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Introduction

> *The mother of the other victim, a boy of fourteen, told the story of what had happened in language whose very simplicity made it the more effective. "We were all upstairs for bed, me and my husband, with baby and Percy, when we heard a buzzing noise. My husband put out the light. I saw a bomb fall from the sky and strike the pillow where Percy was lying. I tried to wake him, but he was dead, and then the house fell in. I knew no more." The accounts of this raid upon a purely civilian population aroused furious indignation in England, and caused a feeling of almost stupified (sic) amazement among neutral nations (The Times, January 19th 1915)[i].*

This news report on a First World War Zeppelin raid in England uses citizen testimony to communicate the drama of the event. It is one of the first accounts of a new type of warfare, air raids, that extended the zone of killing beyond the frontline and into, what has henceforth come to be known as, the home front: *'Those whom air raids affected'*, as Grayzel (2012) argues, *"had to confront an essential feature of modern and total warfare: every home could come under fire. As a result, civilians mattered in wartime as never before"* (p. 2). It is this elevated status of the civilian in total warfare that has since rendered citizen voice a crucial part of war and conflict reporting (Goode 2009). For, by speaking from the perspective of war victims, citizen voice enhances the authenticity of journalism, whilst by exposing their stories of suffering, it introduces moral argument into war reporting and takes side in the conflict.

Even though citizen authenticity and moral argument today remain cornerstones of digital journalism (Allan 2013), there are differences in the use of citizen voice then and now. In 20th century reporting, as shown, citizen voice is subordinate to the voice of the journalist who authors the report; it also expresses personal experience instead of conveying newsworthy information; and it is linguistic rather than visual. Moreover, as the last sentence of the quote suggests, citizen voice is used to reflect popular sentiment around people's suffering and, in so doing, aims to unify readers around the imagined community of the nation. Contemporary war reporting is different. As we shall see, it relies on digital platforms, where citizen voice, in the form of tweets or emails, appears alongside that of the journalist; treats this voice as a source of information rather than only experience or emotion; and consists of visual testimony, in mobile phone snapshots or videos, as well as linguistic account (Chouliaraki, 2010). Finally, given that conflicts today occur mostly outside the West, citizen voice is not used to rally people around the nation but to offer multiple perspectives on the conflict, calling into being a trans-national, rather than national, imagined community (Kampf & Liebes, 2013).

The new visibility of citizen voice in digital journalism has been hailed as a turning point in the power relations of news production, in that it empowers a hitherto "passive" audience: "the news," as Russell (2011) argues, "moves from being mostly journalist-centered,

communicated as a monologue, and primarily local, to also being increasingly audience-centered," enabling people to "deeply affect the news, in which the margins grow in power to shape the center" (p. 1238). In the post-Arab Spring conflicts, such as Libya and Syria, for instance, where the exclusion or persecution of professional journalists were pervasive (Salama 2013), citizen journalism became a necessary dimension of Western conflict reporting, so that, as Wollenberg and Pack (2013) argue, "even the NATO decision to intervene on humanitarian grounds (in Libya, LC) was influenced by this powerful new mechanism made up of the alliance of social media and pan-Arab channels" (p. 197). The potential of citizen voice "deeply affect the news" stems, here, from its capacity to witness conflict from the perspective of civilians and, thereby, raise the moral demand of the responsibility to protect these civilians.

Questions, however, arise. To what extent is citizen voice incorporated in Western news platforms and how is it articulated with journalistic witnessing? Is witnessing the only contribution of citizen voice in war and conflict reporting? And how does citizen witnessing portray war suffering and propose forms of responsibility and action towards the suffering? It is these questions I explore in this article. I begin by providing the theoretical context in which citizen voice can today be understood as a constitutive dimension of war and conflict reporting and then proceed to provide a novel conceptualisation of citizen voice as a practice of "securitisation" of the news – a digital discursive practice that thematises the suffering and death of conflict as a cause for concern and possibly action. I subsequently employ this conceptualisation in a comparative analysis of convergent news on two post-Arab Spring conflicts, Libya and Syria, to show how differences in their incorporation of citizen voice produce variations in the securitisation of news across contexts. These variations, I conclude, bear implications on the discourses of responsibility and action that each piece of news articulates, throwing into relief the hierarchies of place and human life that, *pace* the celebratory rhetoric on citizen voice, continue to dominate global news.

Civilian testimony in convergent journalism

Two factors have contributed to the rise of civilian testimony in war and conflict reporting. The first is the new accessibility of digital media, which has indeed enabled ordinary people to take unprecedented control over the recording and dissemination of information, rendering conflict reporting *"much more complex and varied than in the past"* (Kampf & Liebes, 2013, p. 3). The second is changes in warfare itself. Unlike the First World War, and subsequent conflicts of the 20th century, with their clear-cut distinction between war zone and home front, contemporary warfare, waged largely through suicide bombings, city skirmishes and drone attacks, has moved into urban spaces and placed civilians at the heart of conflict. As a result, *"the proportion of all war casualties that are civilian has increased from about 14% in the First World War to 67% the Second World War, and to 90% in the 1990s"* (Spiegel & Salama, 2000, p. 2204). At the same time, civilians have become instrumental in the conduct of, so called, "humanitarian wars"— wars of the West that are waged in the

name of protecting civilians from the violence and threats of non-Western regimes (Bellamy, 2009). Citizen voice operates, in this context, as a powerful means of introducing moral argument in the news, insofar as it communicates the people's authentic experience of their suffering as a call for action (Chouliaraki, 2006).

