2.1.3.1. Islamist Parties

The discourse about organized political Islamist formulation can be analysed through the prism of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), a prevailing, global and long-established movement. Although many other Islamist formulations had emerged after the Uprising, the most organized and politically influential one was the MB, which remains one of the most prominent Islamist movements in Syria and most of the Middle East region.[36]

After the crackdown on the MB following the Hama massacre in 1982, most of the movement's members left Syria.[37] However, the movement continued its activities abroad, thereby retaining organizational abilities and gaining experience, which ensured the MB was in primary position vis-à-vis other Islamist formations to return to the Syrian political scene with the onset of the Uprising. Different elements accorded the MB a privileged status in the Syrian context. Amongst others, the MB maintained the discourse of grievances and injustices inflicted on the movement by Hafiz al-Assad's regime, and its concurrent history of struggle to appeal to the public. It also manifested its strategy of being part of the local society through its various not-for-profit organizations, which gave the movement an embedded presence in Syrian society. Indeed, such a code of conduct proved essential to gaining credibility and legitimacy within local communities. Finally, the stable financing of the movement has had a crucial impact on its ability to organize activities.[38]

The MB had the potential to lead the popular movement, but they failed drastically for a number of reasons, notably, prioritizing the regional project of the movement over the Syrian national agenda, and their attempt to enforce that project by manipulating the prevailing chaotic circumstances. The movement's partisan attitude towards other Syrian political components included consistent attempts to have the upper hand on every official opposition coalition by forming the majority using

different methods, such as creating more than one formation under different names but with affiliation to the MB.[39]

2.1.3.2. Secularists Parties

On the other side of the ideological spectrum lie secular parties, who differentiated themselves by, theoretically, upholding the Syrian national agenda, and declaring their sets of values mainly by excluding any religious ideologies – namely Islamic – from influencing the political future of Syria. However, these secular parties were the least capable of leading the popular movement, no matter which label assigned themselves, be it Intellectual Elites, Liberals, Leftists, and Nationalists. They were incapable of gaining people's trust for different reasons. These included leaning towards ideological advocacy instead of practicing politics; and trying to spread their ideologies and terminologies that were, in many ways, associated historically with the West, and the regime who claim secularity although manipulating the Islamic discourse, according to the circumstances, to maintain its structure. Secular parties were not sufficiently alert to the importance and influence of religious ideologies in respect to the people of the region. These parties adopted a subtle struggle against Islam, including both cultural and faith dimensions, despite Islam's authoritative popular appeal. In doing so, they employed Westernization approaches, but these had negative associations and were destined to be ineffective. Their ideologies did not attempt to pragmatically engage with Islam, but rather keep those secularist ideologies pristine through blaming Islam. As a result, those parties missed the opportunity to bring cumulative change to people's social and cultural legacies. Consequently, this caused those parties to turn into closed oligarchies, blaming grassroots and their culture for any complications, including later armament. Thus, instead of upholding popular responsibility and providing competent leadership with a clear project and strategies, these parties sustained their elitist status, losing their leadership role and blaming their failure on the ignorance of the people.[40]

In summary, both secularist and Islamist parties used religion to maintain their respective ideological narratives. Both are "Islam-centred", either

for or against, using it as the base for their rivalry, ideology, and practices. However, neither has presented a clear vision, strategy or project to help the people achieve their demands.

The Dilemma of Mass Leadership

After years of mass political passivity, Syria, since the beginning of the Uprising, has developed into a politicized society, which according to Sartori is:

"...a society that both takes part in the operations of the political system and is required for the more effective performance of the system."[41]

This politicized public created the challenge of organizing, representing, and leading in order to utilize this mass power effectively and turn it into an authoritative pressure tool. Usually, parties take on such roles and responsibilities, being the main vehicles for political participation and representation of the people by raising awareness and educating the population, articulating demands, recruiting political leadership and training them.[42]

One of the key predicaments the grassroots had faced since the Uprising was the absence of any kind of institutionalized structure to organize their activities on a large scale. Although local coordination committees tried to play this role at the onset of the Uprising, the increased span of popular participation required a more sophisticated form of organization and representation.[43] Even collective action institutions like syndicates, initiated during Hafiz al-Assad's presidency, which should have played the role of facilitating the organization of the masses, proved useless, if not disruptive, because they were designed to play a different role. Consequently, after the Uprising, people faced a void of any organizational contingent to realize their demands.[44]

