



REUTERS
INSTITUTE for the
STUDY of
JOURNALISM

**Syria's post-uprising media outlets:
Challenges and opportunities in Syrian radio startups**

Rima Marrouch

Hilary and Trinity Terms 2014

Sponsor: The Said and the Asfari Foundations

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Said and the Asfari Foundations for the opportunity to study at Oxford. The time at Reuters Institute allowed me to look deeper into topics like using social media for newsgathering or data and mobile journalism.

My deepest thanks go to my adviser, Tim Suter, not only for his patience and guidelines on my paper, but often also on work and life.

Special thanks go to James Painter and John Lloyd for their sense of humor and intellectually stimulating discussions during our seminars. And to all the staff at the Reuters Institute Dr David Levy, Alex Reid, Kate Hanneford-Smith, Monique Ricketts, Tanya Vale, and Rebecca Edwards, who were always ready to assist and answer all questions with a smile.

Also a big thank you to all the people interviewed for this paper for sharing their knowledge.

To my fellow fellows -- for wine and time spent together, two crucial elements for forming any new friendship.

And finally to my father and sister, for their constant love and support.

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Background: the pre-uprising history of Syrian media.....	6
3. Syrian Media since March 2011	8
4: The recent experience of Syrian Radio	16
5. 'It is all about the listeners': building a sustainable radio sector	21
Audiences and content.....	21
Funding.....	25
6. Conclusions.....	29
7. Bibliography.....	31

1. Introduction

The media coverage of every conflict comes with its own set of problems and challenges. In Syria, foreign journalists would often enter the country for a few days, either on 7-10 day government official visas, or on a quick visit to the areas outside of government control in the north of the country. Some would enter for a longer period of time and stay for weeks to produce documentaries or longer form¹. There were also short trips inside. Especially when the government lost control over areas in the north, journalists could spend a few hours travelling from Gaziantep or Hatay to towns just across the Syrian-Turkish border, like Azaz, just to get Syria's byline. But even these short visits have become more and more difficult, and more and more dangerous since winter 2012 when the number of kidnappings dramatically increased.

Syria remains the deadliest country for journalists, according to press freedom groups: the New-York based group, The Committee to Protect Journalists, reported in 2014 that sixty-seven journalists had been killed in the country. Many journalists watched with horror the video showing the murders of James Foley, and later Steven Sotloff, beheaded by the so-called Islamic State. Others refused to watch the videos as a demonstration that they would not be part of the terror that the Islamic State is trying to spread.

Foley was a US journalist who covered Syria and who had been kidnapped inside the country in 2012. Following his death, a heated debate has been taking place about the US government policy of not paying ransom, alongside the continuing discussion about the ethics of using freelancers' work in conflict zones, but also about the industry as a whole.

Tom A. Peter, a freelance journalist who also travelled on assignments into Syria and who knew Foley, expressed it poignantly in a piece for the New Republic: "Now that he's gone, I wish I could believe that such an extraordinary person died striving to inform an American public yearning to know the truth. It's harder to accept what really happened, which is that he died while people eagerly formed opinions on his profession and the topics he covered without bothering to read the stories he put in front of them."² When Peter was himself detained in Syria he reflected that it wasn't his country, it wasn't his war and that now he would at worst be killed, or – in the best case scenario – indefinitely detained.

Today, there are even fewer foreign journalists entering the country, which should come as no surprise ('there is no story worth your life,' as teachers repeat in journalism schools). Nevertheless, it is troubling that there are even fewer first-hand accounts of the war and the people at its heart. Syria itself has been largely left in the dark, even when it is still the subject of main headlines. Most of the

¹ The French journalist, Mani, spent weeks in 2011 in Homs to document what has been happening in the city. His work was broadcasted on Channel 4:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyQIv5wyYGE>

² <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119222/journalist-kidnapped-syria-reacts-isiss-james-foley-beheading>

sourcing of events in Syria includes phrases like: “according to activists,” or “according to the Syrian Observatory to Human Rights.” It seems that, more than in any previous conflict, the responsibility for gathering the news, and getting the information out to the wider world, has largely fallen now, not only on the shoulders of local journalists and activists but also on regular Syrian citizens.

It is therefore imperative to understand the steps being taken to build, and sustain, journalistic media within Syria as the growth of reliable journalism is of the highest importance – not only for Syrians themselves, but also for those who wish to understand what is truly happening.

In the course of my research, completed in May 2015, many people have been happy to share their experience and the lessons that may be more widely drawn: but some, for wholly legitimate reasons given the nature of the conflict and their position in reporting it, but mostly due to the sensitivity of the donors-benefactors relationship have asked not to have their identity disclosed.

The case of Syria is part of a larger trend in the region; many countries, for example Libya and Yemen, are more and more difficult to access for journalists coming from abroad. It is the journalists on the ground, who continue to often risk their life to get reliable information that in many instances is not convenient for the authorities or local warlords and militias.

2. Background: the pre-uprising history of Syrian media

Since the late president Hafiz Al-Assad took power in a military coup in 1970, there have been several phases of the government oppression of Syrian media.

Hafiz Al-Assad was consistent in his policy of crushing any dissident voices as well as suppressing a free press. For the 29 years of his rule, Syrians were dependent on the monopoly of government-controlled sources of information. Three newspapers: *Al-Baath*, *Tishreen*, and *Thawra*, were the only national print outlets during his authoritarian rule, along with state-run TV channels. Some Syrians did not even bother to follow the media; apathetic and tired of coverage of the Presidents' countless meetings, speeches, and op-ed articles praising the leader.

A different era came when his son, Bashar Al-Assad, took power on his father's death in 2000. This second stage of Assad's family rule of Syria saw limited liberalization, not only in the media but also in the wider economy. For a short time, Syrians witnessed a period of greater freedom and an environment where, even if there were not complete freedom of speech and press, nevertheless the limits were extended in comparison to his father's days. Subsequently, this period came to be referred to as the "Damascus Spring".³ For a short period, Syrians felt no fear discussing politics in salons, forums, and coffee houses. Although certain topics were still off limits (such as direct criticism of the president Bashar Al-Assad), it was nevertheless a more open space than during the rule of Assad, the father. Privately-owned newspapers, radio, and TV channels appeared. One of the most successful ventures was *Al-Doumari*, the country's first independent satirical weekly. It was published by the very well-known Syrian cartoonist, Ali Farzat. The magazine talked about corruption and used humour to call for reforms in the country.