This claim to authenticity has prompted major news institutions to appropriate citizen voice in their own renewed vision of journalism as a collaborative project. At the BBC, for instance, the lesson drawn from disaster and terror reporting, such as the tsunami (2004) and the London attacks (2005), is that "when major events occur, the public can offer us as much new information as we are able to broadcast to them. From now on, news coverage is a partnership" (Sambrook, 2009). It is, in turn, this "partnership" between people's voice and mainstream digital platforms that Deuze (2004) defines as convergent journalism – the online presentation of a "news story package" that incorporates more than one media format, including "the spoken and written word, music, moving and still image, graphic animations, including interactive and hypertextual elements" (p. 140). Driven by techno-commercial and professional interests, the rise of convergent journalism is nonetheless primarily invested in an ethico-political discourse, that of "giving voice" to the public (Russell, 2011). For it is these convergent platforms, of the BBC, CNN or Al Jazeera, that ultimately mediate citizen voice into mainstream broadcasting and thus enable this voice to become global, to participate, that is, in the "global network structure and enter the battle over the minds by intervening in the global communication process" (Castells, 2007, p. 244).

Yet, whilst everyone agrees that citizen voice is today a constitutive aspect of convergent war and conflict reporting, there is disagreement as to its political and moral implications: to what extent does citizen voice contribute to mobilising a sense of responsibility and, potentially, action towards war victims? and how, if at all, can it challenge the geo-political relations of power, as they are reflected in Western conflict reporting? Two positions dominate this debate, the optimistic and the pessimistic one.

The optimistic position celebrates citizen voice for offering a new visibility of suffering in the news (Allan, 2013). Citizen voice, the argument has it, breaks with the dominant pattern of war and conflict reporting, the state-driven propaganda in the name of national interest (Herman & Chomsky 1988), by communicating the civilian experience of war. Such communication relies on testimonies of the ordinary eye-witness, who produces heart-rending narratives, "designed," in Cottle's (2013) words, "to humanize, sense-ize and bring home the plight of distant others" (p. 13). For instance, the reporting of the post-Arab Spring conflicts on Twitter and Facebook worked as a "partisan advocate" (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013), bypassing state propaganda and placing civilian suffering in Libya and Syria into the global spotlight: "what national and international audiences see," as Kampf and Liebes (2013) claim, "are pictures of the suffering of innocent people …which means that viewers spontaneous demand is to stop the suffering straight away" (p. 9).

The pessimistic view, however, regards this "spontaneous demand" with suspicion, challenging the altruistic potential of civilian testimony. Instead, it links citizen testimony with the expansion of corporate media and their need to re-legitimize journalism in the face of a declining consumption of news (Scott, 2005). The rise of citizen voice constitutes, in this context, a "demotic," rather than a "democratic," turn in that, by trading professional validity for personal authenticity, prioritises the immediacy of experience over fact-checking and expert analysis (Turner, 2010). As Kampf and Liebes (2013) show in their analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, citizen voice today replaces the voice of authority (generals or politicians), thereby personalising the content of war and conflict reporting: "new actors occupy centre-stage and tell of their own personal experiences in melodramatic and heartrending language" (p. 12). The consequence is that journalism provides the resources for judgment necessary to understand the war: "armed conflict," they conclude, "is increasingly covered in ways that stress the micro-level individual experience rather than the macro-issues of the collective social good" (p. 12). Simultaneously, whilst claiming to introduce a new pluralism of voice, convergent journalism recreates the traditional hierarchy of journalism by carefully distinguishing professional contributions from amateur ones. As Palmer (2013) shows in her analysis of CNN's iReporting platform covering the violence of the 2009 Iranian elections, the citizen's "unpaid labor simultaneously bolsters the power of the CNN brand while also illuminating the social hierarchies long associated with traditional journalism" (p. 368).

Suspended between these positions, celebrating the moralising potential of convergent journalism or regretting the demise of the news into a 'journalism of emotion', the argument on citizen voice remains unresolved. Consequently, it also fails to address the key empirical question of how the reporting of different conflicts may vary, depending on how such voice is remediated in Western platforms. Following Robinson's (2011) claim that "research into the impact of media and communication processes needs to be done with due attention to the multiplicity of non-media processes that shape political actions and outcomes," (p. 6) I therefore propose that we approach the role of citizen voice in the convergent news on post-Arab Spring conflicts as primarily a political process, which depends not only on the use of digital media on-the-ground but also on the geo-political and military interests of the West. Let me, then, next present a conceptual framework for the analysis of citizen voice in Western convergent news on Libya and Syria in terms of the political process of securitisation.