The grassroots looked for institutionalized incubators to organize and lead their popular activism and integrate them under unifying goals and a common national umbrella. They expected opposition leaders and formations to fulfil the institutional gap,[45] but these were not prepared to

meet the challenge, falling short of popular expectations, subsequently asserting the anti-party sentiment originated by the Ba'ath party legacy. The opposition formations never developed sufficient grassroots organizational and mobilizational capacity. They ignored the fact that the power of the masses was not merely dependent on numbers alone, but also realized through forming an organized and mobilized mass movement aimed at applying constant pressure on the regime and international powers to respond to popular demands.[46]

The marginalization of grassroots, who were at the core of the Syrian Uprising, was exemplified by the total lack of coordination with activists inside and outside Syria, and with other components of Syrian society.[47] Additionally, interaction with civil society organizations was curbed because of the belief that providing humanitarian aid through NGO's would be sufficient to engage with the masses. This troubled relationship left no chance for grassroots organizations to participate effectively, depriving political parties of the potential power of its members.[48] Without such membership, parties cannot legitimately claim any representational role in deciding the future governmental structure of the country. On a more practical level, marginalization of party memberships weakens lines of financial and labour resources. On the other side, members also need parties in place as institutions for collective action. Only by engaging membership effectively can popular demands be made against a powerful organized regime.[49]

During the critical period of the popular Uprising, and with the prevailing authoritarian practices of the governing monocratic regime, political parties and leaders have increased responsibility to cultivate democratic culture and values in society. The awareness-raising process has to start from within parties through practical adaptation and fostering of these values and practices, such as boosting the participation of all members and tolerating their diverse ideas and suggestions, as well as encouraging new views, coupling this with clear decision-making process and abiding by it. Notwithstanding the importance of a clear socially inclusive strategy aimed at including women and marginalized minorities from different socio-economic backgrounds,[50] which hitherto opposition

parties had failed to achieve due to the internal organizational and structural problems from which they suffered.[51]

Previous failings have included using populist speeches without raising grassroots awareness of essential concepts. Similarly, instead of being socially inclusive, parties have further alienated themselves from broader society by demonstrating a discriminatory attitude especially towards women, excluding them from decision-making positions and involving them only to satisfy the requirements and conditions of the international community. This method of conduct was exhibited by political parties across the spectrum, from left to right, which resulted in discouraging women from political participation, who instead turned to civic activism in their search for meaningful participation.[52]

In general, the way the opposition parties dealt with the masses resulted from several factors. First, the historical oppression of traditional opposition parties and political leaders, who were covertly working without any grassroots base or popular networks, resulted in a lack of experience in dealing with popular masses. This, in turn, created the tendency of many political personalities, who were involved in struggling with the regime before the Uprising, to claim leadership positions based on the sole merit of prior activism and struggle, regardless of any other necessary qualifications. Second, there was the inexperience of nascent parties, who were unready, structurally and organizationally, to engage the huge numbers of active masses. Instead, the only interaction these formations had was at the party level, which is characterized by competition and rivalry.[53] Finally, the problematic elitist nature of some formations, who considered themselves progressive elitists, denied any elemental role of the masses in politics. As a result, instead of actively interacting with grassroots and using the power of the organized masses as a tool to realize people's demands, parties sought power in two ways. Firstly, by using the tactic of being part of bigger coalitions and unions, and sometimes even splitting into more than one formation to count for more balloting power in any coalition or international conferences.[54] Secondly, parties tried to overcome inadequate popular representation by establishing relations with regional and international powers. This resulted in maximizing the role of those external powers in the Syrian

conflict, additionally creating potential continuity of such influence in the future.[55] Thus, the generation of external-subordination dynamics rather than grassroots-representation was one reason for the failure to reach consensus on national principles in order to form a basis for any resolution of the Syrian conflict. More grassroots representation would have validated party power in any resolution or agreement. Besides, a representational role in the current period would probably have increased parties' chances for future engagement in the transitional period, or even any foreseen democratic elections.

