

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS: THE CASE OF SYRIA

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“Since most of what we hear is either plainly untrue, or half true and half distorted, and since most of what we read in the newspapers is distorted interpretations served as facts, it is by far the best plan to start out with radical skepticism and the assumption that most of what one hears is likely to be a lie or a distortion.”

(Erich Fromm)¹

“The press is the hired agent of a moneyed system, set up for no other reason than to tell lies where the interests are concerned.”

(Henry Adams)²

ABSTRACT

Whether in the time of war or peace, media, considered the ‘Fourth Authority’, must struggle to present the truth to the public, making no concession to any kind of authority, whether legislative, executive or judicial. This study, which adopts descriptive-analytical method, gives a brief account of the 2011 Arab popular revolts with reference to the media's significant role in war/conflict. Then, it investigates the manipulative role played by the official and semi-official visual media during the first six months of the Syrian Revolution. As a tool in the hand of the regime, these media outlets worked on propagating the regime’s adopted narrative. This narrative depicts the non-violent protestors as terrorist gangs, and conspirators supported by foreign imperial powers. The media’s manipulative role in the presentation of events and dissemination of information falls under the following categories: misrepresenting reports; the blame game; defaming the opponent; manipulating religious discourse and polishing the image of the regime. Examples are furnished for each category. Finally, the study calls for the core values of ethical media from the Islamic perspective, providing a blueprint for those who aspire to engage in the public information sphere and to ensure reliability and credibility in their profession.

Keywords: *media, Syria, Revolution, regime, information, news*

INTRODUCTION

The late year 2010 situated the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in a new era of profound social and political upheaval, witnessing the rise of populist movements of

opposition to authoritarian regimes. The immediate cause came from a Tunisian street vendor, Muhammad Bouazizi, who set himself on fire to protest his work conditions. (For socio-political, historical, economic, and cultural analyses of the Tunisian Revolution and its far-reaching impact see Ganea, 2013; Boubakri, 2015).

The driving forces for change were as varied as the countries in which the events took place. Nevertheless, there were common grievances and causes: dictator leaders, government corruption, high rates of unemployment, deteriorating living standards, and growing inequality, and the like. The 2002 Arab Human Development Report provides a detailed account and scathing assessment of the economic, demographic, social and political conditions in the Arab world in the period leading up to the uprisings. (See Baroudi, 2004; Gelvin, 2015, pp. 4-7; 25-27).

A conflagration can develop rapidly from a spark falling on a dry brush. This is how the catastrophic Syrian Revolution broke out in mid-March 2011. The key catalyst came from a small southern town of Dar‘a, where a few schoolboys who, influenced by the wave of the popular mobilization, painted anti-government slogans on a school wall. (Lister, 2015, p. 12). Consequently, the teenagers got arrested and tortured by members of the Political Security Directorate.³ In a peaceful demonstration, residents of Dar‘a voiced their grievances.

Instead of handling the situation appropriately, the secret service fired on protestors. Meanwhile, Syrian people flooded into the streets showing solidarity with their countrymen of Dar‘a. The Syrian regime’s ferocious repression only served to inflame the public’s outrage. After enduring months of arrests, torture, and murder, chants for freedom turned into rebellion, bullets and war.⁴

The role of information and communications technologies (ICT) in the dynamics of armed conflicts cannot be underestimated. News coverage can shape and reshape public perception of what and how the conflict/war is (or ought to be) occurring. “Existing differences in media reporting of political events may carry significant consequences for scientific inference, public knowledge, and policy” (Dzabija, 2016, p, 4).

In their book, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*, Hoskins and O’Loughlin “identify and illuminate the conditions of what they term ‘diffused war’ and the new challenges it raises for the actors who wage and counter warfare, for their agents and mechanisms of the new media and for mass publics” (2010, the book’s back cover). The term ‘diffused war’ refers “to a new paradigm of war in which i) the mediatization of war ii) makes possible more diffuse causal relations between action and effect iii) creating greater uncertainty for policymakers in the conduct of war” (Ibid., p. 3).