However, this period of relative freedom for Syrian media proved short-lived. *Al-Doumari* was shut down in 2003. Many intellectuals who had spoken openly before, like Michel Kilo and Anwar Al-Bunni among others, were put in jail. The regime returned to business as usual with a minor, but significant, change: the 2005 amendment to the media law allowed private-owned radio stations to operate. But these radio stations were mostly owned by businessmen close to the circle of power (Rami Makhlouf, Sliman Maarouf, Nabeel Kezbari), and the condition for ownership was clear: no politics on air. Morning shows, music, or topics about society were allowed, but nothing more. Nevertheless, in this third stage of media development, access to the internet was improved, and young Syrians started following news websites like *DamasPost* or *Aljamal*. During the policy of economic liberalization run by Assad the son, new glossy magazines appeared alongside privately owned newspapers like *Al-Balad* and *Al-Watan*. But the information they contained was still heavily modified through censorship and the strict enforcement of government editorial guidelines.

³ <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=48516>



Figure 1: One the covers of Al-Doumari weekly

3. Syrian Media since March 2011

The most recent phase started with the beginning of widespread protests in Syria in March 2011. The Syrian uprising changed forever the news landscape in Syria and the way citizens could obtain, share, and consume information. With limited access for trained journalists, foreign as well as local, to the sites of breaking news, local media activists and citizen journalists took on their own shoulders the responsibility for getting the information out. Many Syrians obtained their information by following these activists and media networks via social networks, since the traditional Syrian media of state-controlled TV and newspapers failed to deliver accurate information. It was no surprise that state-run media outlets failed citizens in the delivery of accurate news, since this had been the case for decades. For many months after the outbreak of the protests, Syrian pro-government TV channels like *Dunia TV* chose to ignore the reality on the ground, instead choosing to broadcast morning shows dealing with such issues as how to lose weight, or what colours to wear this season, failing to mention the large street demonstrations against the government.

In their news bulletins, facts were either twisted or omitted. As one example among many, the news anchor of a bulletin broadcast on April 1, 2011⁴, acknowledged that there were demonstrations in Douma, a suburb of Damascus, but claimed that security forces had not opened fire at protesters. However, according to a Human Rights Watch release, security forces had indeed opened fire and at least eight people had been killed.⁵

Dunia TV reached a new low in its general approach to the crisis in its shocking coverage of Daraya. On August 25, the Syrian pro-government journalist Micheline Azar entered Daraya, soon after government forces had stormed the area.⁶ Many Syrians were shocked when Azar interviewed, first, a seriously wounded woman (instead of assisting her to get to a hospital or calling for help). Only after Azar was done with interviewing her did soldiers come to assist the wounded woman. Then Azar moved on to interview two children who were sitting in shock next to their dead mother. This incident further deepened most Syrians' mistrust of the mainstream media, and pushed the younger generation to look for alternative sources of information. TV has crossed many ethical lines in the past three years, and there is probably a separate paper to be written about *Dunia TV* conduct.

Unsurprisingly, Syrians turned elsewhere for their information. Arabic satellite channels, like *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* were often the source, although as time passed some became critical of *Al Jazeera's* coverage of Syria. Both channels often hired some of the local activists as their 'correspondents' on the ground in provinces like Idlib, Latakia, or Hama. Their reporting may not always have been balanced, but often these local activists were the only source of information for reporters who were themselves working from bureaus in Beirut and Cairo, banned from obtaining a Syrian entry visa, or unwilling to risk crossing the border

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhIE6ADqXOU>

⁵ <http://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2011/04/05-4>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qxxs2uXIXns>

between Turkey and Syria. Trips to Syria with the help of smugglers, either via Turkey or Lebanon, were rare and dangerous at the beginning of the uprising. In February 2012, Anthony Shadid, reporting for the New York Times, died when he was on his way out of Syria with his colleague, Tyler Hicks, after a week of reporting inside the country. The stated cause of death was an asthma attack.⁷ At the beginning of 2012, the way into Syria was still difficult, with government forces controlling most of the border crossings.

With the fall of the major northern border crossings, Bab Al Salameh and Bab Al-Hawa, into rebel hands, reporters began to have access to what the majority of pro-opposition Syrians call 'liberated areas' in the north. But the access changed again by the end of 2012 when the number of kidnapped journalists in the north of the country increased. Many media outlets stopped sending their journalists into Syria. Because of this, Syria's conflict is probably the first conflict that has been covered so remotely for so long a stretch of time via Skype interviews, or YouTube amateur footage of local media activists monitored from bureaus in the region.

Almost from the beginning of the uprising, Syrians started organizing their own news outlets, as people needed to find alternative sources of information to the government backed media. Syrian media networks and local media outlets therefore mushroomed across Syria.

One of the strongest was and remains *Sham Network*.⁸ They were not only the most reliable in passing info via skype to reporters, but also they were very well organized with a wide network of contributors across the country. In February 2013, they started issuing their first weekly newspaper, printed in the south of Turkey and distributed across northern Syria. The weekly carried news from the battlefields, as well as opinion pieces. It talked about the most pressing matters for Syrians: the first issue covered such issues as the lack of electricity and fuel, the fighting between Kurds and the Free Syrian Army in Ras Al-Ain, the flow of Syrian capital held by the business class out of the country to Egypt, Algeria and Jordan (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/09/23/239646.html>). *Sham* saw that with lack of electricity and network in the north, there was a need to go back to traditional media: hard copies of newspapers for people to read. But even their good organization at the beginning of crisis could not translate into actual printing weekly: sadly, only after 13 issues the newspaper closed down due to a lack of funding. Today, the group continues covering closely developments in Syria. It is a good resource for updates on all sides of the conflict: Islamic State, government forces, and Syrian opposition. Their content is mainly distributed on Facebook.

⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/17/world/middleeast/anthony-shadid-a-new-york-times-reporter-dies-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>

⁸ https://www.facebook.com/ShamNetwork.Arabic?ref=br_rs



Figure 2: May 29, 2015 Facebook post by Sham Network informing that Al-Touwaqli village in Aleppo countryside was taken over by the Islamic States after heavy fighting with rebel groups.

*Souriatna*⁹ is another weekly publication that has been able to operate, and be distributed in both government-controlled and opposition-controlled territories. It is a successful venture as it has been published in a digital copy from Damascus since 2011. The weekly includes news roundup of the week (which always present both sides version on the discussed events, opposition and government), longer pieces on current problems (for example in May 24, 2015 issue on water contamination in Syria), but also feature stories which show that there is still life going on in Syria (art, sport, etc.).¹⁰ The first few issues were printed, but it proved too dangerous, and due to these security concerns the staff decided to move it predominantly online, although it is still printed in rebel-controlled areas, one of the printing houses is in *Saraqib*.