The convergent journalism of conflict as securitisation

Citizen voice as a politics of pity: The reporting of humanitarian war entails a new news structure that relies on the representation of suffering as a cause of responsibility, and potentially action, for Western publics. This thematisation of suffering in war journalism

enacts, what we may call, a *politics of pity*: a politics of representing conflict that, in order to gain public legitimacy, construes the conflict as a scene of action between sufferers, their persecutors and their saviours (Chouliaraki, 2006). In centring upon the human toll of conflict, pity foregrounds questions of death, victimhood, injury and displacement whilst it backgrounds questions of interest, alliance, rivalry and power, which, nonetheless, continue to dominate the sphere of global governance - for the very conception of states as deserving security (or not) already presupposes a specific relationship of power between those who offer and those who need protection or, in Duffield's (2007) words, between *"effective and ineffective states"* (p. 122). The ethos of humanitarian war emerges precisely through this construal of conflict as a matter of protecting lives whilst, simultaneously, reproducing the geo-political hierarchies of the international community between the protector West and its non-Western protégées.

This discursive work of pity in construing a conflict as humanitarian emergency can be defined as a "securitisation" of news – a process "aimed at convincing a target audience to accept, based on what it knows about the world, the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it" (Balzacq, 2005, p. 173). The news becomes, then, a site of securitisation, insofar as the proposal to act in the name of civilian security depends upon the systematic use of discursive resources of the news to invest the conflict in moral meaning and engage its publics with the demand for action. Rather than assuming, therefore, that journalism simply reports on pre-existing events, the politics of pity suggests that journalism bears a *performative* force upon these events, construing them from particular standpoints, at the moment that it claims to simply represent them (Chouliaraki, 2013). By this token, journalism also bears a performative effect on the publics it addresses, insofar as these publics are mundanely invited to engage with the news' politics of pity and relate to its discourses of responsibility towards civilian suffering - thereby establishing "the media (as) a key player in terms of the creation, propagation and dissemination of the discourses which shape the world around us" (Robinson 2001, p. 5). In focusing on Western journalism, therefore, my question becomes how BBC news securitises Libya and Syria as humanitarian conflicts and, in so doing, which forms of responsibility it proposes to the publics it addresses.

Witnessing and Deliberation: My starting point in addressing this question is that the securitisation of the news relies upon the act of witnessing – upon reporting on the experience of those present in the scene of conflict. For it is the testimonies of conflict as a scene of suffering that, in turn, makes it possible for Western publics to bear witness to the conflict and engage with it in morally acceptable and politically legitimate ways[ii]. Its power to move and moralise granted, however, witnessing can only legitimise action once it is further authorised by international stakeholders that not only deem suffering civilians as worth acting upon but also judge the conditions of the suffering to be possible and desirable to act upon. This is because the question of security is not a fixed moral "truth" but, as

Hansen (2006) argues, it is always entangled with the power relations of the international order and, therefore, becomes an object of deliberation among interested parties, as they negotiate humanitarian versus other, more self-interested forms of responsibility. The securitisation of news, it follows, depends as much on testimonials of suffering as on authoritative voices that assign particular discourses of responsibility to the stakes of a conflict, be these the voices of the UN, INGOS or national governments (Watson 2011)[iii]. How, then, do the acts of witnessing and deliberation come together to construe the two post-Arab Spring conflicts? Which politics of pity does each piece of conflict reporting enact?

I address these questions by comparing the Libya and Syria conflict reporting in BBC's convergent news. The choice of BBC reflects my interest in identifying the ways in which a major Western broadcaster securitises conflict reporting. Libya and Syria are chosen because they were both protagonists in the surge of civilian uprisings against the authoritarian regimes of North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011, and were, subsequently, subjected to state violence, mass atrocities and crimes against humanity. They differ, however, in terms of the response of the West towards these crimes. Already in March 2011, Libya saw Western intervention – a response that, in UN Secretary General's words, reflected "*clearly and unequivocally, the international community's determination to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians from violence perpetrated upon them by their own government.*"[iv] Yet, despite its ten-fold higher casualty rates, Syria did not – the strongest Western reaction having been the UN-supervised destruction of its chemical weapons (following a horrid case of chemical warfare, in August 2013). In light of such significant difference, I ask how the BBC used the witnessing and deliberation claims in its convergent reporting to articulate different discourses of responsibility and action towards each conflict. I begin with BBC's Libya report on *Saturday February 26th 2011*, and continue with that of Syria, on *June 10th 2011*[v].

