Libya Media Transition: Heading to the Unknown

Fatima el Issawi

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By Fatima el Issawi[1]

About the Author

FATIMA EL ISSAWI is a research fellow at POLIS, the journalism and society think tank in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics (LSE). She is leading the research project on "Arab Revolutions: Media Revolutions," which looks at the transformations in the Arab media industry under the transitional political phases within the current uprisings. She has over fifteen years of experience in covering the Middle East for international media outlets. She also works as an independent journalist, analyst, and trainer in the Arab world.

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Chapter 3

Introduction: The Historical Context

The Libyan revolution of 17 February 2011 resulted in a United Nations mandated NATO air campaign in March 2011, and the death of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi at the hands of rebel fighters 20 October 2011. Almost two years after the February 17 Revolution began, the transition to democracy remains a fragile process.

The transitional process can only be understood in the context of the heavy legacy of Colonel Gaddafi's dictatorial and totalitarian rule. For four decades Gaddafi's regime maintained a monopoly on political and economic power in Libya. Civil and political rights and rights of association were highly restricted. In addition, media was under the control of the government.[2] The result was chronic underdevelopment and mismanagement of the country's institutions.

In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, the revolution in Libya took the form of a major internal conflict resulting in on-going consequences for Libyan security. The National Transitional Council (NTC)—formed on 5 March 2011 in the city of Benghazi[3]—failed to disarm rebel groups once fighting had ceased. The NTC handed power to the General National Congress in August 2012.

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2. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Libya.* Retrieved online 03/12/12: http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/12/17/libya/1shh accessed 03/12/12

3. The website of the transitional council http://www.ntclibya.org/english/

The first free elections in decades that took place in July 2012 saw liberal, secular and independent candidates outflank the Muslim-Brotherhood-aligned Justice and Construction Party. The liberal National Forces Alliance party won with 48% of the vote (39 seats), with the Islamist Justice and Construction party coming second with 10% (17 seats). Independent candidates won 120 seats, reflecting the importance of regional politics.

Mr Ali Zidan was elected by the parliament as prime minister in October 2012. His predecessor, Mustafa Abu Shagur, had failed in two attempts to form a government acceptable to Congress. The interim government is formed of a mixture of liberal figures and Islamists and also aims to strike a balance between Libya's various regions. It was officially inaugurated in November 2012.

The government is facing a major change; that of asserting the new state's authority in face of the growing hegemony of diverse armed factions in Libya's post-Gaddafi. These decentralised armed groups are the greatest threat to Libya's recovery. The killing of US ambassador Christopher Stevens in an attack against the American consulate in Benghazi by Islamist gunmen was a major setback for the transitional authorities and reveals its shortcoming in dealing with the security challenge.[4] The result is widespread insecurity and stalled economic recovery.

The Libyan government's quest for justice has focussed on the cases of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi (son of Colonel Gaddafi) and Abdullah Senussi, both of whom are facing arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity. The Libyan government is still refusing to hand over Gaddafi's son arguing that he should be tried before the national legal system.[5] While these are high profile and nationally significant cases,

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4. See http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/12/uk-libya-usa-attack-idUKBRE88B0ED2012 0912

5. CNN, *Libya challenges International Criminal Court's order to hand over Saif Gaddafi*, 09/10/12. Retrieved on 18/12/12.

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the government has not yet proposed a comprehensive transitional justice strategy for the country.

The adoption of the so-called political isolation bill incited further internal divisions and occurred under the pressure of militias who mounted a siege of governmental buildings in Tripoli. The bill is meant to prevent officials who worked under the former Gaddafi-era government from participating in politics. There are worries that this bill will over-reach its mandate and will be used for account settlements.[6] There are fears that this bill will also contribute to the exclusion of endemic lack of skills in the country.

Moreover, the growing tribal tension is hindering the national reconciliation. In a country that lived for years without any political dynamics, tribes replaced the political arena manipulated by the regime. This situation confirms the primacy of a national reconciliation plan able to help Libyans close the chapter of the Gaddafi era and to successfully lead a peaceful state building process.

Although national media is now free from the tight control of Gaddafi's regime, Libyan media are still struggling to develop into a free and professional industry. Subject to the threat of armed groups, lack of professional structures, poor skills and the heavy legacy of the past, Libyan journalists have been reduced to the same self-censorship of the prior regime.[7]

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6. BBC, Why Libya's militias are up in arms, 01/05/2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22361101

7. This report was published in a smaller version by Carnegie International. See the report of Carnegie http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/05/14/transitional-libyan-media-free-at-last/g3dk#

Mainstream Libyan Media: From Gaddafi's Propaganda to the Reconstruction Process

Under Gaddafi, the media was used solely to secure his own power. Content was highly politicised in favour of the regime and any criticism of Gaddafi would result in imprisonment or worse. The revolution saw an explosion of new private media while the old state media apparatus is struggling to cope with the transitional phase. According to Legatum Institute's Libya Media Wiki there are currently at least 200 registered newspapers, 20 TV channels and 200 radio stations,[10] though the volatile transitional phase makes it impossible to assess with accuracy the number of new media outlets. The lack of any law or emerging policy to organise this field also means it is ripe for libel, slanderous statements and unfounded accusations.