The authors’ account of the process of mediatization of war is integral to understanding the dynamics of how the governments- revolutionaries conflict is perceived in the media, national and international. War becomes mediatized when the media are so entwined within the conflict that it would be impossible to understand the war without unless the involved role of the media is discerned. (Ibid.). Because it is through media, war is ‘transformed’ and ‘reconstituted.’ (Ibid., p. 5).⁵

On the significance of conflict-sensitive reporting, Ross Howard, an international conflict expert, notes, “professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But it is often through good reporting that conflict is reduced” (2003, p. 2).

Good journalism can deliver several elements of conflict resolution: channeling communication, educating, confidence-building, correcting misperceptions, identifying underlying interests, providing emotional outlets, framing the conflict, face-saving, consensus-building, solution-building, and encouraging a balance of power. (Ibid., p. 8-9).

According to the UNESCO handbook on conflict-sensitive reporting, good reporting should be neither defamatory, derivative, malicious, nor corrupt. What is necessary to fulfill the requirements of so-called good journalism during a violent conflict is the following: being accurate, being impartial (keeping the balance), and being responsible. (Dzabija, 2016, p, 20).

It is admitted, on the other hand, that media reporting *depends* on the extent of freedom on the ground. Where government pressure on the media is limited – in democratic regimes – the scope of reporting should reflect conventional media preferences toward novel, large-scale, dramatic developments that challenge the conventional wisdom and highlight the unsustainability of the status quo. Where political constraints on reporting are more onerous – in non-democratic regimes – the more conservative preferences of the state will drive the scope of coverage, emphasizing the legitimacy and inevitability of the prevailing order (Baum & Zhukov, 2015, p. 1).

There is no doubt the post-2011 Arab Media are suffering from a multifaceted crisis, (ethical, bureaucratic, administrative, etc.). According to 2019 Press Freedom Index, Arab countries, like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Syria are ranked among the worst 20 countries. (“2019 Press Freedom Index,” 2019). Official and unofficial media, supposedly the ‘Fourth Authority’, became the communication mechanism of autocratic governments, not the people.

The aim of this study is to assess the role of the Syrian media in the ‘mediatization’ of the Revolution via underreporting or overreporting of events, which, in turn, spawned a diffused war or conflict. For the purpose of the study, descriptive-analytical method is adopted. The study scope is limited to the official and semi-official visual media during the first six months of the Syrian Revolution, from March to August. This period is of particular importance, as during which the non-violent protest movement went militarized.⁶ The selected samples are the Syrian TV, and Ikhbariya TV, Nour El-Sham,⁷ (official), and Addounia TV,⁸ (semi-official).

On the other hand, the study calls for the core values of media ethics based on the Islamic perspective. These values provide a blueprint for those who aspire to engage in the public information sphere and to ensure reliability and credibility in their profession.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the war on Syria has become a global event and a humanitarian crisis, substantial number of books, book chapters, journal articles, edited volumes, theses cover a myriad of

relevant research areas, including media coverage and reporting, at national and international level.

Dzabija's thesis (2016) investigates factors that affect reporting bias in the international coverage of the Syrian war. Taking three states as case studies, (Saudi Arabia, the United States and Turkey), this study analyses what types of events (rebel-induced or government-induced civilian casualties) the media in the above-mentioned states covered on 50 identified days of increases in a number of casualties between May 2014 and May 2016. In her project, Moufti, (2012) uses a reflexive design methodology with elements of graphic design and journalism as visual to observe media hegemony in the context of the Syrian Revolution.

By contrast, al-'Aridee's study (2017) examines revolutionary media in terms of their rhetorical structure and linguistic patterns and, on the other hand, discusses some challenges that inhibited these media outlets from creating a viable alternative to the pro-regime's media.

Fares (2015) compares the role of the pro-regime's media with the working mechanisms of revolutionary media from 2011 to -2013. Further, he refers to the generally mediocre performance of pro-regime's media, like favoritism, government censorship, lack of professionalism, etc.