3.1. Consequences of Political Parties Position towards the Masses

The incompetence and attitudes of political opposition formations towards public masses contributed to serious consequences for the popular movement. These formations – formal and informal – are accused of being one of the causes of fragmentation in public opinion towards key issues, betraying grassroots confidence. Moreover, the transformation of the grassroots Uprising into regime-opposition struggle over power led to the prioritization of international and regional support over popular representation. This resulted in underestimating the grassroots and wasting the potential competencies of many activists inside Syria and in the diaspora, who were eager to use their qualifications and skills to participate actively in achieving the democratic transition, which caused the Uprising to lose its momentum. Likewise, those parties could not attract new members, restraining themselves to founding members only, and so they could not represent grassroots interests, aspirations, and expectations, especially those of young people. Not only that, but many also encountered the state of mass resignation of their membership.[56] However, the inability to mobilize and organize grassroots was one of the main reasons that led to one of the most serious consequences of the Uprising, which was the militarization followed by the radicalization of the Uprising.[57] The militarization of the Syrian Revolution began at the end of 2011, with civilians starting to use light weapons to protect themselves against the regime. In addition, some regular army officers and enlistees defected to the opposition upon refusing their commanders' orders to target civilians.[58] However, this development from peaceful demonstrations to militarization was the

result of combined factors, including the increased brutality of the regime against protestors, the use of different kinds of armaments, denying the state of "uprising" in the first place, and declaring that what was happening was an international conspiracy, executed by a group of local terrorists, which implied the futility of any attempts to reach a political solution.[59]

Furthermore, the opposition's political leaders and formations were unable to save people from the regime's practices, and their concurrent incapacity to represent grassroots in the international fora further weakened any potential ability to do so.[60] In addition, there were discordant voices in the opposition, with some indifferent towards arms proliferation while others condemned protesters' resorting to militarism. The latter's denunciation of arming proved weak as they imparted no practical substitute action to those protesters. Armament was thus seen as a solution of sorts with some subsequently arguing that the problem was the chaos of armament rather than armament per se, in that it could have been used as a shield of the people's movement.[61]

At a later stage, with the regime losing control over some areas, and with resultant security vacuums, especially in border regions, radical groups started to rise, finding in those areas the perfect environment to control and expand. People found in those radical groups an alternative to opposition formations, since they provided what those formations could not. The fundamentalist organizations were more experienced in organizing and mobilizing youth, having a clear ideology, long experience gained from their involvement in other countries, generous funding, vast networks, strategic planning, and effective leadership. Those factors qualified them to take the lead in absorbing and using youth energies to achieve their hidden agendas by exploiting the desire of those youth to defeat the regime at any price.[62]

4. The Evolvement of Parties

LaPalombara and Weiner state that, "The creation of parties has been a continuous process. The historical graveyards are cluttered with parties which dominated the political scene, but which subsequently failed to

adapt to new circumstances and therefore died, were absorbed by new more active movements, or withered into small marginal parties."[63]

The reasons for the emergence of political parties differ from one region to another, and there are different theories to explain the evolvement of parties.

4.1. Party Evolvement in Developed Countries

Western political scientists have generated a theory of evolution for the political party, with the cadre party of the nineteenth century transforming into the mass party that prevailed in the industrial era, then the catch-all party in the 1960s,[64] followed by the cartel party by 1990.[65] Most recently, we are witnessing the gradual emergence of the digital party.[66]

In the context of this paper, it is important to clarify the differences between cadre and mass parties, since parties in the region have rarely transformed into mass form, or any other party forms, so it is beneficial to consider the defining characteristics as set out below.

4.1.1. Cadre parties

A cadre party can be described as a primordial party structure that consists of a small group of matching social and political elites, exerting their influence over society with total apathy of the masses. With its individualistic tendencies, a cadre party is far from being a collective organization.[67]

4.1.2. Mass parties

Unlike a cadre party, a mass party can be identified as a collective action organization aiming at integrating a large segment of the population into politics by organizing them into a hierarchical structure, occupied by a huge bureaucracy of political professionals. This type dominated the industrial era reflecting the technological, economic, and social structure reflecting the concept of big factories. Mass parties bring together the

public through gathering their demands and interests, and they depend on grassroots for their financial and human resources. Hence, they seek to widen their networks by recruiting more members, through whom the mass party derives its legitimacy and power.[68]

It is crucial to associate the legitimacy of a party with its respective roles, a legitimacy that is established on the popular base it develops; a legitimacy by which mass parties emerge both to strengthen and to control the access of the new masses into the political system.[69]

The critical transition from a cadre into a mass party[70] requires new party functions attuned to modernizing society, leading, mobilizing, and organizing masses and articulating their demands, in addition to providing the means through which the government and the people can communicate and connect.[71] The historical theory explaining the development of political parties from a modernization perspective looks at three "crises" as the main reasons driving party evolvement; legitimacy, participation and integration. Legitimacy crises of regimes in power lead to the crisis of participation, parties evolve to be the vehicle for that participation, and through doing so parties play a crucial role in building a joint national identity while integrating different categories into that identity.[72]