This weekly publication gathers young journalists, citizen journalists, and writers from across the country. The editor-in-chief worked as a professional journalist before the uprising, and one can see a certain level of professionalism in the content of *Souriatna*, even though it depends mostly on young Syrian writers and contributors. The work is done mostly underground. To keep the operation safe, contributors frequently don't know the identity of the editor on the other side in case one of them should be arrested: the detainee will not be able to pass on names he doesn't know, even under torture.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/souriatna?fref=ts>

¹⁰ May 24, 2015 issue: <https://souriatna.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/souriatna-192.pdf>



Figure 3: Souriatna, May 24, 2015 issue

There have also been many local initiatives:

- Menbej, a town of 100,000 people in Aleppo province, has approximately ten local newspapers. The best known is *Al-Masar Al-Hor*. It was critical of both the government and the conduct of the rebels. This created problems for the *Al-Masar Al-Hor* team with the local armed brigades that it criticized. Some rebels took one of the young reporters away for questioning several times. But the biggest blow for the team, according to local activists, was when the Islamic

State entered Menbej. The newspaper stopped being published since 2014, when Islamic State took over control of the town.

- In other towns the printing of local newspapers, often just laser printed on A4 paper, is also happening. In the small town of Kafranbel, in Idlib province, there were at least two newspapers. The town has been dubbed, “the conscience of the Syrian revolution” because of its weekly demonstrations, and the critical cartoons held up by demonstrators that often reflected the main questions, dilemmas, and frustrations of many Syrians across the country. In February 2012, *Al Mantra* was the first “revolutionary” newspaper to be published in Kafranbel. Sadly, the team ran into financial problems and had to suspend its activities due to lack of funding.

Along with newspapers, there are also new TV and radio stations, albeit mostly broadcasting from outside Syria. However, as the cost of running a TV station is much larger, there has been only one TV station that managed to sustain its broadcast and is largely followed by people of Aleppo:

- *Halab Today* (<http://halabtoday.org>) carries information about the situation in Aleppo, and often gives viewers guidance about which areas to avoid because of heavy clashes. The content is still basic: images from Aleppo with a news scroll on the bottom – but often this information is nevertheless crucial. The offices of *Halab Today* are in Gaziantep, Turkey, but they have a wide network of approximately 30 correspondents in Aleppo itself and the wider province that feeds them information. The team also is working on a radio-station under the same name. Halab Today remains hugely popular among both Aleppo residents and Alepeans living in Gaziantep.¹¹
- *Deir El Zor* channel changed its name to *Al-Jisr TV*¹² and is broadcasting from Istanbul. In the beginning it focused on *Deir El Zor* area in east Syria and was broadcasting from Istanbul. Now it covers all Syria. According to media activists, it doesn’t have a big audience.
- *Syria Al-Shaab*¹³ was a TV station broadcasting from Jordan but it has closed down due to lack of funding, according to one person who worked in the channel but who asked not to be named.
- *Syria Al-Ghada*¹⁴ was a TV station broadcasting from Cairo, where many Syrian media projects were based (like Radio Ana) before June 2013. As the political climate in Egypt changed, the station was forced to closed down its offices in 2015 and shut down its broadcast. There are currently plans to move the offices to Istanbul and resume broadcasting.

With the destruction of infrastructure and economy, the news business is one of the few that is still functioning not only inside Syria, but also for Syrians in countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt. Many of the media activists who would be gathering news as volunteers in the beginning of the uprising, later found jobs in Syrian post-uprising media outlets or networks, sending news

¹¹ <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/28/166054186/syrians-turn-to-aleppo-tv-for-survival>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/Al.JISR.TV?fref=ts>

¹³ <http://syriaalshaab.tv/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/algad.tv.ch?fref=ts>

exclusively to for example *Sham Network* or *Radio Rozana* among others. After leaving Syria some others started working in media offices or bureaus in Beirut, Cairo, Gaziantep, or Istanbul.

Roughly 100 new Syrian media projects were established after March 2011, according to Syrian journalists working in them. They estimate that there are 60 newspapers/ magazines (weeklies, bi-weekly, monthly) including children's magazines (like *Zaitoun* and *Zaitouneh* in Saraqib), nine opposition TV channels (like *Halab Today*), and approximately 25 new radio stations, according to a research done by Radio Souriali in 2013 to map the Syrian media landscape.

Deborah Amos, the NPR Middle East correspondent who has been covering Syria since the 1980s, captures the scene history:

First of all, you had all these activists who learned the media on the fly in that first rush, the Local Coordination Committee (LCC), the Syrian opposition group, everybody making their YouTube videos. You had activists from abroad giving journalism lessons: 'Take a street sign', 'record a newspaper so you can verify the date', 'get up on the balcony so you can see the size of the crowd'. This was an on-the-ground tutorial in journalism in a country that didn't have open media, but which, at the same time, had contact with the full range of the international press, not the Western press, but everybody. It was an international journalism tutorial for activists who became media activists. Then some of them left the country, some of them lashed themselves to brigades, and I think that job ran out for a lot of people and they were looking for something else to do. They had the skills. And these media started popping up.¹⁵

The current state of the media in Syria seems to be chaos. It is not clear what will emerge out of it. Some media outlets that mushroomed directly after the uprising, like *Souriatna*, are still there and developing their content. Others, like *Syria Al Shaab*, have already closed down. Despite the initial enthusiasm of creating new media outlets, some seemed not to live up to the audience's expectations. It seems that it is a process of evolution. "I suspect this is going to be Darwinian, just like it was with the rebel groups. There are different criteria but it is the same idea. Syrians have a sixth sense for crap, they have been listening to it all their lives and they know what their propaganda sounds like. I just don't think that those ones who are putting crap out are going to survive," says Amos.

The phase that immediately followed the outbreak of the Syrian uprising, which saw dozens of media outlets mushrooming and different media projects being launched spontaneously, was definitely the most promising phase in Syria's history of journalism. In no previous period of Syrian history, even in the short lived period of parliamentary democracy (from 1944 until the military coup of 1949) had we witnessed such a plethora of emerging outlets and projects, as if Syrians were trying to make up for lost time. I believe this stage ended around 2013 when darker times and forces in the Syrian conflict unfolded.

¹⁵ Interview with Deborah Amos conducted via Skype on May 19, 2014

In January 2014, the Islamic State took complete control over Raqqa. After it won clashes with Free Syrian Army, Islamic State became the de facto ruler of a city with a population of 200,000 people. They soon launched their own radio station, broadcast on 99.9 FM from Raqqa. The radio station in the beginning had no online presence. It would broadcast programmes about Jihadi doctrine, and also speeches from Jihadi fighters, according to activists from Raqqa.

Mohamad Azouz, an activist and filmmaker from Raqqa who currently lives in Turkey, describes its appeal:

It is the radio of ISIS, so of course it is inciting violence and hate speech towards other non-Muslim groups and the West. Its audience constitutes mostly of taxi drivers and shop-owners who want to show loyalty towards Al-Baghdadi. You need to understand that in Raqqa if one's loyalty towards the Islamic State is questioned, one is killed. This is one way to show loyalty.¹⁶

The radio-station has now a website and is available online.³ It is called Al-Bayan¹⁷ and it posts daily audio news bulletin (approx. 10 min.) on the advancement of the Islamic State. But it also posts written statements of the Islamic State and updates from different areas under IS control. The Islamic State has been expanding its media presence in Raqqa and beyond, not only via the radio station but also through such ventures as the IS weekly magazine – *Dabiq* – which is available online and which, according to activists, is distributed in Raqqa in hard copy.