Chams Eddin's thesis (2013) seeks to answer the key question "how effective was the official Syrian propaganda in dictating a narrative description of events on the ground in Syria which inhibited effective international support for democratic change?" (Ibid., p. ii). The writer focuses on the first sixteen months of the Syrian Revolution from March 2011 to July 2012.

While the above significant works fill the research gap in their respective research area, this study mainly focuses on how revolution/war in Syria during the first six months has been mediatized, transformed and reconstructed by the official and semi-official media coverage, which reported almost exclusively on rebel-induced crimes and casualties.

The Regime's Propaganda

Theoretically, the article 38 of Syria's constitution calls for the right of free speech and press. When it comes to practice, however, this right seems null and void. ("Freedom of the Press: Syria," 2012). For example, the 1963 State of Emergency allows the authorities to arrest journalists under vague charges of threatening the national security. (Ibid.)

All media outlets in Syria are controlled and censored by high ranking military officials and the security services headquarters. (Fares, 2015, p. 187-188). Right from the very beginning of the uprising, official media had the full advantage of on-the-ground reporting, yet Arab and foreign media outlets were expelled and hence denied official access to events coverage. (See examples in "Freedom of the Press: Syria," 2012).

The Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCMFE), a Damascus-based nongovernmental organization, reported that the Syrian government called for a “formal declaration of war on the media” (Ibid.). Over one hundred cases of violations against journalists, correspondents, etc., from March to October in 2011, were documented. (Ibid.).

The regime’s media, while completely cutting itself off from the established values of its profession, adopted the following strategies:

a. Misrepresenting reports and distorting facts

The regime, along with its coopted media, worked tirelessly to convince foreign people that Syria was fine, and nothing had gone wrong.

For example, Addounia and Ikhbariya in April 2011, claimed that protesters in al-Midan area of Damascus were nothing but citizens who were celebrating the blessings of rain after a period of drought. (Fares, 2015, p. 190; Eddin, 2013, p. 46).⁹

Putting a positive spin on the situation, Reem Haddad, (the then director of the Syrian television), told the BBC in an interview in June 13, 2011 that residents of Jisr al-Shughour, a city in Idlib Governorate in northwestern Syria, near the Turkish borders are there to visit their relatives. (Fares, 2015, p. 190; Starr, 2012, p. 71).¹⁰

b. the Blame game

On quite many occasions on TV shows, the official media played the conspiracy card blaming foreign powers which were masterminding initial protests. Why? Because Syria is, and has always been, a country of resilience and resistance to the State of Israel and its allies.

And here is the evidence! reports and news on weapons and money stored by terrorist and armed groups in the al-Omari Mosque in Dar’a. (Eddin, 2013, p. 30). For the credibility of the reports, the media interviewed two famous figures in Dar’a: sheikh Ahmad Sayasna, the imam of al-Omari Mosque, and Rizq Aba Zayd, the mufti of Dar’a,¹¹ who affirmed the existence of ‘foreign conspiracy’. (Ikhbariya TV, 10 May 2011). What the audience was untold, however, is that both men had been blackmailed into appearing on television in order to provide credibility to the official narration.¹²

c. Defaming the opponent

In the manner of defense mechanism, the state-run Media projects the regime’s own flawed attributes to the opposition.

In the early days of the uprising, peaceful demonstrators carrying olive branches were labeled by the media as extremists, terrorists and conspirators. (Eddin, 2013, p. 28). The Syrian TV and Addounia broadcasted forced confessions of the so-called terrorists in Dar’a. (Eddin, 2013, p. 30). Both TV stations also aired a number of shows to discuss the amoral character of some opposition figures, (e.g. homosexuality, political treason, bribery, etc.). (Fares, 2015, p. 190).

Further, Bouthaina Shaaban, the main political and media advisor to

Assad claimed that Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Friday sermon, (March 25, 2011), represented a clear and direct call for sectarian strife in Syria. ("Majlis al-Sha'b al-souree yotalib al-ra'ees al-Assad bi eidah al-islahat allati yanwee 'itimadaha." 2011).

Addounia, again and again, broadcasted reports about al-Qaradawi followed by interviews with regime supporters who depicted him as a source of sedition encouraging Syrians to kill each other. (Eddin, 2013, p. 42).