Conflict reporting in Libya and Syria

The BBC's convergent reporting on Libya and Syria offers daily live updates of the conflicts, by using a multi-platform online structure: twitter and email messages, "eye- witness" links with footage and "have your say" links with people's testimonials and opinions. This hybrid structure de-homogenises the news story, as sources, appear in a temporal (what-comes-first), rather than narrative, sequence, that invites multiple modes of user engagement: reading, clicking and navigating, skimming through images (Chouliaraki, 2010). How does each piece of news on Libya and Syria manage this hybridity so as to activate a particular politics of pity around each conflict?

Libya

The Libyan story is denser than the Syrian one, reflecting an easier flow of information on-the-ground. It, consequently, offered more frequent updates, which, however, remain

radically open-ended, as events are randomly reported rather than ordered in a hierarchy of significance.

Witnessing: There are 113 instances of eye-witnessing in the 148 update entries of the Libyan online broadcast. These can be categorised in two classes, civilian and professional eye-witnessing. Civilian witnessing refers to twitter messages or mobile phone footage sent by civilians or civil organisations on the ground – for instance **16.39**. *Ibn Omar tweets: "Roads from #tripoli to #azZawiya are filled with military and tanks, the west of the city (sourman area) is under control by Khweldi*." Professional witnessing refers to twitter messages or reports sent by journalists, as they either quote civilians' experience of the conflict, what we may call indirect professional testimonies – as in **18.41** *John Griffin in Benghazi writes: "Locals here in Benghazi are complaining of increasingly limited access to fresh food, medical equipment and, in particular, drinking water*," or report on their own experience, what we may call direct professional testimonies, as in **08.06** *Sky News correspondent Alex Crawford says that in the last few minutes, the rebels have repelled the attack by government force.*

Out of the 113 entries of eye-witnessing, the majority (54) are indirect professional testimonies, journalistic reports on civilian experiences, followed by direct testimonies of journalists (51) and by the ordinary witnessing of civilian tweets (6). The BBC, thus, reverses the Al Jazeera practice of conflict reporting as civilian witnessing (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013) to prioritise instead the professionalization of citizen testimonies through indirect witnessing – journalists reporting on civilian accounts. Whilst this emphasis reflects the large number of journalists on mission in Libya, it simultaneously resonates with the epistemological shift in online news reporting from a conception of truth as journalistic objectivity towards a multi-vocal conception of truth that relies on personal experience, re-mediated and validated as this is by professionals (Allan, 2013).

Through this shift towards multi-vocal news, the BBC online footage of Libya managed to articulate a powerful politics of pity, which consistently used the figures of victim, perpetrator and benefactor to propose a discourse of responsibility as the protection of Libyan civilians. This is the case in civilian testimonies, for instance: **09.44** *Libyan Youth Movement tweets "Tanks were used this morning and fired at residential buildings on the city of Zawia but yet again Gaddafi fails to control #Libya #Feb17*," which uses the distinction between people and army to establish the two sides of the conflict in terms of an unequal and immoral battle – Gaddafi's "tanks" "fire" at "residential buildings" — and, simultaneously to reinforce the identity of the Libyan Youth Movement as a force of resistance, in "yet again Gaddafi fails to control #Libya." A similar distinction is articulated in indirect professional testimonies as in, **07.44** *''I am watching neighbours dying unarmed in front of their homes" another resident of Zawiya tells The New York Times. The resident says the militias are using tanks and heavy artillery, attacking from the east and west gates of the city. "I don't know how many are being killed but I know my neighbourhood is being killed.''* The benefactor is here absent, though evoked in subsequent entries, but the juxtaposition between victim/civilians and

perpetrator/army is repeated in a starker form, in "neighbours dying unarmed" and "neighbourhood…being killed" versus "militias … using tanks and heavy artillery." The following example of an indirect professional testimony follows the same pattern of pity:
15.08 *Sky News correspondent Alex Crawford, at Zawiya hospital, says that within the last 10 or 15 minutes government tanks loaded with soldiers have been rolling in… She says there was heavy artillery bombardment lasting about 10 minutes. Since then, the sound of gunfire has died down. Casualties have started arriving at the hospital with serious injuries, including a young boy of about 10 whose body was peppered with bullets, she adds. There are also reports that government forces have been taking away bodies on the streets to minimise the numbers of known casualties.* The juxtaposition between "government tanks" or "forces" and "casualties … including a young boy about 10" reinforces the distinction between perpetrator and victim, by singling out the case of the child casualty, whilst the reference to the removal of "bodies on the streets," suggesting that the government knowingly commits crimes against its citizens, further strips the regime from moral and political legitimacy.

The Libya conflict is mediated by a range of witnessing claims: civilian witnessing, professional direct and professional indirect witnessing. Despite their differences[vi], all three types gravitate towards the distinction between perpetrator, the Gaddafi forces, and victim, Libyan civilians, with the category "rebels" figuring as benefactor. The BBC, consequently, securitises the Libyan conflict through a discourse of denunciation – a discourse that, according to Boltanski (1999), entails a *"redirection of attention away from the depressing consideration of the unfortunate and his sufferings and in search of a persecutor on whom to focus"* (p. 57).