¹⁶ Interview with Mohamad Azouz conducted via Skype on May 14, 2014.

¹⁷

<https://akhbardawlatislam.wordpress.com/tag/%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/>

Figure 4: Radio Al-Bayan

Today, the situation on the ground is more troubling, even alarming sign. The enthusiasm that was present in the beginning of the uprising and the bustling new creativity and projects is gone among most Syrians as the reality had hit hard Syrian journalists, media activists, but also regular citizens. Many of the grass root initiatives, like Sham Network or 1+1 radio station, were forced to close down due to lack of funding. In Raqqa, the Islamic State has suppressed any local media initiative taking over equipment that belonged to the ANA radio station. The only voice that is allowed in areas controlled by the Islamic State is the media that belongs to the group, like Dabiq magazine or the radio station. Many Syrian media activists and journalists have been detained by the Islamic State, like Mohamed Nour Matar, who went missing on August 13, 2013 while covering in Raqqa a protest against IS. Many, like Matar have been missing, detained, or even killed by the Islamic State. The areas under Islamic State control has been largely left in the dark and underreported.

It is impossible to analyze all the available media outlets in a six-month research period. To understand both the current state of, and future prospects for, Syrian media I propose to focus on Syrian radio: in many ways the simplest and most direct way of reaching a potentially large and disparate audience.

4: The recent experience of Syrian Radio

Radio seems a particularly powerful medium in conflict and post-conflict areas. There are many examples from Sudan and Somalia for example, of community radios providing crucial information for the local population – although, of course, it can also be used to spread false information and propaganda. But there are other reasons, beyond its simplicity, for my focus on radio stations.

Radio has always been a popular medium among Syrians. Privately owned radio stations were becoming popular even before the uprising. As noted above, the 2005 Media law permitted the launch of private radio-stations: soon, there were approximately 15 of them, like: *Arabesque*, *Al-Madina FM*, *Sham*, *Mix FM*. They were allowed to operate under the condition that they would not air any political programmes. Despite avoiding politics, some of these radio stations like *Sham FM*, would carry shows (for example *Hiwar al-Youm/Today's Discussion*) with phone interviews of local government officials, talking about local government issues.

In addition, my own experience of reporting Syria over the last four years has convinced me that, while some stories may be better told via print, and others have great visual dimensions, radio is the perfect all-round medium for telling the Syria story. From the beginning of the uprising, Syrians were afraid to show their faces on screen or use their real names. There was a genuine fear of being on camera, whether seen by people inside or outside Syria. But radio gives a sense of privacy, the anonymity needed by people fleeing for their safety, even though, at the start of the uprising, the difficulty of acquiring any recorded “actuality” material made radio coverage more difficult. NPR’s Deborah Amos sums up the difficulties:

I remember trying to cover it in the early days of the uprising. It was a nightmare for radio because there wasn't any authentic audio that you could collect. Yes, you could watch YouTube like anyone else, you had to verify it as closely as everybody else and all you had then was the audio from YouTube. In the beginning, it was a very hard story to do for radio. That changed and it changed because Syrians left Syria so you had somebody to talk to.¹⁸

The situation inside the country also gives radio as a medium some significant advantages over TV. It is not as expensive as TV to produce, and small battery powered radio devices are a good solution when other devices are plagued by constant electricity cuts. Several radio stations, like *Nasaeem Syria*, have distributed their own radio devices in several towns in northern Syria. Radio stations are also still widely listened to inside the country while traveling via car.

These radio stations are not only trying to target Syrians inside the country but also Syrian refugees and Syrian professionals living outside the country. Gaziantep in southern Turkey has grown to become a media hub for many Syrian projects, as well as being the base for many humanitarian organizations who have opened offices in the city. The city is located just 60 km north of the Turkish-Syrian border

¹⁸ Interview with Deborah Amos conducted on May 19, 2015

and has become a home for an estimated 200,000 refugees. There are growing tensions between local population and Syrians¹⁹, so it is not certain how long Gaziantep will remain a safe hub for Syrians to operate in.

Overall there are at least 22 radio stations, with either offices in Gaziantep or at least individual correspondents based there. Some have main offices in Istanbul; others have their offices further abroad, like *Rozana* whose main office is in Paris. There is an array of transmission options: some of these radio stations are only available online, while others are broadcast both on short waves and have also online presence. Some, like *Radio Fresh*, a local radio station broadcasting from Kafranbel in Idlib province, are available only through their local broadcast, although for people outside Syria, there is a possibility of listening to their daily news and programs through their account on soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/freshfm90mhz>).

As of May 2015, at least 17 Syrian radio stations were in operation:

Name	Main office	Distribution	Website/Social media/Soundcloud
FRESH	Kafranbel, Syria	90.0 FM (mainly Kafranbel)	https://www.facebook.com/Radio.Fresh.90.00FM?fref=ts http://mixlr.com/radiofreshsyria/
SOURIALI	No main office – operating from several cities: Marseille, Washington DC, Paris, Damascus	Online presence + few hours of daily broadcast via Hawa Smart	https://www.facebook.com/RadioSouriali https://soundcloud.com/souriali
ANA	Gaziantep, Turkey	102.7 FM (mainly Aleppo)	http://www.ana.fm/ar/ https://twitter.com/RadioanaSY https://www.facebook.com/RadioANAsy https://soundcloud.com/radioana
AL-KUL	Istanbul, Turkey	95.5 FM	http://www.radioalkul.com https://www.facebook.com/Radio.Alkul?fref=ts
HAWA SMART	Gaziantep, Turkey	103.2 FM	https://www.facebook.com/hawasmartradio
ROZANA	Paris, France	103.5 in Hama, Homs, and Aleppo 99.9 FM in Qalamoun	http://rozana.fm
YARMOUK 63	No main office (team working from Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey)	Online	http://yarmouk63radio.weebly.com https://www.facebook.com/yarmouk63/info?tab=overview
NASAEM SYRIA	Gaziantep, Turkey	98.5 FM (mainly Aleppo and Idlib)	https://www.facebook.com/radio.nasaem.syria/timeline http://www.nasaem-syria.fm
HARA FM	Gaziantep, Turkey	99.9 FM (mainly Aleppo)	https://www.facebook.com/radioharafm?fref=ts http://hara.fm

¹⁹ <http://www.thenational.ae/world/turkey/syrian-refugees-face-backlash-in-turkey>