Historical Background

For much of its history, media in Libya has merely been an extension of state power. Under the pretence of reform, Gaddafi's regime constructed—and when needed, reconstructed—media bureaucracies that were tightly bound to its own authority.

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10. See http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Main_Page

After Gaddafi seized power in a coup in 1969, media content became highly politicised in support of the new regime. Nevertheless, despite the emergence of more politicised media content, it was under state control as set out in Gaddafi's Green Book on political philosophy (published in 1975).[11] This was achieved through linking all public organisations, including the media, to "People's Committees." According to the Green Book, government was society and, thus, these committees directly represented local or professional entities thereby establishing a direct popular democracy. Independent organisations, including those of the media, were seen as a threat to the government/society relationship:

> "… the press is a means of expression of society and is not a means of expression of a natural or a corporate person. Logically and democratically, the press, therefore, cannot be owned by either of these."[12]

In reality, Gaddafi loyalists were selected to run the People's Committees, which were also frequently linked to the security apparatus.[13] A complex system of patronage ensured loyalty to Gaddafi and his family. During the 1970s, broadcasting was organised by the state-run *Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting (LJB)*. The government was the sole funder of the LJB and all advertising was banned. It had an explicitly political mandate, aiming to "… stand against defamation campaigns and refute all fabrications about the LAR [Libyan Arab Jamarhiriya]."[14]

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11. The Green Book is available in English at http://books.google.com (accessed September 29, 2009). The website of the World Center for the Study and Research of the Green Book, an important Libyan institution, is available at www.greenbookstudies.com (accessed September 29, 2009).

12. Richter, Carola 'Media and Journalism under Gaddafi: Al Jamahirya and other tools for revolutionary mobilization and national development.' Retrieved from http://www.reinventinglibya.org/mediaandjournalism.php accessed on 01/06/2012.

13. Internews, 'Libya media assessment May/June 2011' Accessed from www.internews.org retrieved 01/06/2012.

14. McDaniel, Drew, 'Libya' in Boyd, Douglas A., Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media of the Middle East, IOWA State University Press, 1999.

The period of national media expansion during the late 1970s to mid-1980s ended with the economic turmoil of the late 1980s. The reduction in the global demand for oil and a massive increase in Libya's defence spending (18% of GNP, proportionately one of the highest in the world at the time) saw a reduction in expenditure on public media. Plans for further expansion made in the 1970s never came to fruition.[15] While the structures of media control were reorganised during this period, political considerations remained foremost in programming and content.[16] While political freedom was absent, institutional capabilities had advanced.

The economic sanctions of 1993, imposed on Libya by the UN following the Lockerbie Bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, damaged Libyan national media by preventing imports of computers and other technology. Newspapers suffered from a shortage of paper and the technological advances in television production were left behind by rapid technological and professional shifts occurring abroad.[17] The space created by the sanctions inadvertently allowed Al Jazeera to gain dominance as the preferred channel for Libyan audiences. Libya's own satellite channel *Al Jamahirya* was launched in 1996, but could not compete with the professionalism of the pan-Arabic satellite channels. The popularity of pan-Arab satellite television channels introduced a degree of information plurality, though the regime invested heavily in equipment to monitor satellite content and to jam satellite broadcasts.[18] The regime encouraged local print and radio which "provided niches for Libyan journalists and intellectuals in the prevailing environment of ideological journalism."[19] They fashioned their small operations as instruments of intellectual development and cultural education. This non-political output

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15. McDaniel, Drew, 'Libya' in Boyd, Douglas A., Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media of the Middle East, IOWA State University Press, 1999.

16. McDaniel, Drew, 'Libya' in Boyd, Douglas A., Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media of the Middle East.

17. Ibid.

18 USAID Report pp. 8.

19. Richter, Carola 'Media and Journalism under Gaddafi.'

sidestepped the censorship of the political sections of the media.[20] While the large state media operations focussed on international and national news of relevance to the regime, local newspapers became a breeding ground for more community-oriented journalism.[21]

The Internet was introduced to Libya in 2001 but only small clandestine media operations in the eastern part of Libya were able to bypass the state monopoly on Internet service providers (there was just one, Libya Telecom and Technology–LTT[22]).[23] The use of new media, particularly in eastern Libya, was to expand rapidly in the wake of weakening territorial and political state power during the revolution.