In his sermon, al-Qaradawi merely praised the Syrian revolution and spoke metaphorically of the train of revolution arriving at the important station, likening the uprising to recent events in Tunisia Egypt, and Libya. (Ibid.). Yet, he did not instigate sectarianism.

d. Manipulating religious discourse

Syria is a country of religious diversity. The overwhelming majority of the Syrian population are Sunnis who account for about three-quarters of the Muslim population. As a predominant religion, Islam has deep roots in the Syrian soil playing a prominent role in shaping the social life as well as the culture of Syrian people.

The Ministry of Endowments, the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, has gone to extraordinary lengths in implementing the regime agenda and attacking the Salafi-Wahhabi-puritan thought.

Within this context of the war of ideas, Nour El-Sham was instituted. "Nour El-Sham Satellite TV is a cultural and social channel mantling the cloak of Islam. It speaks for moderation, which is a characteristic of Bilad *al-Sham*.¹³ Specifically, Nour El-Sham adopts the religious moderation away from fanaticism, and violence, reflecting the religious discourse of Syrian scholars to counter deviant thought and extremist religious trends."¹⁴ The 'deviant thought and extremist religious trends' refers to Saudi and Qatar-based Salafists/ jihadists.

To the annoyance of Salafi doctrine, Nour El-Sham quite often broadcasts Sufi gatherings in mosques, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (PBUH) or engaging in *dhikr* (remembering Allah).¹⁵

For nearly three years, Nour El-Sham used to broadcast Friday sermon by Ma'moun Rahmah, the post-revolution preacher of the Umayyad Mosque. This ultra-pro-regime sheikh transferred the pulpit into an anti-opposition platform, launching rhetorical offensives against Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc.¹⁶ Meanwhile, he maintained constant glorification of the Syrian military, Hizbullah, Iran as well as Russia.

On the other hand, there were Shari'a scholars who refused to appear on TV, despite repeated requests. This ethical resistance drove the media outlets to host little or quasi-scholars who would pontificate on a variety of big serious issues, such as Islam and democracy, political Islam, Islamist movements, etc.

e. Polishing the image of the regime

The media followed various tactics to prove to the wider public opinion the greater Syrian 'support' for the regime or the President.

For this purpose, the media frequently aired pro-regime demonstrations, songs praising Syria/the President, and interviewing ‘ordinary’ by passers¹⁷ who announce their rejection of the conspiracy theory and call for the national unity. (Fares, 2015, pp. 190-191).

In fact, what was happening on the ground is different. A lot of so-called 'pro-regime' demonstrators are nothing but government employees and workers who were forced to participate or else they would face the consequences. School boys and girls, requested to suspend their classes, joined the gathering. Even private minibus drivers were ordered to put their buses at the service of the demonstrations for the whole day.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Syrian TV regularly aired celebrations of the Syrian Army depicting them as heroes and liberators. (Eddin, 2013, p. 30). Regime forces, together with other supporting militias, have been found heroes, however, in killing, kidnapping, torturing, bombing as well as in “ta’feesh” phenomenon. This post-revolution term describes widespread systematic looting or stealing carried out by Syrian army and its allies in all deserted areas which fall under the regime control. (“National Defense Militias Loot Air Conditioners,” 2019).

DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, media coverage in democracies emphasizes on change rather than on the status quo, yet in non-democratic regimes, news coverage reflects regime preferences. Consequently, in the case of protest movements, media tend to underreport or overlook government’s crackdown. (Dzabija, 2016, p. 27).

Syria is known to be a state of intelligence, where the security of intelligent services, in conjugation with trusted elements of the military, has dominance in controlling people and in defending the regime against perceived threats, internal and external. According to Lesch, "Hafez al-Assad had largely established the mukhābarāt state in Syria, having created a tangled matrix of overlapping security agencies during his time in power" (2012, p. 5). Al-Assad’s long-term strategy has militarized nearly all resources and apparatuses of the state: economy, industry, security, education, as well as the media.