YASMEEN AL SHAAM 8RBTNA FM	Gaziantep, Turkey	103.4 (mainly Aleppo)	Online	https://www.facebook.com/yalshaam?fref=ts www.yalshaam.com
ARTA FM	Gaziantep, Turkey	99.5 (mostly Kurdish areas: Amudah, Qamishli)	Online	https://www.facebook.com/gherbetna/info?tab=overview http://8rbtนา.com/
NAHDA FM	No main office		Online	https://www.facebook.com/NahdaFm?fref=ts Www.NahdaFM.Com
WATAN	Gaziantep, Turkey	90.2 (Aleppo) and 90.3 (Idlib)		https://www.facebook.com/fm.watan?fref=ts http://watan.fm/
ALWAN	Gaziantep, Turkey	93.3		https://www.facebook.com/alwan6070?fref=ts www.alwan.fm
Roo7	Gaziantep, Turkey	92.7 (Aleppo) 99.7 (Hama and Homs) 98.0 (Qameshli)		https://www.facebook.com/RadioRoo7?fref=ts
SOUT RAYA			Online	https://www.facebook.com/Raya.fm?fref=ts http://www.raya.ps/

A business is slowly emerging around these new media outlets, such as the development of mobile apps, though it is still a small sector and often done voluntarily by friends. Bahr Abdul Razzak, a young Syrian activist, recently developed the *Syria Radios*²⁰ app. By tapping on the mobile app, you can access most of the Syrian opposition radio stations, such as *Rozana*, *Radio ANA*, *Radio Alkul*, *Souriali*, and *Hawa Smart*. “I wanted an application for my own use to let me find all the stations in one place, because I travel a lot, and it’s very hard to open the websites separately. Also, I’m based in Turkey and there are no Arabic channels here so the online radio was a good solution for this,”²¹ says Abdul Razzak.

There is another application, *Gherbtنا*, albeit linked to an online only radio station. “We want to provide useful information, like the situation on the border crossings, which areas are being shelled and which ones are safe, as well as the currency exchange rate. Things that are useful for Syrians inside”, says Mojahed Akil, the 25 year old app developer who now lives in Gaziantep.²² Despite the successful design and packaging of *Gherbtنا*, Akil says he’s struggling to find funders to sustain his project. “I need a team to update the data and I need to pay them. Many Syrian media projects are being supported but we still haven’t found a donor. I think we’re meeting the wrong people,” he adds. For the time being he pays out of his own pocket.

But after *Gherbtنا*, other projects followed. “People started contacting me to develop apps for them. Now, I have so many projects that I have had to hire additional people and train them in how to create apps,” says Akil. Alongside Akil’s partner, they are now a team of five, and have named their Gaziantep-based

²⁰ <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bahrabd.syriaradio>

²¹ Interview conducted with Bahr Abdul Razzak via Facebook chat on May 15, 2014

²² Interview conducted with Mojahed Akil via Skype on May 15, 2014

company Namaa, the Arabic word for growth. Since launching *Gherbtna*, Akil has worked on an app for *Nasaeem Syria* radio station, among others.

As I was researching the radio stations, I came across positive stories, like the story of Akil, showing the creativity of some Syrians. But I kept thinking of the more gloomy side. Experience elsewhere shows that the very power of radio can be used for incitement in conflict areas, as well as more open and informative uses. There are several examples in history where local radio stations have been used as a tool to incite violence, such as the case of *Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLHC) in Rwanda.²³ The station was financed by Hutu extremists and incited hate and violence against Tutsi. Bearing that in mind, I tried to look for any traces of hate speech in the radio stations I had access to online.

Apart from the example of the Islamic State radio, in my research on Syrian radio-stations, I did not identify any direct hateful messages. But as Bilal Zaiter, a Syrian Ph.D. student at Paris VIII researching emerging media says: “It depends how you define hate speech.”²⁴ As part of his research, Zaiter, had to monitor several Syrian emerging media, specifically a number of radio stations. “In several programmes, I came across content that was glorifying taking up arms,” he says. While listening to some radio services, you certainly come across stories of mothers sending their children, teenagers and adults, to take up arms to fight the regime, or songs encouraging young people to join the battle. Some of it is definitely opposition propaganda; the same way, there is also some government propaganda.

Direct hate messages are mostly found in amateur videos widely circulated on social media, such as YouTube, among government and opposition supporters alike. For example the video²⁵ showing a young boy who is being hoisted on people’s shoulder while he is singing, “Wait Alawites, we are coming to slaughter you” (the Syrian president is an Alawite). The pro-government side had its own chant⁴ that became popular on social media: “You and I.”²⁶ There is also a version sung by a young boy, although the song was first chanted by a group of Syrian soldiers. “We will f. the people of Jobar, Harasta, Ghouta, Daraya,…” mentioning, one by one, areas inhabited by Sunni population that were outside of government control. Another chant was “Ya Bashar la tehtam” (Bashar, don’t you worry) with pro-government thugs chanting to the president: “We are your men, we drink blood.” In Syria, with the exception of Islamic State radio, it seems that the hate-speech has moved to social media.

However, it is not just direct hate speech that can betray a biased agenda: editorial selection plays at least as important a part in determining the balance of news reporting. Despite the fact that direct hate speech appears mostly in other media rather than radio, there are troubling signs among some, albeit not all, of the new and aligned radio stations. A former editor-in-chief of one of the radio start-ups,

²³ Melvern, Linda. *People Betrayed*. Zed Books. 2009. London. P.81

²⁴ Interview conducted with Bilal Zaiter via Skype on August 19, 2014

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U70bTWRGFxA>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4w1RkTFM-w>

who agreed to speak on the condition of anonymity, said that he noticed the lack of news coverage of events happening in other Syrian communities.

There was a large explosion in Homs in the government-controlled area of Al-Zahra [a largely Alawite community]. When I said that we should include it in our news bulletin, I was told 'There is no need'. But it is not only Homs a largely Alawite community. 'Recently, a group of 150 young Kurds were kidnapped in northern Syria by the Islamic State. 'There was no mention of that either in the radio's bulletin's. ²⁷

This editor-in-chief resigned after two months, citing the lack of coverage of events related to communities that are part of minorities and that are often perceived as siding with the Syrian government.

²⁷ Interview conducted via Skype on August 7, 2014

5. 'It is all about the listeners': building a sustainable radio sector

Steve Warren, the author of *Radio: The Book*, says that when he teaches a class about radio programming he writes on the board: "It's all about the listeners."²⁸ But finding the listeners is the main challenge for the Syrian radio start-ups.

Audiences and content

It is almost impossible to measure the popularity or reach of these radio stations, especially for their broadcast service. The only available measures are of listeners online, and even these numbers are not always very satisfactory. Estimating the audience and the reach has been one of the main obstacles in my research. In a country torn by war, it is difficult to measure the impact these radio stations have on Syrians. "Whoever tells you they have x number of listeners, they are lying. There is no mechanism or ways to measure it," I was told by one journalist working in one of the radio stations, who asked not to be named.