In a simple comparison between a cadre and a mass party, we can identify core contrasts. A cadre party has a small number of members, seeking no recruitment. It is not open for membership except by formal nomination. Overall, it does not depend on numerical strength, rather, it counts on the influence of its members, and hence, it appeals to the elites and excludes the masses. A cadre party is reliant on the donations of the elite for its financial resources. The mass party by contrast has an open membership and it is dependent on its membership for financial resources and not a small number of private donors. It is essential for mass parties to raise the awareness of its members and educate them to prepare them for future official positions at both leadership and administration levels.[73]

4.2. The Evolvement of Parties in Underdeveloped Countries

As explained above, the evolution of the party in Western countries has gone through a number of stages; from aristocratic cliques, into a small group of notables, factions, cadre parties and developing into mass-participation parties with the advent of parliament, electoral systems and plebiscitary democracy.[74]

However, this parliamentary theory explanation cannot be applied to the underdeveloped countries, due to the differences in the historical conditions those societies went through. For underdeveloped countries in the Middle East, specifically Arabic countries, these went from being under Ottoman control at the beginning of the twentieth century, into the colonialist era under the control of European countries. This legacy bequeathed no parliamentary existence or democratic institutions, with colonial mandate systems mostly focused on control and subordination, leaving a lack of democratic apparatus post decolonialization.[75]

Nonetheless, even with different historical conditions, both in developed and underdeveloped countries, preliminary formations were similar in that they were compounds of a small number of like-minded men, based on close relationships, common ideologies or common interests. The difference is that, according to Duverger, parties in Western countries continued their development from "cadre parties" into mass party forms.[76] By contrast, parties in underdeveloped countries persisted in the form of a cadre party, with rare exceptional cases. This was due to the conditions of the colonial system, which generally did not allow parliamentary or constitutional experience to exist or develop. One example is what happened in Syria in 1920, when the French bombed Damascus and forced their mandate instead of respecting the Syrian peoples' desire for an independent constitution.[77]

In summary, parties either retained their cadre nature or took the shape of liberation movements against external occupation and sometimes later on against internal post-colonial governments, who were seen as sympathetic allies of previous occupying powers but were deemed to be acting against the will or interests of the majority. Therefore, the legacies of occupation, foreign subsidies, and cultural hegemony are important background factors affecting the modernization of the region's countries

in which parties could supposedly play a major role. Hence, political parties, instead of adopting the role of building integration and national identity or developing new systems, are more focussed simply on assuming a position of power.

5. Syrian Opposition Parties Case

Reflecting on and applying what is mentioned above with regard to Syria's popular uprising, it would be expected that opposition parties would assume the structure of a mass party to facilitate the participation process of the people. Mass parties would have been the most appropriate approach to organize, mobilize, and lead the grassroots. However, opposition parties opted for the cadre style of party, excluding the masses and discarding the importance of integrating them within the political realm. In doing so, parties have kept grassroots in a passive role and have limited their political influence in favour of party elites.[78] Moreover, there is another potential risk on the horizon. In discord with the framework of modernizing theory, in which crisis forms the stimulus by which parties emerge, there is by contrast a high expectancy that parties will fail to evolve and modernize after passing the crises. Thus, the type and track of development of those parties and the roles they may play in future could well remain static.

5.1. Future Prospects of Syrian Parties

Syrian parties, who appear to be preoccupied with their intra- and inter-party struggles, should look for new resources and practices to re-legitimize their role in the ten-year-long conflict. They need to grow into major players by attracting grassroots support, rather than seeking foreign power endorsements. It is necessary for the Syrian people demanding democratic transition not to be led by parties who, cynically, do not take on the burden of listening to their voices or engaging them in the discourse about decisions related to key issues of their political future. The excuses used for excluding masses, such as political turbulence and instability, or the political ignorance of the masses proclaimed by the political elite are unjustified. These kinds of exclusionary policies have not yielded any political progress in a decade.

Syrian parties with their inept performance and abandonment of their role as vehicles of mass mobilization have evacuated more space for civil society organizations to play a more significant role. Unlike parties, those organizations have proved more able to attract young people from different walks of life because of their relative ideological neutrality. Those organizations have deployed youth talents and competences by providing the opportunity for participation, which parties could not offer.[79]

Thus far, parties' performances have proved disappointing to people, and no political formation has been created to fulfil the Syrian peoples' aspirations.[80] With their weak internal organization and the crisis of public confidence reflected in low membership, existing parties are in dire need of reform. It is vital for parties to find new ways to regain the trust of the masses in order to claim their legitimacy.