Reporters, newscasters, and journalists are appointed on the basis of the regime loyalty, as well as political and sectarian affiliation rather than on professional experience. (Fares, 2015, pp. 188-189; CF. Starr, 2012, p. 2).

It is within this context of security’s hegemony, favoritism and censorship, the above strategies of the media are assessed and discussed.

“Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth” (Stafford, 2016). The media seemed to hinge on this law of propaganda. But telling lies no longer functions in an age of mass information flow, let alone the lack of professional experience on how to convince others that your lies are true. As mentioned above, in the initial protests, the media claimed that protesters in al-Midan, Damascus, took to the street to celebrate the blessings of rain. And this is doubtless clumsy and absurd handling of the case. I distinctly remember how the regime and its news agencies became an object of ridicule and loathing in the social media at the time. Ikhbariya TV was thus named ‘the Channel of Rain.’

On the top of that, according to Addounia, where unrestrained lie emanates, Qatar-based al-Jazeera constructed massive look-alike models of the cities of Homs and Hama and was broadcasting scenes of soldiers beating and shooting civilians. (Starr, 2012, p. 60). The reason why al-Jazeera was fabricating this news is to tarnish the image of the Syrian government. It is worth noting that this 'Big Lie' has been the preferred policy of the regime for decades.

In the 1980s, Mamdouh 'Adwan, a Syrian poet of 'Alawite sect, remarked, "The Syrian media keep lying even in the weather forecast." ¹⁹

As far as the blame game is concerned, one cannot deny the fact that what is happening now in the Middle East cannot be understood in isolation from various Western countries' effort to create division and chaos in the Middle East.

For instance, 'KIVUNIM,' a document written in 1982 by Oded Yinon, an Israeli journalist, clearly shows the Zionist Plan for the Middle East through the break-up of the Muslim countries into religious sectarianist divisions, as part of an Israeli expansionist project. (Shahak, 1982). This is obviously happening today with the balkanization of Iraq and Libya into small states and the use of trained insurgents sent into places like Syria to cause unrest and civil war.

In 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, during a visit to Tel Aviv spoke of 'creative chaos' to forge a 'New Middle East.' (Rihami, 2015, p. 116). The term 'creative chaos' coincided with a flurry of activity on a project called the "Broader Middle East and North Africa." (Ibid.). It is not hard to see a linkage between the current turmoil in the region and this plan for redrawing a New Middle East.

Equally, it is not hard to realize that the foreign conspiracy against Syria would not have been possible without the regime's ferocious repression of protestors coupled with its reckless disregard for all political solutions. This stubborn policy has allowed to a brutal, protracted war mixing regional power struggles, and sectarian hatred. For example, Hizbullah's sought intervention has heightened the 'sectarianization' of the conflict providing an emotional rallying point for popular mobilization. (Erlich, 2014).

The official media's one-sided reporting of events has reinforced the above-assumption about non-democratic government media on the one hand, and caused a climate of deep mistrust and irritation among Syrians towards the de facto 'Fourth Authority' on the other hand. During his meeting with Bashar al-Assad in 2011, the Mufti of Damascus conveyed a message of popular dissatisfaction with the amoral role of the media, "Mr. President, when we watch news via our media, we go disgusted." The President replied, "You are right, our media are backward." (A. Bezim, personal communication, March 24, 2016). Due to the growing feeling of dissatisfaction, a lot of cases of defection from the media sector were reported. (Eddin, 2013, p. 47; "Freedom of the Press: Syria," 2012).

In search of an alternative to the official media's narrative of the conflict, Syrian activists were able to construct a counter-narrative via social media, which supplied a space for a spectrum of opinions and events. (See Marnicio, 2014).

To borrow the Canadian law professor, Joel Bakans' words, the regime's media outlets are essentially a "psychopathic creature", unable to recognise or act upon moral reasons to refrain from harming others" (Edwards & Cromwell, 2006, p. 3).

Media Ethics: The Islamic Principle

Islam, in addition to being a religious and spiritual belief, is a coherent system of life, a social order, a philosophy of life, a system of economic principles, and a rule of government. Islam provides its followers with a code of ethics that covers every aspect of life, including media.