To address this, several radio stations, including ANA, 7ara, ARTA, Watan, Sawt Raya, and Alwan, are planning to create a joint-technical team that would visit the centres of broadcasting, measure frequency, assess wave penetration, and conduct polling to assess the number of listeners. "We will do mapping of the broadcast of all radio stations. All information will be disclosed. Some radio stations claim they are broadcasting in let say Deir El Zor where electricity comes for few hours a day. But if you don't have consistent broadcast, you are not really broadcasting," says Rami Jarrah, co-founder of Radio ANA.²⁹

Three specific examples show the different ways in which Syrian radio stations are seeking sustainability.

The experience of Radio ANA suggests that it is possible to find out more about the available audience and the performance of the radio stations in meeting it. The audience of Radio ANA consists of people under the age of 30 years, according to Jarrah. "We don't have listeners from the Free Syrian Army, mostly these are people linked to the local councils and local authorities. The targeted audience is civil society, and people in the 18-40 age group," says Jarrah. The station wants to widen the audience with programs like "shou btaaref" ("What do you know?"), using simple messages to explain such concepts as human rights as well as different such political concepts and approaches as communism or liberalism, raising awareness of people who might have not been through formal schooling.

Jarrah says there is no way to measure Radio ANA audience on short wave. They can only measure people listening to the radio online. Their most popular program: "Maa El nas" (With people) has an average audience of 250 people listening online. ANA was seeking FM carriage by a third party organisation, but, following talks, Radio ANA's management decided to not to proceed. "We were supposed to sign a document saying we are committed to the "ethics of the

²⁸ Warren, Steve. *Radio: The book*. Focal Press. 2005. Burlington. p.1

²⁹ Interview conducted with Rami Jarrah via Skype on May 17, 2014

revolution". And we didn't want to do that. Syria needs an independent media that people can trust and you cannot achieve it by signing such documents. We want to broadcast to the coastal areas (Alawite areas). I cannot approach them as a 'revolutionary radio station'," says Jarrah.³⁰

In terms of Facebook page popularity, **Radio Souriali** is definitely in the lead with 224,000 claimed users (as of end of May 2015). In June 2014 it became also the first Syrian radio whose accounts have been verified by Facebook. "It meant a lot to us. It was an important indicator that we are on the right track," says Caroline Ayoub, project manager at Radio Souriali.³¹ She points out that "Facebook itself picks the most popular accounts, you cannot nominate an account." The radio station relies heavily on social media. "It is the major tool that you need to use today," says Ayoub.

Souriali is definitely one of the strongest Syrian media projects. The group, with 20 staff members including seven inside Syria, pays a lot of attention not only to the audio service but also to the visual design, branding, and packaging of their on-line shows. "I decided to approach it as a sustainable business: consistency, branding, a clear message," says Ayoub, now based in Marseille but who, in her previous life in Damascus before the uprising, was a brand manager and head of fashion working with such international fashion companies as Guess, L'Oreal, and Dior, which explains her focus on establishing a strong brand for the radio station.

Mostly, the radio station staff work remotely from their apartments scattered in Syria, Lebanon, United States, France, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Germany. Ayoub admits that it is often not easy to work when the team is scattered across several time zones and working largely via Skype. But despite the difficulties, the radio station launched in the beginning of October 2012. Programmes are hosted by such well-known personalities as Honey al-Sayyed, who before the uprising had the second most popular morning show in Syria on Radio Madina, or Lukman Derky, a well known Syrian Kurdish poet who has also a show on Souriali.

The radio has 500,000 returning visitors to the website each month and 200,000 playbacks on their sound cloud account. They have estimated 4 million on-line listeners although Ayoub admits that these numbers are difficult to verify. They broadcast for three hours a day in Syria (1800 – 2100), using equipment and transmission capacity provided by Hawa Smart (see below) in Hama, Homs, Damascus, Latakia, and Aleppo. Their annual budget is approximately between €200,000 – €250,000. The editorial proposition for the station does not focus heavily on news, which would require a large network of activists inside the country, offering instead a more broadly based mix of programming.

The radio station that focuses most heavily on news is **Radio Rozana**, also founded in June 2013. It has a network of 60 contributors across Syria, with a full time staff of 12. At the end of August 2014, it claimed 40,724 followers on Facebook. It is available on FM (103.5 in Hama, Homs, the Latakia countryside,

³⁰ Interview conducted with Rami Jarrah on May 17, 2014

³¹ Interview conducted with Caroline Ayyoub on June 23, 2014

and Aleppo and at 99.9 FM in Qalamoun). It has an informative website and presents solid and reliable news focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the opposition, which perhaps explains why it was blocked within Syria in November 2013.

Hawa Smart has different roots, as it is a project of the group SMART. The group started first as an informal group of Syrian and non-Syrian activists sending media equipment into the country (small cameras, radio transmitters, satellite internet equipment). The group formalized their work and registered in November 2011 in France as ASML, Association de Sourien aux Medias Libres. The group aimed to play a supporting role for existing radio stations, providing the technical capacity necessary for terrestrial FM transmission, concentrating on building radio towers in the liberated areas of Syria. In March 2013, SMART started a network of FM broadcasting, to air the content of radio stations that they supported. This was the Hawa SMART FM network. SMART then decided to produce its own content and launched Radio Hawa SMART on January 1, 2014. They are on air daily for 12 hours, and in the evening the group gives airtime to stations like Souriali and others. Currently Hawa Smart has 69,782 Facebook followers, and its broadcast service is available in Damascus, Homs, and Hama (103.2 FM) and in Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia, and Deir El Zor (99.6 FM). The group currently consists of 20 staff in Turkey with 15 correspondents on the ground.



Hawa Smart member standing on one of their towers in northern Syria after the tower was installed (courtesy of Hawa Smart)

Hawa Smart's content is edited outside the country, says Armand Hurault³², the director of Public Relations for the Syrian Association of Free Media, the group in overall charge of supporting Hawa Smart as well as some other projects. Hurault

³² Interview conducted with Armand Hurault in Oxford on June 4, 2014

explains their focus as being not only on war-related news, but also on building civil society, and reflecting the emerging administration. The group has been attacked more than once. In November 2013 they were attacked in Raqqa by a group of Islamists and on December 6 2013, they had to move their transmitters to Deir El Zor, only to find themselves being shelled by government forces on December 9.

Despite these difficulties, even activists on the ground connected to providing content to other radio stations admit that Hawa Smart are the strongest when it comes to the broadcast of FM-available content inside the country. Hawa Smart also sends out a daily news bulletin in Arabic to other journalists and activists interested in Syria, providing a daily round-up of clashes between government and opposition forces, along with details of the number killed on both sides. It also includes information about which areas of the country are under government shelling, and where government forces have been dropping barrel bombs. Recently it has also included information about the executions carried out by the Islamic State.