To begin with, for a political party to be responsive to the needs of society and to deal with its existing complications, it should have a clear perception of the nature of the relationship it will develop with the masses. Different tools to engage people, mobilize followers, and raise awareness should be developed. For example, it is important to have a popular platform, to interact with a wide variety of grassroots segments by addressing different aspects of their lives. In addition, it is essential to keep up with popular trends and the spirit of the times by utilizing available tools and technology. Similarly, political parties should be clear about the kind of relationships intended with other parties, organizations, and regional and international powers, to avoid becoming a tool in the hands of any foreign bodies, especially in times of crisis.[81]

This paper advocates that internet and new technological advances might represent a chance for such reform. Digital technologies can play an effective role in shaping Syrian political parties' activities. Opposition political parties have not used internet technologies to their maximum capacity. Although using those technologies will not instantaneously solve all the mounting problems of apathy and distrust, they might yet provide the type of organizational change that will help narrow the gap

between elites and grassroots, and to positively effect parties' roles and performance.

The following section seeks to advance models for digitizing parties in the Syrian context, including how technology might be used as a tool to regain the confidence of the grassroots and develop new possibilities for participation. In addition, it suggests opportunities to assist in challenging the status quo – engaging existing players and influencing their power. The key matter for exploration is therefore: What role can digital parties play in bringing about democratic transition in Syria and other Arab Spring countries?

6. The Internet in Syria

The internet was introduced in Syria when Bashar al-Assad was the head of the Syrian Computer Society before he took over the presidency. The introduction of the internet was done for multiple purposes including economic modernization, legitimization of the regime and the mobilization of its supporters.[82] However, the regime was also vigilant about the political risks and security concerns associated with introducing the internet. Yet, despite significant restrictions to control the usage of the internet in virtual politics,[83] to prevent its use by the political opposition to coordinate or carry out deliberations, the opposition circumvented the limitations through a variety of different technical solutions.[84]

The use of the internet by opposition activists culminated in the era of the Arab Spring. Social media in particular played an important role: first, in transmitting the Uprising contagion to Syria after sweeping other Arab countries, and then by igniting the Uprising inside Syria, which was triggered by spreading news about peaceful demonstrations, mobilizing activists, organizing protests, and exposing the brutality of the regime forces against peaceful protesters.[85] This played a very important role since the regime evacuated all journalists from the country following the inception of the 2011 Uprising.[86]

Activists utilized the internet to its full capacity, unlike opposition political parties, who were unable to exploit the internet to engage people, or even to use it as a marketing tool in their favour. For instance, parties' websites have never been used in the Syrian context as a participatory or organizational tool. While some parties have websites, others settled for creating accounts on different social media platforms. Nevertheless, websites were limited to serve administrative purposes like displaying information about a party's founding members, activities, recent news, promoting the ideas and initiatives of party leaders, and to announce party positions towards political events and developments.[87] Such websites do have the potential to be an interactivity medium instead of limiting the message to one-way communication.[88] However, using the internet to its maximum potential requires, in the first place, a willingness from decision-makers in the party, which has previously been absent for different reasons, as Hague and Uhm argue, "This reluctance no doubt derives from a nexus of psychological, structural, and institutional reasons."[89]

In the Syrian context, the internet has never been used as a tool for building and maintaining relationships with grassroots, and new communication and information technologies have never been used to build inter-party or party-grassroots relationships in a trial to regain their trust. Parties have failed to exploit potential participatory elements of technology. According to statistics, the number of internet users increased by 422,000 (+5.5%) between 2019 and 2020, and by January 2020 there were 8.11 million internet users in Syria. Around six million of these were social media users in February 2020.[90] These numbers are from inside Syria only, but might be substantially more if Syrians living abroad are considered. However, there is very little authoritative research, if any, on the internet usage in refugee camps and amongst internally displaced people, but then again it can be inferred that user levels are likely to be low considering the poor state of telecommunications infrastructure and generally appalling living standards for these people.