The most important of these ethics are as follows:

a. *Truth and justice*

{ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ
أَقْرَبُ لِلنَّفْقَىٰ }

(المائدة: 8)

"O believers, be steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity. And never allow your hatred of any people to lead you away from justice. Be equitable, that is nearer to godfearing." (the Qur'an, 5: 8).

It is a legal and social obligation on the mainstream media to tell the truth, whatever it may cost. The Arab revolts have made people rethink the role of the press/ media in disseminating true information and standing for the cause of justice. As a result, they turned to social media, as an alternative to governments'-controlled narrative of the conflict, to voice their concerns. (see Storck, 2013, pp. 3-4).

b. *Freedom and responsibility*

{ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ } (البقرة: 256)

"There must be no compulsion in religion." (The Qur'an, 2: 256).

Islam sees faith as a matter of conviction. It never seeks converts by means of compulsion, threat or pressure. Therefore, as freedom of belief, the most basic human right, is guaranteed, other types of freedom (freedom of expression, conscience, press and so on) are protected and secured. (see Kamali, 1994).

Everyone is free to express his or her opinion as a fundamental human right. Without the freedom of expression, the Islamic principle 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil' is impossible to put into practice. This freedom, however, should have certain limits and cannot be taken in an absolute sense. (Jallow AY, 2015, pp. 1-4).

Therefore, the media should practise freedom within the sphere of social responsibility. In newsgathering or news reporting, media professionals have to perform their ethical social responsibility of representing issues of concerns to others. For example, journalists face ethical dilemmas of balancing the competing rights of privacy and freedom

of expression or the right of the public to know. (See Malik, 2015, pp. 264-266; White, 2011, pp. 12-14).

c. Accuracy and authenticity

{ وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا }

(الإسراء: 36)

‘Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Man’s ears, eyes and heart shall be called to account’ (The Qur’an, 17:36).

One of its impressive characteristics is that Islam neither accepts assumptions nor permits anything to be based on suspicion or myth. Every theory, dogma, argument or even faith should be substantiated by concrete evidence and a solid foundation.

Commenting on the above verse, Sayyid Qutb notes,

These few words establish a complete method for the human mind and heart, incorporating the scientific approach that humanity has begun to apply recently.... Making certain of every report, action or situation before passing a judgment concerning it is the essence of the Qur’anic approach. (2008, vol. 11, p. 163).

On the other hand, the Qur’an, while calling for the accuracy of information or reports, condemns spreading rumours and false news (the Qur’ān, 49:6). It also warns against damaging the reputation and honour of others (the Qur’ān, 24: 23).

In a similar vein, the Prophet, in several authentic sayings, advises Muslims not to indulge in acts of falsehood, and instructs them how to make sure of the accuracy and truth of their reports. He said, ‘The worst falsehood is that a man makes his eyes see what they have not seen’ (Qutb, 2008, p. 163). Also ‘It is indeed a bad practice for a man to always begin his statement with “it is claimed”’ (Ibid.). Elsewhere, he is quoted as saying, ‘Refrain from assumption, for assumption is the basis of the worst lies’ (Ibid. p. 164).

Based on these traditional instructions, is formulated the motto of scientific/research enquiry of Islam:

إِنْ كُنْتَ نَاقِلًا فَالصَّحَّةُ أَوْ مَدَّعِيًّا فَالدَّلِيلُ

If you are quoting, verify the source, yet if you are making a claim, give evidence (Al-Buti, 1997, p. 34).

Good or reliable media during the war or conflict should fulfil the following requirements:

Being accurate, being impartial (keeping the balance), and being responsible. Being accurate refers to getting the correct information - which is one of the most important conditions. The facts as they happened, the spelling of names, evidence, and facts should be double-checked before being reported on. Impartiality (balance) refers to not taking sides. There are always two sides

in any conflict, and inclusion of both sides is essential for maintaining the balance. Responsibility is linked to the obligations of journalists to the society to whom they report the news and to the people they report about. Journalists should protect their sources and use honest methods to acquire the news (without breaking the law). (Dzabija, 2016, p, 20).