Example of SMART Bulletin

Radio Fresh is one of the most interesting Syrian radio stations. It was founded in 2013 by a small group of media activists in Kafranbel, in Idlib province in northern Syria. It is truly what we can call a community-radio, covering local issues that are important for its local audience. “The success of Radio Fresh is that they really speak about issues that touch Kafranbel’s residents. For example, fixing the local power plant or distribution of humanitarian aid in town. They don’t speak about the Iranian nuclear program or international affairs, stories that people can follow in mainstream Arabic-language media outlets,” says Ali Alshlash, a Syrian researcher living in Gaziantep. More focus on local radio stations might be a good approach and successful approach that other radio stations could also use.

The examples of the radio stations mentioned above represent what we can so far call 'successful' media projects if we take into account that they are still operating and producing content, even if it is hard to estimate their audiences with any accuracy. But there have been many projects that were forced to shut down: the following two examples of online radio stations which have been forced to close down since their launch show clearly the challenges facing any new start-up.

Bidayeh Jdideh (New Start) and ***Wahed + Wahed*** (1+1) were among the first online radio stations when they were launched in 2011. *Bidayeh Jdideh* was produced in Amman, Jordan, from a small studio apartment on Rainbow Street. The small place was a place full of Syrians who would stop by whenever they were in Amman. It was one of the most dynamic places I have encountered, with conversations and debate about the country, with interesting guests, airing calls to residents of shelled areas. It was truly giving a voice to the voiceless in the early stages of the uprising, produced by people who truly believed in its mission. But Hosam Badri, the station's co-founder, says that Jordan turned out not to be the best choice of location for starting a Syrian radio station. Turkey provides more flexibility and freedom.

Badri is open about the reasons for the closure of the station. First, he identifies the deliberate decision to rely exclusively on funding from Syria. "We felt we want to create a Syrian radio station so our funding should also be Syrian," he says in a Skype interview from Istanbul, where he is currently located. The group was offered more funding if it would adopt a more Islamic tone. "We didn't want to do that. We felt like we had a good mix of programmes: for both secular and for more religious Syrians," Badri says. He also admits that the group's four staff at some point stopped believing in the purpose of continuing their work, when confronting society's militarisation and war. Badri recalls that he would sometimes hear horrifying testimonies on air. "I believe in the type of work we were doing, but its place and time is when the sound of bullets dies down," he says.

Lama Khayer, a Syrian journalist working currently in London for Al-Ghad TV, was one of the co-founders of *Wahed + Wahed*. There were six volunteers in the core team. *Wahed + Wahed* was one the first post-uprising radio stations, launched as early as July 2011. It aired material produced by Syrian activists that was widely available on social media, as well as their own in-house produced material. When Khayer looks back at this experience she still says it was one of the best projects she participated in: people genuinely believing in their work, working as volunteers. But the lesson that can be drawn from *Wahed + Wahed* is that in start-ups sometimes it is not good to be the first one. "Maybe if we started later, we could have learned from others. How to get funding, how to write proposals," she says speaking via phone from her home in London. But she adds that "The experience was great, a group of young people with ideas and passion."

Funding

Unfortunately, it is just as hard to identify the money spent and budgets as it is to track down hard audience figures. Nevertheless, two broad strategies emerge:

donor funding, or a more self-generated funding mix. Of the donor funded stations, only a few were prepared to talk openly about budgets, and funding, although other stations were prepared to talk more openly about the donors they rely on and the level of resource they deploy. There is an irony in this lack of full transparency given that it is one of the values preached by these radio stations. Other researchers studying the topic have also noticed the poor transparency over funding as one of the recurrent problems.³³

- Souriali has opted for a strategy based on donor diversification. The radio is supported by: PAX Christi, IWPR, British Council, and National Endowment for Democracy.
- Radio Rozana is supported by International Media Support for their staff salaries, while CFI (Channel France International) provides training for their journalists. Its headquarters office is based in Paris and according to a person who saw Rozana's launching proposal (but asked to remain anonymous) Rozana founders asked for start-up funding of €1,820,660 for its first two years.
- Hawa Smart is supported by a small grant by the Asfari Foundation; but it does not disclose who its other donors are.

An alternative approach is adopted which looks to generate additional sources of income. According to the co-founder, Rami Jarrah, 25%-30% of ANA's budget, comes from selling reports and material for newspapers like *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, and *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*. Jarrah believes that sustainability and a proper business model should be the basis for any media project. "Culturally it has not been easy. Among Syrians, there is a mentality that you shouldn't be making money out of projects connected to the uprising. I think it was true in the beginning. But now, if you can survive without actually asking anyone for help, then this is actually positive," says Jarrah in a Skype interview. *Radio ANA* is working on expanding its studio to include not only audio but also video production to be able to produce video packages for media outlets or NGOs as a way to generate income.

It is difficult to estimate how much money in total has been spent on supporting Syrian media projects since March 2011. But there is no reason to suppose that Syria will not prove to be a part of a larger trend. As Mark Nelson and Tara Susman-Peña, authors of the 2009 report *Rethinking Media Development* write: "Of the \$129 billion that was spent by donors on international development in 2010, only about 0.5% of that was specifically targeted at the media, or about 50 cents for every \$100. Nevertheless, that adds up to \$645 million. And a closer look at how this money was used yields a picture of haphazard and random approaches, poorly coordinated with broader reforms, and rarely led by the counties that are receiving the assistance."³⁴

³³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/08/against-odds-syria-flourishing--201483094530782525.html>

³⁴ Mark Nelson and Tara Susman- Peña, *Rethinking Media Development*, Washington, DC: Internews, 2009

Although the *Rethinking Media Development* report does not discuss the case of Syrian start-ups, having been written before the Syrian uprising, its critique of the donors community may prove equally relevant to Syria: “Donors barely keep track of what they spend on media development, or how they spend it, and judging by some methodologies used to address media weaknesses, learn little from past failures... Many decisions about investments in media development seem to be driven by political or foreign policy concerns – often using the media to get out donor-inspired messages – not because of the impact that the media might have on broader development.”³⁵

In countries with successful media transformation, like Poland, donors and international media organizations supported the Polish-led process with effective and well-coordinated action ranging from successful loan programs (Media Development Loan Fund) to trainings for journalists and managers. As the authors of the *Rethinking Media Development* report says that “the focus and coordination that was seen in Central Europe is today quite rare.”