State Media: The Voice of Propaganda

The press code of 1972 punished those who "tarnished the country's reputation" with life imprisonment and prescribed the death sentence for anyone who "advocates inside Libya … theories or principles aiming to change the basic tenets of the national constitution or the basic structures of the social system, or aiming to overthrow the state's political, social or economic structures."[24] The state media was controlled by a set of different organisms depending on the regime's mood and willingness to relax its grip over media or strengthen it. The state media was put under the umbrella of the Ministry of Information in 1971 but this ministry was continuously reorganised and rebranded. For instance, the press publications were under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior in 1977. Later in 1979 the Ministry of Information was rebranded as a 'secretariat' for information and then for information and culture in 1988. The *Jamahiriyya General Information Corporation* was

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20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. USAID Report pp. 9.
23. Richter, Carola 'Media and Journalism under Gaddafi.'
24. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Main_Page

established in 2001 as an umbrella to gather all media outlets. Under its remit was the *Jamahiriyya General Broadcasting Corporation* (for audio-visual media) and the *General Press Corporation* (for print publications), as well as related industries (printing, distributing, documentation, music, publishing, etc.). The information ministry was again dismantled and the media was under the remit of the Ministry of Culture just before the revolution of 17 February 2011.

The creation of executive bodies to oversee and directly manage the media sector—such as the *General Press Corporation (GPC)* for print publications and the *Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation (JBC)* run by high security officials close to Gaddafi—was to assert media control and maintain subservience. The state media, considered as a tool for *tawjih* (or "regime orientation"), had no respect or credibility among the Libyan audiences; while rebels raged and the regime struggled to cling to power, state media was increasingly steadfast in its disinformation campaigns. State media, especially broadcast, became a platform for libel and slander to the extent of fabricating stories about alleged mass crimes and rape committed by the rebels. The battle within the hearts and minds of Libyans of whether to trust the state media or the regional Arab satellite TV stations was fierce. Some journalists interviewed disclosed knowledge of a special unit within the regime's media apparatus tasked with providing regional TV stations, such as al-Arabiya and Al Jazeera, with erroneous reports. The purpose of this disinformation campaign was to discredit these particular media outlets—who frequently broadcasted these unconfirmed reports—in the eyes of Libyans. While it remains impossible to verify the authenticity of this information, it is nonetheless symbolic of the fierce media propaganda crucial for the regime's survival. Thus the media war was part and parcel of the larger revolutionary war.

Under the crisis, state media was rebranded again with talk show stars-turned-pundits who used their positions to launch politically charged campaigns against dissidents. These media figures were largely unknown before the uprising but quickly rose to prominence as a result of their antics. The most prominent example is that of Hala al-Misrati, a TV presenter who drew a gun in the studio of al-Libyya TV and promised to fight till the end in defence

of the regime. She was also well known for her police-style investigative talks with imprisoned journalists who she commonly asked to declare their repentance.[25]

For Abdallah Rached, a former state media journalist, media control was key for the former regime's survival. *"The regime wanted to win the battle at any price. The media was more important than the field battle,"* said Rached, who remained in his position in state media until the fall of the regime. However, he said, the state media performance was extremely weak and not able to face the main voice of the rebellion: powerful Arab satellite channels. While traditional media, especially TV stations, were the main propaganda tool for the regime under the crisis, social media was gaining traction with the so-called "Libyan electronic army" campaign. (It is important to note that the Facebook page of this social media "army" is still live with calls for revenge for the "martyr leader Gaddafi."[26]

The state media employed approximately 5,000 employees most of whom were technicians and administrative staff. Journalists amounted to less than half the administrative staff, an endemic problem that remains one of the major challenges to the media reconstruction process. State media had no real political function other than to publish information about activities provided by the regime itself as well as its interpretation of international news. The monopoly of the *Jamahiriyya National News Agency (JANA)* over the political news meant that the regime was able to continuously control the content of state media. The four state press main publications (*al Jamahiriyya, El shams, el Zahf al Akhdar and el Fajr el Jadid*) had minute differences because headlines, editorials and political news were simply provided by the national news agency. While the format of the "news" was extremely redundant—lengthy prose in praise of the regime interspersed with insults to its opponents—there was more room to manoeuvre when tackling socio-economic or cultural topics, especially in the latter years of the Gaddafi regime. Many journalists interviewed talked about encouragement from avant-gardist editors-in-

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25. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk4wlP04Sdk

26. http://www.facebook.com/libyan.Electronic.army2

chief who offered them opportunities for advancement, which meant field reporting on domestic issues and the ability to question the performance of some ministries. Since broadcast media was under tighter state control, this was mainly left to print publications whose reports—depending on access granted by the regime—could range from questioning the performance of the minister or another high official to critiquing the shortcomings of the public administration.