These core values, if taken into consideration, enable media organizations, as a powerful tool, to reduce the causes of the conflict and to explore opportunities for resolution.

CONCLUSION

Media outlets pretend to represent themselves as self-evidently dispassionate windows on the world. Yet, in fact, they constitute a propaganda system for specific interests (e.g. elite, regime, etc.).

This study sought to identify the practices that account for the ethical crisis of the official and semi-official media reporting and disseminating news about the initial uprising in Syria. It has been seen how even the most obvious or hard facts were distorted, suppressed, marginalized and ignored by these media. For the last four decades, the regime, has succeeded in establishing a puppet media. The media, lacking in professional experience and media ethics, drove protestors and activists to disseminate a stream of information through the social media providing a competitive challenge to the regime's narrative.

Finally, the study in very brief highlighted Islamic standards of ethical media that pursue authentic and worthwhile news.

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Endnotes

¹ Erich is a German social psychologist, who died in 1980. His statement is quoted in David Edwards and David Cromwell, *Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 1.

² Henry is an American writer, who died in 1918. His statement is quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

³ According to abundant reports, the children were tortured in a number of methods, including nail plucking. This savage behavior was overseen by 'Atif Najib, the President's cousin, who was the head of the Political Security Directorate in Dar'a at the time.

⁴ The regime, fearful of the power of nonviolent opposition in neutralizing the power of the government, was desperately trying to provoke resistance into acts of violence. As Stephen Zunes aptly notes the regime was "recognizing that the Syrian people were far more likely to support a regime challenged by an armed insurgency than through a largely nonviolent civil insurrection." Stephen Zunes, "Supporting Unarmed Civil Insurrection in Syria," in *The Syria Dilemma*, edited by Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel, (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2013), 107-108. On the militarization of the uprising see Emile, Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, 2013), 81-92.

⁵ On the role of the media as a facilitator of, and a threat to peacebuilding and conflict prevention see Piers Robinson, Philip Seib and Romy Frohlich (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Media, Conflict and Security*, (Routledge, 2016).

⁶ Bashar al-Assad admitted that the militarization of the uprising took place during the above period. Retrieved October 9, 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYLpZ-b501c>>.

⁷ A religious satellite television station based in Damascus, which was launched in July 2011.
<https://www.facebook.com/pg/nour.elsham.channel/about/?ref=page_internal>.

⁸ A private TV station owned by Rami Makhlof, Bashar al-Assad's cousin. Retrieved July 8, 2019.

<<https://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/business/media-marketing/2009/jul/5/24071>>.

⁹ See the video. Retrieved August 8, 2019 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cykr1ee44NA>>.

¹⁰ See the video. Retrieved August 8, 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6k7AVtstqo>>.

¹¹ Due to the regime's bloody repression of demonstrations, Aba Zayd announced his resignation. (April 23, 2011) Retrieved July 22, 2015.

<<http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-149530.htm>>.

¹² The regime accused both men of being the brains behind the Dar'a uprising and of orchestrating alleged terrorist operations against security forces by Salafist radicals. They were charged with obtaining financial resources and weapons from Saudi-based Salafists, calling for jihad, instigating demonstrations, issuing a fatwa branding Syrian security forces as 'Zionists', and paying volunteers to attack security forces and burn down Ba'ath party headquarters. Reinoud Leenders & Steven Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 17, no. 2, (July 2012): 152. The regime's allegations are debunked in the article, 151-154.

¹³ It is defined today as (Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Palestine).

¹⁴ https://www.facebook.com/pg/nour.elsham.channel/about/?ref=page_internal

¹⁵ This is based on my own observation for over 4 years.

¹⁶ Retrieved May 2, 2018. < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufZkfbqNclo>>.

¹⁷ "Recordings from official Syrian channels show the same people being interviewed over and over in different parts of the country." Fares, 191.

¹⁸ A good number of my friends and relatives were among those who by force attended the pro-regime's demonstrations.

¹⁹ Retrieved July 8, 2019

<<http://www.welateme.net/erebi/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8459#.XVEdgPIzbIU>>