Deliberating: This denunciatory focus on the persecutor/Libyan regime, however, is not enough to mobilise a discourse of humanitarian responsibility. For this to happen, denunciation needs to be combined with deliberation – with arguments that legitimise intervention in the name of the international community. Which kinds of deliberation are involved in the BBC news? In line with the ordinary/professional distinction in journalistic witnessing, deliberation, too, can be defined in terms of its source status, with popular deliberation referring to citizen contributions in and beyond Libya and professional deliberation referring to commentary by international organisations - the United Nations or national governments. The total of deliberative entries is 30.

Popular deliberation (10 entries) is about moral argument through people's dramatic appeals for international action in Libya: **2054** *Kobby in Denver, writes: "It saddens me that the world looks helplessly as Gaddafi slaughters his own people. I wish we could send anti-tank and aircraft bombs to the rebels. The world should not wait until people are slaughtered in Libya as it happened in Rwanda before acting. Freedom must reign!"* The use of emotional language ("It *saddens* me that the world looks *helplessly*," "people are *slaughtered*"), the expression of desire ("*I wish* we could send…") and the proliferation of categorical imperatives ("The world *should not* wait," "Freedom *must* reign!") are some of the linguistic features that inform the

discourse of denunciation, already established through witnessing, so as to promote a humanitarian argument for intervention. A similar politics of pity is enacted in: **2045** *Samira Kawar in London writes: "The international community should come to the aid of the brave people of Benghazi in every way possible. Governments and NGOs, including voluntary organisations, should send food and medical supplies. That is the least that Libyans trying to overthrow their tyrant of a leader deserve."* Convergent journalism's claim to give voice to ordinary people is exemplified in this statement, which explicitly addresses the 'international community' as a potential benefactor of the Libyan people, whilst, simultaneously, it enacts a familiar politics of pity by activating the figures of perpetrator, the "tyrant leader," and the (dignified) sufferer, "the brave people of Benghazi" in need of "food and medical supplies."

Professional deliberation principally includes UN statements about the status of refugees in Libya (20): **1348** *African workers trapped in Libya are the most vulnerable of the foreigners scrambling to flee the country, the UN refugee chief has said. "There are hundreds of thousands of African workers in Libya, and very few have shown up at the borders," Antonio Guterres told Al Jazeera in an interview. "We have received phone calls from people in a desperate situation, afraid of leaving their homes."* Similarly to popular deliberation, such statements also moralise the news, this time by focusing upon refugees and, thereby, expanding the domain of civilian suffering to non-Libyan citizens: "*African workers … the most vulnerable of the foreigners;*" "*desperate situation,*" "*afraid to…*".

In summary, the BBC's online journalism on Libya combines a discourse of denunciation, in its witnessing claims, with appeals to humanitarian intervention, in its deliberation claims. The securitisation of BBC's convergent news, lies, then, in its capacity to both narrate the Libya conflict from the perspective of civilians under threat and to invest this perspective with moral argument as to why it is important to act on their suffering. In this manner, it effectively promotes the responsibility to protect discourse and contributes to legitimising an international military operation, in the name of saving civilian lives.

Syria

The Syria news also combines professional with citizen voice, but consists of fewer updates than the Libya one and eventually activates a different politics of pity and a distinct process of securitising this conflict.

Witnessing: As with Libya, the Syria news is also made up of instances of civilian and professional eye-witnessing (78 entries in total). The latter, however, rather than being direct journalistic testimonies, consist principally of indirect witnessing (36), because of the absence of Western professionals who were banned by the Syrian government. This difficulty in reporting on the ground is a major difference between two pieces of news, reflected throughout the online broadcast –for instance, **13.59** … *"We cannot verify this but if it is true then it signals the regime will stop at nothing…"*; **16.16** … *"Despite the difficulty in independently verifying reports from Syria, a clearer narrative is emerging …."*. The Syria news,

consequently, relies more heavily on citizen reports from Damascus and other cities but also on Syrian state TV and other Arab media.

Civilian witnessing (13) reports on violence against civilians in the course of protests: **16.16** *ZainSyr tweets: "Idleb: persistant random shelling from tanks & heavy persistant gunfire in Maaret Al-Noman & Jarjanaz. Dozens of martyrs and wounded ppl in streets (sic)."* **13.59** *Yousif in Hama writes: "Last Friday major massacres were committed in Hama that claimed the lives of 70 and wounded tens of citizens. At first the media have denied the massacre and spoke of a limited number of deaths according to public sources. It also spoke of the presence of gangs who committed vandalism. All citizens of Hama know that the demonstrations were totally peaceful. Protesters were carrying roses when protesting. There has been no vandalism at all."* The principal distinction in these entries is, like in the Libya news, between civil activism and state violence, which casts civilians as the victim and state army as the persecutor. This familiar contrast is established through the juxtaposition of, on the one hand, a vocabulary of violence ("persistant (sic), random shelling from tanks," "dozens of martyrs," "massacres," "70 lives claimed") and, on the other, a vocabulary of civil protest ("demonstrations were totally peaceful," "protesters were carrying roses"). This politics of pity articulates a discourse of denunciation that, like the Libya news, vilifies the state and victimises the citizens – with the contrast between state propaganda, in "denying the attack" or speaking of civilian "vandalism," and defiant resistance, in "protesters were carrying roses," further consolidating the moral superiority of the latter over the former.