6.1. Scenario of Change: Digitizing Parties

The reassertion of Ba'ath party rule continues after more than forty years, and post-Revolution opposition parties' performances have done little to dispel the negative notion of party within Syria, although it should be noted that negativity towards parties is by no means an exclusively Syrian phenomenon.[91] Many studies show that people have increasing doubts about traditional parties and lack faith in them being a reliable representative of their demands, some doubting even the necessity of the party for organizing collective action. This negative notion is reflected by declining membership and decreasing voter turnout in general elections. Consequently, parties are losing essential financial support and sources of volunteers, both on-the-ground supporters and activists.[92]

Moreover, recent distrust in political parties has been capitalised on and encouraged by the different alternatives that hold appeal for people, such as NGOs and social media platforms. Those alternatives experience the dilemma of not being parties, yet nevertheless needing to aggregate the numerous demands and interests of the people in organized programs.[93]

Nonetheless, the historical evolution of parties is a continuous process, and the roles of the party keep changing to fit the conditions of society. Driven by social and political movements requesting the change of current dominant systems,[94] the use of the internet by digital parties in response to the demands of change is a mere reflection of the technological advancement of the current era and a trial experiment to seek to address the prevailing socio-economic conditions of society.[95]

6.2. What is a Digital Party?

In his definition of digital party**,** Gerbaudo mentions that "The term digital party attempts to capture the common essence seen across a number of quite diverse political formations that have risen in recent years and which share the common attempt of using digital technology to devise new forms of political participation and democratic decision-making."[96]

In other words, a digital party is a new political formation that uses digital technologies to facilitate direct democracy instead of a representative one in which people choose their representatives to act on their behalf, and purportedly remain accountable to the people. However, with politicians retaining power in representative democracy, the aim is to devolve monopolistic political power from the hands of politicians to ordinary people through mass participation via digital platforms, while replacing the bureaucracy of traditional parties with direct communication between membership and leadership.

6.3. Digital Party emergence

Digital parties emerged at the beginning of the millennium and were further boosted after the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08 alongside the growth of social media.[97] By utilizing such technology, digital parties promise to bring back people's control over their own political lives, and to respond to popular needs and aspirations. It involves them in shaping the political sphere through large-scale interactivity and participation in setting-up polices, and joining decision-making processes, while eliminating the huge bureaucracy of traditional parties. Such bureaucracy is seen as being an obstacle to direct contact between members and leadership and an impediment to holding their representatives accountable for political decisions and outcomes.[98]

Mimicking social media platform concepts, digital parties are trying to use the internet to bring about access to participation for a vast membership base. People are encouraged to participate in this direct democracy with zero cost membership. Using digital party platforms in expressing their day-to-day concerns and coming up with initiatives to solve them these platforms engage members to actively discuss problems and suggest solutions. Besides voting on crucial issues and policies, they also include party leadership positions and other details related to party strategy.

There are many parties, movements and campaigns that are described as digital parties, yet these formations differ in their degree of adaptation to digital technology and structure, while they all share the common

embrace of the digital democracy agenda to reach the change for which they advocate.

One of the earliest examples are pirate parties in North Europe, the first of which was established in Sweden in 2006 which gained two seats in the European Parliament in the European Parliament election. The Pirate Party International (PPI)[99] was established in Brussels in 2009 and coordinated with several other pirate parties in different North European countries – such as Germany, the Czech Republic and Iceland – with the latter becoming the third largest party in Iceland in the 2017 legislative elections. Nevertheless, some digital parties have achieved electoral results and others have not. Parties which failed include, for instance, the parties initiated in South America using the same pirate party concept but with different names, such as Partido de la Red (Party of the Net) in Argentina, and Wikipartido (Wiki Party) in Mexico.

One of the most successful manifestations of digital formations has been the MoVimento 5 Stelle M5S (Five Star Movement). After its initiation in 2009, with gradual success, it became the first party in the Italian parliament subsequent to the national election of 2018. Another example is Podemos in Spain. In 2014, shortly after its foundation, five members from the party were elected to the European Parliament after receiving eight per cent of the votes in the European elections. Moreover, it came third in the parliamentary elections of 2015-16.[100]

In the Syrian case, the concept of the digital party has the potential to end elite domination over the political process, and to convert grassroots political apathy into active participation by engaging them, and encouraging them to take part in the political future of the country. Arguably, one solution would be that opposition parties transform themselves from their current cadre party form into mass party form. However, there are various obstacles to achieve such transformation. One of which is the geographical and physical barriers. With Syrians scattered all over the world, this represents financial and logistical challenges for any physical gatherings, making it difficult to implement a mass party format. On the other hand, it is important, as well, to reach out to people inside Syria, whether in areas under opposition or under regime control.

Therefore, it is crucial to use innovative techniques of utilizing digital technologies, given that significant functions of traditional parties, such as interacting with people, educating them, and raising their awareness, are achievable by utilising the internet.

