



## **Emerging Media Organisations: Voice, agency, and precarity in post-2011 Syrian and Tunisian media spheres**

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### **Abstract**

The decade following the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings saw a flourishing of emerging media organizations across the region. A phenomenon that comprises a diverse set of actors from small-scale associative radios in Tunisia to numerous oppositional media outlets in Syria. This study investigates these new communication spaces opening up in the Arab World, by looking at emerging media organisations (EMOs) as a specific category of media producers in Tunisia and Syria. The study examines the phenomenon of emerging media organisations beyond the dichotomy of mass and alternative media and taking into account a comparative and non-eurocentric perspective. The study outlines the structural conditions (state relations and regulation, ownership structures and financing models) that constrain and shape the operations of emerging media organisations in Tunisia and Syria. Moreover, it also analyses the processes of resistance, negotiation and mediation by which these organisations (through their key actors) attempt to align the structural constraints, challenges and opportunities they are faced with, with their professional and political objectives and visions. The research questions underlying this study are the following:

1. On a theoretical-conceptual level: How can we conceptualise the emerging independent media organisations beyond the dichotomy of alternative and mainstream media, and taking into account a comparative and non-eurocentric perspective?
2. On an empirical-structural level: What are the main structural constraints on the operations of emerging media organisations in Tunisia and Syria? What are the different political/regulatory and ownership structures they have to operate within? What is the role of foreign development aid in their operations?
3. On an empirical-cultural level: How do the actors within emerging media organisations negotiate between the aforementioned constraints and their professional objectives, and what kind of journalistic culture emerges from this process of negotiation?



The case study approach builds on data collected through desk research, interviews and fieldnotes from two periods of fieldwork. The first period of fieldwork focused on the associative media sphere in Tunisia, and involved fieldvisits, interviews and observations at 11 local associative radios in the country. This sub-study focused on the media practices of the associative radio producers, and their entanglement with the broader political contestation around voice (especially in articulation with regional marginalisation) in the country. The second period of fieldwork focused on the newsroom of medium-scale Syrian news organisation (*Enab Baladi*, based in exile in Istanbul, Turkey), and comprised a 3-months-long period of participant-observation and in-depth interviews. This sub-study focused on the production context, and how different layers of precarious life and precarious labor are articulated, experienced and negotiated in the newsroom.

Finally, the study uses the notion of voice as a connecting concept to articulate the different layers of analysis, but also to interrupt techno-centric and western-centric narratives of media's place during and after the Arab uprisings of 2011. The thesis makes the argument that these emerging media organizations should be seen to represent specific interventions into the politics of voice in their various national and local contexts, but ones that share similar logics. It proposes a multi-layered understanding of these interventions which brings together: voices (actors, issues, discourses), modalities of voice (organizational models, production values), and the underlying political economy of these emerging media (funding, institutionalization). Moreover, it argues that these interventions, and the logics they espouse, themselves belie a complex interaction between the political and professional agency and precarity of these media organizations and the individuals, and groups, behind them.