Indirect professional witnessing partly echoes this discourse, in a small number of entries (3), as in **13.47** *"Reports now say Syrian security forces have shot dead two demonstrators in the southern village of Bosra al-Harir. Anti-government activists say a third protester was shot dead in the capital, Damascus"* or **13.32** *"A witness in Jisr al-Shughour tells BBC Arabic he saw 14 Syrian army talks 'firing randomly'." He added "Anything that was moving in front of them they shot at."* However, by majority (33), indirect professional witnessing, in reporting from a multiplicity of sources, modifies the discourse of denunciation by offering alternative interpretations of the conflict: **10.11 "***The action against Jisr al-Shughour is in response to claims by Damascus that armed gangs killed 120 members of the security forces there amid protests against President Bashar al-Assad's rule. The government says local residents requested the army's intervention to restore peace and quiet. But dissenting accounts say the violence was sparked by deserting soldiers, and that the loyal troops have massacred peaceful civilians."* The contrast here is not between persecutor and victim but between two distinct claims about who occupies these positions: for Damascus, the persecutor is "armed gangs," whilst the victim, "security forces," is also the benefactor, called to "restore peace and quiet;" for "dissenting accounts," it is the reverse in that the evil doer is the "loyal troops" massacring "peaceful civilians" – the sufferer. The figures of pity, as established in civilian witnessing, are here reconfigured in ways that shift denunciation into undecidability – the impartial presentation of views held by all parties involved.

In summary, witnessing in the Syrian news differs from witnessing in the Libyan one in that civilian witnessing only partially sustains a discourse of denunciation, whilst professional witnessing introduces a pluralism of testimonials that marginalises denunciation in favour of impartiality.

Deliberating: Similarly to the Libya news, this piece also consists of popular and official deliberation entries (27). Popular deliberation (9) expresses the voices of citizens in Syria and the world. Some articulate anti-regime sentiments, as in **14.17** *Ramzi Hafez in Damascus writes: "Injustice, oppression and tyranny generate violence. We live in an age where people do not accept injustice and the system of Assad will not last. The Arab league is not being effective in ending the oppression. Assad's family has used the Syrian army, whose members mostly belong to the Baath party, to maintain their unjust rule."* **10.11** *Adolf Agbormbai in the UK writes: "It is high time the international community takes decisive action against Syria. The Syrian government cannot be allowed to continue massacring demonstrators while the world sits and watches. This is irresponsible..."* However, even though these claims sustain our familiar distinctions among the state as persecutor (exercising "injustice," "oppression," "tyranny" or "massacring" people), civilians as victims (the object of violence) and the international community as benefactor (urged to "take decisive action" to not "be irresponsible"), other claims blur these distinctions: **13.59** *Ziad A. Fadel from Michigan, US writes: "We have family in a town called Hallouz just west of Jisr-al-Shugour in the mountains. The village looks over the city. They told us that people are being evacuated from the city in anticipation of a much-awaited and welcomed Syrian army attack on fanatics holed up there. Mr Erdogan statements, if true, are irresponsible. He ought to know better about what these fanatics can do. Especially since the Turks have fought a much longer and bloodier war against their native Kurds."* **12.17** *Daram in Hama writes: "Syria is witnessing vandalism by armed groups and armed attacks on security forces and governmental property. It is the duty of the security forces is (sic) to maintain security., which we had in Syria for decades. The damage and destruction caused by the opposition forces in hampering the reform promised by the Syrian regime."* In contrast to the claims above, these ones construe the Syrian army as "much awaited" and "needed," whilst turning demonstrators into "fanatics" and the international community, in the face of Turkish president Erdogan, as "irresponsible" for seeking to intervene.

Taken together, these instances of popular deliberation unsettle the politics of pity, as we have known it in the Libya piece. Rather than establishing a stable stage of suffering populated by actors with fixed attributes, the Syria news interchange these actors, blurring the boundaries they are supposed to maintain. There is, consequently, no pure figure of evil or misfortune, in the Syria news, nor is there a clear imperative for the international community to protect Syrian civilians. This blurring of divisions becomes more explicit in entries that address just this instability of positions: **13.04** *Antoun from Allepo in Syria writes: "Protests in Syria began peacefully and there are still large segments of the peaceful protesters, but also there is a major segment that uses violence, weapons and vandalism. The biggest mistake the*

protesters may commit is to harbour this segment. Describing the protests in Syria as sectarian is more accurate than labelling it as popular. So far the regime remains the strongest link and a large faction of the society still holds to it. We welcome reforms with the regime at the top of it." If deliberation articulates the main argument for legitimising intervention, then, unlike Libya, popular deliberation on Syria, by unsettling the categories of state/perpetrator and civilian/victim, refrains from articulating such argument: the state is both evil and "supported by civilians" whilst civilians are both peaceful and "violent." In encompassing a range of voices, from categorical anti-or pro-regime to moderate reformist ones, popular deliberation in the Syria news reinforces instead a position of undecidability towards the imperative to protect civilian lives through military intervention.