6.4. Digital Party Features

6.4.1. Membership

Digital parties have redefined and reshaped the political party's membership concept through mimicking the sign-in membership of social media platforms. By doing so, digital parties are ending their financial dependence on membership fees, which is the custom of traditional parties. This new shape of membership can be looked at as a sort of solution for declining party membership over the years.[101] In addition, new networks can be created, based on a relation with members in which communication is easy, efficient and cost-effective.[102]

This new membership aims to involve the greatest possible number of people, regardless of any socio-economic considerations. Hence, the target is to enhance the numerical advantage, which by implication promises the ability to mobilize and organize the masses. Furthermore, the large number of members constitutes an immense base of active volunteers who can be enlisted as sources of free political assistance. This can engage even less active members to spread the word about the party through the minimal digital activity of 'liking' or 'sharing' a party's posts. Hence, digital parties evade the need for a paid cadre and bureaucracy by replacing the element of the 'apparatus' of traditional parties with a participatory platform, disintermediating the relation between members and leaders of the party.[103]

6.4.2. Platforms

According to Gerbaudo, "Platforms are digital systems that act as execution environments of various programs and applications."[104] The platform is essential for a digital party; in fact, it replaces the physical address traditional parties used to have. It is a cost-effective way of

engaging people, cutting overhead costs like salaries, offices and other related expenses of the traditional party. It is a versatile tool used to promote the party's values, with the collecting of data constantly allowing for the adjustment of party strategy accordingly. It facilitates interaction between members and leaders by providing two-way communication channels, while offering the ability to control the level of feedback. It also facilitates decision-making processes by eliminating the vertical multi-layered method used by traditional parties, instead relying on more straightforward bottom-up processes. Platforms also create networks of specific structures with different degrees of privacy for members. However, such functions can be limited by the design of the platform which may qualify the extent of influence such platforms can have on promoting the political participation of the members.

Platforms are designated in diverse ways to serve the needs and goals of the party. Some parties would use purpose-built platforms, while others would use different ready-made interactive platforms, including social media platforms. Nevertheless, even with the creation of a customized platform, digital parties should not neglect the importance of social media platforms in spreading their messages and values to the widest audience possible. Different formations use different platforms for involving the masses in politics, such as the Rousseau platform of the Five Star Movement or the pirate parties use of the LiquidFeedback application. The goal of using these platforms is to disintermediate both the relations between different members and also between the members and leaders, thereby dispensing with the usual bureaucracy.[105]

6.4.3. Participation

With the existence of new, easier to use, free-membership interactive platforms, participation is becoming a viable choice for members. Although there is a scarcity of studies – if any – about the correlation between internet use and political activism in politically unstable countries, including Syria, there are some studies in Western countries showing the rise of political participation amongst people who use the internet, even in the absence of political drive.

Digital parties promise direct democracy and open participation, enabling people to express their opinions on key issues about their lives, which is an essential task of the party since, as noted by Sartori "parties are channels of expression".[106] The internet provides a channel of freedom of expression and allows the right of ordinary people to freely exchange information and materials of interest. By using the internet as their main tool of communication, digital parties are enhancing mass participation by reaching out to grassroots wherever located, interacting with them, and building and maintaining relationships with them. This, furthermore, allows various activities to take place, including soliciting people's opinions and receiving their initiatives, crowdsourcing their ideas, deliberating topics, balloting on different issues, enabling mass contribution, and accessing decision-making processes. These activities all contribute towards constituting the major cores of political participation.[107]

This kind of participation is driven by the advancement of internet communication technologies that provide the tools to facilitate these new methods, with social media platforms in particular providing a comparatively easy and inexpensive means of communication to reach the masses easily. However, the dependence on the internet for digital parties will also require them to be agile; to remain relevant they need to rapidly adapt policies to changing environments, especially paying attention to the aspirations of younger generations who are the majority users.

Furthermore, the internet is a tool for communication between the public and their political representatives to achieve democratic aims. This two-way open flow of information shapes the quality of representativeness of such parties. Therefore, reclaiming representation of the grassroots will be an important gain attained by digital parties. Similarly, the transparency of policies and decision-making strategies resulting from digital approaches is a step towards the accountability and good governance of those parties.

Finally, the easy, open, unconditional membership eliminates any discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic

conditions. This results in the opportunity for more inclusiveness and equal participation, especially for women who have traditionally been politically underrepresented due to challenges such as domestic responsibilities preventing participation in physical meetings.