Several Syrians leading different start-ups have complained that there is poor coordination and that the media environment is almost like the ‘wild west’ with head-hunting from different NGOs trying to get the best journalists into their projects. “We are not sufficiently developed to start competing with each another,” says one founder of a Syrian radio start-up in Gaziantep who asked not to be named. “We are young institutions that need support, not an environment in which we compete against each other,” he added. Syrian media start-ups in the beginning faced a generous donor environment; many non-governmental organisations were interested in funding media projects as part of their non-lethal aid. However from January 2014, several people interviewed for this research paper, both from Radio start-ups to NGOs funding different projects, referred to ‘donors’ fatigue’ regarding Syrian projects, with clear risk to projects that have been unable to diversify their funding.

In the June 2007 report *Towards Economic Sustainability of the media in Developing Countries* issued by CIMA (the Center for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy), its authors point out that “Media sustainability is not always attainable.”³⁶ In the case of Syrian start-ups this is all too true. Talking about the sustainability of Syrian start-ups in a country torn up by war is a fantasy; and is hard to envisage even in an immediate post-conflict environment, where the economy will be so weak that local businesses will have no incentive to advertise.

In theory “good product leads to audience, which leads to new products. But this cycle does not work very well in every market,” as one participant of the working

³⁵ Nelson, Mark and Tara Susman-Peña, *Rethinking Media Development*, Washington, DC: Internews, 2009. http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/InternewsRethinking-Media-Dev.web_1.pdf

See also: Anne Belson, ‘Funding, Free Expression: Perceptions and Reality in a Changing Landscape,’

³⁶ *Towards Economic Sustainability of the media in Developing Countries*, Working Group Report, June 22, 2007.

group cautioned. The virtuous circle of this revenue model has often recently failed, even in developed countries. And even in non-war circumstances many argue that sustainability should not be the single goal of media assistance (p.8). But according to the working group, sustainability should still be a major focus of media assistance; and despite the difficulty of their mission, donors should nevertheless include capacity-building programmes. The authors warn that “there is no one-size-fits-all solution for sustainability – donors must tailor their programs to adjust to specific economic conditions.”

Another of their recommendations relates to supporting the training in business skills. “When equipped with management and financial skills, media owners can develop creative solutions for making their outlets more sustainable even in the least developed economies. While business knowledge and skills are essential to the sustainability of any media enterprise, they are often overlooked in the promotion of independent media. The business aspects of media development should not be ignored,” the authors of the report recommend.

6. Conclusions

Based on my research, it is possible to deduce a number of potential ways forward for Syrian media:

- **Community and local news and related-stories** seem to be the way to go as the radio stations are not able to compete with slick and sophisticated programming of more professional media outlets.
- A **diversified donor base** is the only way for these radio stations to survive and it is a necessity to implement it as a strategy. Some radio stations like Souriali have noticed this more quickly than others and are working with multiple donors to ensure possible independence.
- **Looking for alternative source of income**, like Radio ANA. The best approach might be to combine broader sources of donor funding with alternative sources of income. One should not exclude the other.
- **Better consolidation among Syrian radio stations** would support a Syrian-led process and allow them to enforce their own agenda rather than following that of the donors. For now there is a sense of distrust and lack of solidarity among different start-ups, although there are some positive signs, such as the signing the Code of Conduct by 13 radio stations that put a general framework for broadcasters, and which is a first step towards consolidation. In addition the initiative Al Abraj has brought together several Syrian radio stations to create a joint-technical team to visit the centers of broadcasting, measure frequency, assess wave penetration, and conduct polling to assess the number of listeners. The other radio stations taking part in the logistical team are: 7ara, ARTA, Watan, Sawat Raya, Alwan.
- **Better coordination among donors.** According to both journalists and project managers, there is little coordination among donors and no exchange of information what projects are they supporting. As one project coordinator, who asked for anonymity and who works in a media NGO supporting different regional projects in 12 countries including Syrian project attested, the Syria donor community is one of the worst in terms of coordination but also funding management.
- **Better project management.** "You have radio start-ups renting three-store offices in Gaziantep and paying \$5,000 rent. There is so much more that could be done with this money," one project coordinator said asking to remain anonymous.
- **Better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.** It seems that for several months there was lack of any real process for monitoring and evaluation. It is slowly being built now with professional journalists from the region (Lebanon, Jordan) with many years of experience being hired to evaluate these projects.

Sadly Syria is part of a wider trend in evaluation as the authors of Rethinking Media development report write: “Few donors actually conduct systematic diagnostic to understand the broader underlying problems that affect the media. While donors have increased the use of monitoring and evaluation, they have not used the finding from these studies to improve the design of future interventions.”

- **Customised training.** One of the most frequent interventions of donor-funded programmes are training programs. Opinions are divided regarding their efficiency. Some Syrian journalists, trained by Rozana, who had previously little experience in journalism found this training useful, but others with more experience found such general training of less relevance. A proper pre-training assessment is needed ahead of any training and there seems not to be enough emphasis on this point.
- Sustainability is important but at this stage the focus should be on **capacity building, and teaching business skills** to prepare for the different environment that might emerge in the future. Donors should encourage media to become profitable: a challenge given the high costs of establishing and running a radio station (Souriali needs €200,000 - €250,000 per annum: Radio ANA’s annual budget for 2014, met mostly by the US donor, Creative, was \$36,000, spent mostly on salaries and equipment). But both donors and those they support must never lose sight of the fact that good journalism has, at its heart, a public service function.

7. Bibliography

Deborah Amos, "In Syria, Aleppo Today is Must-See TV for Survival", National Public Radio. November 28, 2012.

<http://www.npr.org/2012/11/28/166054186/syrians-turn-to-aleppo-tv-for-survival>

Enrico De Angelis, Donatella Della Ratta, Yazan Badran, "Against the odds: Syria's flourishing mediascape", Al Jazeera. August 30, 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/08/against-odds-syria-flourishing--201483094530782525.html>

Anne Belson, "Funding, Free Expression: Perceptions and Reality in a Changing Landscape, *Towards Economic Sustainability of the media in Developing Countries*", Working Group Report, June 22, 2007.

Rick Gladstone, "At Work in Syria, Times Correspondent Dies", New York Times. February 16, 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/17/world/middleeast/anthony-shadid-a-new-york-times-reporter-dies-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all&r=1>

Mark Nelson, Tara Susman- Peña, "*Rethinking Media Development*", Washington, DC, Internews, 2009.

http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/InternewsRethinking-Media-Dev.web_1.pdf

Tom A. Peter, "Why I decided War Reporting Was no Longer Worth the Risk", New Republic. August 26, 2014.

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119222/journalist-kidnapped-syria-reacts-isiss-james-foley-beheading>

Thomas Seibert, "Syrian Refugees face backlash in Turkey", The National. August 3, 2014.

<http://www.thenational.ae/world/turkey/syrian-refugees-face-backlash-in-turkey>

Steve Warren, *Radio: The book*, Burlington, Focal Press, 2005.