Professional deliberation (18) includes claims from international NGOs, principally the Red Cross, and foreign governments. The Red Cross emphasises the humanitarian aspect of the conflict: **11.12 "***The International Committee of the Red Cross has called on the Syrian authorities to allow urgent and unimpeded access to all areas affected by the unrest within Syria. 'It's extremely alarming that our numerous requests for access to affected areas or detained people have not been granted by the Syrian authorities' says the ICRC's Hicham Hassan….*" Choices like "urgent and unimpeded" and "extremely alarming" point to the emergency of the situation whilst the direct quote from an authoritative figure ("It is extremely alarming…") not only adds force to the humanitarian appeal but firmly positions the government on the side of the perpetrator ("suppression of unrest continues," "called on the Syrian authorities," "have not been granted by the Syrian authorities"). Foreign governments partially echo this politics of pity, also construing the conflict as an emergency through the choice of direct quotes in "atrocity" and "massacre of innocents" : **09.28** "*In unusually fierce remarks about its southern neighbour, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Syria is carrying out an 'atrocity', Turkish media reports* (sic)." **10.33 "***US Defence Secretary Robert Gates says Mr Assad's legitimacy has now been called into question by what he calls the 'massacre of innocents' in Syria.*" Others, however, reflect either dissent between traditional and emerging global players, as in **09.40 "***The unrest in Syria has prompted a split within the UN Security Council, where France and Britain have proposed a resolution to condemn the government's actions. But other nations on the council, including Brazil, China and Russia, say such a resolution – which does not propose concrete action – could further inflame tensions in an already volatile region,*" or explicitly articulate geo-political concerns regarding the conflict's spill-over into neighbouring countries: **11.34** *Jonathan Head BBC News, Istanbul: "Turkey has a 900-km border with Syria and, in recent years, has heavily promoted trade with its neighbour. Its officials say they fear chaos if Mr Assad is toppled – but they have quietly started helping the opposition, allowing a meeting to take place here earlier this month in which the disparate dissident figures tried to form a more coherent movement. One of Turkey's greatest concerns is that the unrest will destabilise Kurdish areas of Syria…*" In both cases, the politics of pity has given way to a more complex representation of the conflict, with humanitarian urgency being qualified by political divisions between Western and emerging powers ("a split within the UN Security Council...") or by geo-political considerations

("could further inflame tensions in an already volatile region;" "Turkey has a 900-km border with Syria … the unrest will destabilise Kurdish areas of Syria"). Despite, therefore, the discourse of denunciation, evident in the casting of Syria as an evil persecutor, professional deliberation in this news fails to articulate a politics of pity that would activate indignation against the perpetrator/state and empathy for suffering civilians. Instead, it construes a morally unstable discursive landscape, where a conception of responsibility as realpolitik ultimately prioritises the geo-political concerns of international stakeholders.

The Syria news in BBC's convergent journalism is similar to Libya's in combining a discourse of denunciation, established through its witnessing claims, with humanitarian concerns for civilians, articulated through its deliberation claims. Where the two differ, however, is in that, in Syria, both witnessing and deliberation rely on a more complex representation of the conflict. Whilst witnessing is now characterised by pluralistic testimonials, simultaneously denouncing and justifying civilian deaths, deliberation is split between appeals for action and concerns about the interests of international stakeholders. As a consequence, the securitisation of BBC's Syria news marginalises the discourse of responsibility to protect and stands reluctant towards the option of intervention in the name of human security.

From pity to geo-politics

The prominence of citizen voice in contemporary war and conflict reporting has been both hailed as a democratic turn that gives visibility and control to hitherto powerless audiences and deplored as a demotic turn that sensationalises the news and marginalises deeper understandings of conflict. Rather than taking sides in this debate, I privileged an analytical approach that conceptualises war and conflict reporting as a securitisation of news - a discursive practice by which citizen voice is used to construe conflict as a humanitarian emergency, in line with contemporary conceptions of Western warfare. I subsequently looked into BBC's convergent reporting on two post-Arab Spring conflicts, Libya and Syria, so as to see precisely how citizen voice participates in securitising the news and which moral discourses of intervention it articulates.