6.5. Additional Benefits of Digital Parties in the Syrian Context

The opportunities of wide outreach of digital parties provided by the internet have the potential to facilitate the organizing and mobilizing of grassroots, making it easier for leadership to call people to action and to organize online and offline activities, making the digital party active in the public sphere. This would overcome the declining collective action through traditional representatives. Furthermore, there is the ability to organize online training sessions to spread knowledge and awareness about important issues to the party membership.[108]

There is also the ability to extend political reach via organized channels offered by the methods of digital parties. In Syria, the opposition may have the chance to promote the Uprising ideals throughout the country and around the world through the creative means of discussion groups and emails, to create networks of resistance to authoritarian state power and in support of democratic transition by using the internet as a communication tool to spread their message to build domestic and international support for reform.

Due to the relatively low-cost of the internet, resorting to digital form will enable parties with limited resources to increase their media representation and secure their existence.[109] Parties that previously received little or no coverage in the traditional media will have a platform from which to reach a much larger audience, replacing reliance on traditional media to spread their messages. This will be important given the modest existence of the opposition in traditional (non-social) media channels, and the scarcity of opposition satellite channels, with some failing to continue after their inception,[110] and others prioritizing the private agendas and interests of their owners over any national agenda.

6..6. Challenges of Digital Parties

The challenges of digital parties include internet-related concerns such as cyber-security, lack of privacy, protection of sensitive data from third parties, absence of standards and regulations.[111] Yet, there are other challenges related to the ability of digital parties to commit to their pronounced objectives. One potential risk is that instead of instigating direct democracy**,** it instead shifts into plebiscitary democracy. The latter would be one in which the role of citizenry is limited to accepting or refusing referendums or initiatives proposed by party leaderships, without being part of the process of suggesting, deliberating and forming the policies of the party.[112] To avoid this, digital parties should involve people by interacting with members and providing the options for crowdsourcing, while being open to various ideas rather than trying to use people's votes to implement the vision of the party's leadership. Similarly, they need to use technology to advance participatory qualities that they currently lack and avoid using it simply to empower the party's existing practices.

Another challenge is that digital parties tend to attract a specific group of constituents who are not representative of the population as a whole. Those participants are commonly highly educated, with proficiency in using the internet, typically meaning the active, skilled younger population. This, in turn, would result in excluding people with few digital skills, and with no or little access to internet. To overcome this, digital parties have to come up with new mechanisms for engaging citizens and using offline approaches and innovative solutions. For example, by using complementary non-digital resources this could attract a wider audience while avoiding the risk of nominal membership, turning members into mere spectators with diminished activism or commitment, which is usually associated with adopting social media membership styles.

However, the involvement of the masses in decision-making and the consequent necessity of adapting to the results of their demands and wishes would raise the risk of transforming parties' original principles and values, which could undermine a party's credentials in terms of what

it stands for in the first place. Moreover, the open membership with an open platform of discussion and decision-making might expose the party to capture by opponents. In the Syrian case, because of the current conflict, the risk will be higher for anti-regime parties with the existence of the Assad regime's utilization of an electronic army.[113] Moreover, the high tension and sensitivity at this stage of the conflict will present the risk of increasing polarization of opinion among the opposition itself from one side, and all Syrians in general, since people tend to be attracted to others who share their opinions and values.

Finally, applying digital technologies is not the goal per se. Using them will not overcome the popular distrust of existing parties. Rather, they are tools that should be used to organize and combine online and offline activism to engage grassroots and overcome their exclusion from the political sphere. In addition, they offer the prospect of narrowing the gap between masses and elites.

Conclusion

Syrian parties suffer from many internal and external problems, with mass-exclusionary practices being one of the main roots of the difficulties. By marginalizing grassroots elements, the political action of opposition parties appears to have lost direction during the Syrian conflict. Instead of being vehicles for collective action, mass participation, and public representation, they retreated to cadre- or elite-type formations, who only care about their own interests and share of the political scene. Additionally, instead of assuming their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens and building a common national identity, they conceded those roles, instead following narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas. Consequently, opposition parties lost the trust and representation of the grassroots, and at the same time wasted the potential capacities and qualifications of those masses.

To re-engage the public in the political process, the format of digital party could well precisely represent the inclusive tool and innovative solution that is needed. With its open, easily accessible, participatory platform

allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-making processes, this might change popular apathy and distrust, and motivate the masses to participate again, while also holding those parties accountable. While digital parties alone will not be able to tackle pervasive complications of opposition formation, they should be deployed to restore trust and legitimacy in the political landscape.

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