In both cases, I showed, the securitisation of conflict news involves a multi-vocal communicative structure, where witnessing, in civilian and professional testimonies, and deliberation, in popular and elite appeals, construe the conflict through specific politics of pity – that is through different configurations of the relationship between sufferers, persecutors and benefactors. Central to this communicative structure are digital media, particularly Twitter, which, unlike traditional media, perform, rather than simply report on, this pluralism of perspectives. In so doing, not only do they act as sources of information but become themselves a site of struggle over the various voices that compete for audibility on the ground. In this struggle, it is the journalistic voice that ultimately dominates convergent

platforms, as professional witnessing is an overwhelming majority in Libya (53 direct, 51 indirect vis a vis 6 civilian) and a clear majority in Syria, whereas indirect professional witnessing (36) is more than double to civilian (13); deliberative claims are similarly biased towards elite sources in both contexts with double the number compared to popular ones in both Libya (20 to 10) and Syria (18 to 9). Confirming, thus, Palmer's claim that online news reproduces the power relations of traditional journalism (2013), the hierarchy of voice in these news samples similarly suggests that BBC's convergent journalism privileges professional authority and expertise over ordinary testimony and opinion.

This dominance of professional authority, inevitably, has important implications on the politics of pity in each piece of news: a politics of denunciation in Libya and undecidability in Syria. Even though both pieces share a discourse of denunciation among both their professional and ordinary witnessing accounts, the Libya news reinforces this discourse with popular and elite appeals for support from the international community, whilst the Syria news qualifies the denunciation in two ways: through civilian testimonials that blur the divide between perpetrator and victim and through popular deliberation that holds equally split views on the possibility of Western intervention. As a consequence of their distinct politics of pity, the securitisation of these two pieces of news also differs. Whilst the Libya news unequivocally articulates the responsibility to protect civilians, acting as an exemplary case of the humanitarian ethos of contemporary wars, the Syria one subordinates this to a responsibility towards national and multi-lateral interests[vii].

Such significant variation in the morality of intervention between the two cases demonstrates that the role of citizen voice in contemporary conflict reporting cannot be decided once and for all. It must be evaluated empirically, on a case-by-case basis. This is because, the capacity of citizen voice to make a difference ultimately depends neither on the networked voluntarism of global activists nor on the professional ethos of humanitarian reporting among journalists. Rather, the capacity of citizen voice to make a difference depends upon the geo-political interests and alliances that global news institutions sustain. The remediation of citizen voice in digital news, in other words, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a conflict to be construed within a discourse of humanitarian responsibility: *'humanitarian norms'*, as Finnemore (1996) argues, *'create only permissive conditions for intervention. They create an "interest" in intervention where none existed. They do not eliminate other competing interests, such as political or strategic interests'* p. 157). Unless these 'permissive conditions' are in place, the voice of some suffering civilians will ultimately never manage to make a difference. For, despite the celebrated inclusion of citizen voice in digital platforms, hierarchies of place and human life continue to define who has the right to be heard in these platforms, thereby continuing to classify the world between those who deserve and those who do not deserve protection.

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[i] "Scenes at King's Lynn, Norfolk," The Times History of the World p. 7; available at http://archive.org/stream/timeshistoryofwa07londuoft/timeshistoryofwa07londuoft_djvu.txt Last accessed in January 2014

[ii] In the First World War, for instance, the British justification of the war strategically moved from the German violation of the international law of neutrality, in the invasion of Belgium, to the German atrocities against Belgian women and children, which rallied people around a humanitarian cause. This "representation of German atrocities," as Gullace (1997) argues, "provided British propagandists with a vivid and evocative set of images that could be used to explain the arcane language of international law to a democratic public increasingly empowered to support or reject its enforcement" (p. 716).

[iii] In the war of Yugoslavia, for instance, this was a deliberation between the responsibility to protect civilians and the responsibility to defend Western interests, as national and international actors sought to both respond to *"the media reports of Serbian atrocities"* and simultaneously *"legitimize the deployment of a large peacekeeping force working under rather dangerous conditions"* (Hansen 2006, p. 125). Unlike, then, the First World War, where suffering civilians were used as news propaganda for British interests, the politics of pity in Yugoslavia, the first "humanitarian war" (Roberts, 1999), renders security an inherent part of the construal of the conflict itself and the driving force behind its course of action (airborne intervention).

[iv] Available at: www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sgsm13454.doc.htm Last accessed in October 2014

[ii] Available online at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13724765 (Syria) and

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/9416095.stm (Libya). Last accessed in October 2014

[vi] There are, inevitably, clear differences in the mode of witnessing between these categories of examples. Whilst, for instance, ordinary witnessing is characterised by a militant ethos of defiance, as in "Gaddafi fails to control #Libya," professional witnessing reflects a more balanced reporting ethos, either by conveying people's testimonies in direct reported speech ("watching neighbours dying…") or, by reporting events-as-they-happen ("tanks rolling in," "casualties started arriving.")

[vii] In Libya, following Gaddafi's aerial raids against his population, the UNSC authorised a military intervention on humanitarian grounds (UNSC Mandate, March 1st, 2011; http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm). In Syria, by contrast, the undecipherable and, eventually, extremely risky political identity of the rebel forces, combined with the positioning of the country in the international arena and the risks for a spill-over of unrest across the Middle East, rendered the option of intervention so far untenable (Thakur 2013).