State media management was equally volatile. Since self-censorship was entrenched in the daily practices and news production of journalists, they were not subjected to managerial scrutiny. However, depending on the interpretation given by the regime's officials, some news production could be considered a breach of state imperatives. During the uprising, state media had clear directives for journalists: protesters were to be labelled as thugs or the vestiges of al-Qaeda; there were to be no anger protests but rather support demonstrations; and members of the general public were to be supportive of their leader.[27] The limited number of media outlets and the continuous change in structure led to a situation where journalists moved from one position to another within the same media apparatus. Sometimes, this change was in fact punishment for the journalist's misbehaviour. The performance of the media outlet was also dependent upon the management style the regime opted for in different phases.

> *"Even the critical tone of some publications was dictated by the regime who was designing roles for each media outlet. We were encouraged to cause trouble from inside the regime, but only under their directives. At al-Jamahiriyya, we tried to avoid problematic issues so we decided not to publish news on the front page—only headlines and a caricature. We did not have a large enough margin for error. However, it was not all about flattering Gaddafi. For instance, we had six supplements. The cultural supplement was not subject to censorship."*

> **—Abdel Razzak Dahesh,**
> **former editor-in-chief of *al-Jamahiriyya* newspaper**

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27. Interview Abdel RazzakDahesh, Tripoli, October 2012.

"I managed to implement many reforms especially in providing these media outlets with new equipment. The content was always restricted. The main problem of the Libyan media is that it was limited to local staff and did not benefit from Arab media expertise. This led to a situation where Libyan media were completely excluded from the Arab media environment."

—Mohamed Baio, former head of the General Press Corporation

"When I tackled the issue of the Amazigh[28] language in my programme, a topic considered taboo, I was arrested for a day. I was later told that the segments I produced about this language caused the anger of Gaddafi himself. I later received a letter of termination from my job and was put under a freelancing system."

—Mahmood Sharkazy, TV anchor at *al-Assema* TV station

"We used to receive phone calls after the publication. For example, I wrote a report on Christmas in Tripoli. After publication, the editor received phone calls arguing that we are a Muslim country and there is no Christmas or Santa for us. We were asked to publish another report saying that people in Tripoli are anti-Christmas. We were astonished, but we had to do so."

—Warda Mohamed, journalist at *Libya* state-funded newspaper

Journalists of the former state media acknowledge two positive elements from their experiences: working in a disciplined environment with clearly defined expectations and their exposure to the international media and Arab satellite TV channels. In the latest years of the regime, state media were finally provided with subscriptions to international news agencies. Although oppressive, former state media seemed to offer a secure work environment for journalists as opposed to the chaotic transitional media institutions. The months preceding the outbreak of the revolution witnessed an unprecedented

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28. Libya's Amazigh consider themselves the original Libyans and they suffered decades of repression and discrimination at the hands of the Gaddafi regime, Please refer to http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16289543

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opening up in which state media tackled otherwise forbidden topics. The pressure of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings pushed the regime to release its stranglehold on the media sector in a desperate move to preserve its image. This short phase is remembered by some journalists as a "golden phase." It soon vanished during the revolution as state media was propagated for political redemption.

> *"I greatly enjoyed the two months that preceded the revolution as we had a unique margin of freedom, thanks to the particular conditions of revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. We could talk about cartoon films, violence, graffiti on walls, the meaning of citizenship and the conditions of student campuses. All these were taboo topics. For instance, the conditions of students' campuses were extremely poor as it was the main bastion for political opposition. We still faced internal struggles but this was a golden phase, better than the current situation now after the revolution."*

> **—Mariam al-Hajjaji, head of FM radio *al-Libiyya***

Saif Al-Islam Media Reform: Too Good to Be True?

Under international pressure, the regime allowed a carefully controlled opening up of the country's media. This coincided with the end of the UN sanctions in 2003 and the so-called "normalisation" of diplomatic relations with the UK and the US. Economically, Gaddafi had begun to adopt the limited top-down liberalisation seen earlier in other Arab dictatorships such as Egypt. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch visited the country officially for the first time in 2004 and 2005 respectively. After 20 years of refused entry, Reporters Without Borders was able to interview dissident journalists in Libya in 2006.[29]

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29. Reporters Without Borders, International Secretariat, 'The Birth of "Free Media" in Eastern Libya', Report directed by Servane Viguier in Benghazi and Tobrouk, April 2011.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's 2006 criticism of the lack of press freedom in the country was particularly striking.[30] Established by Saif, Al-Ghad Group for media services was one of the main fruits of the liberalisation process initiated by Gaddafi's son. Launched in the mid-2000s, the *al-Ghad media Group* was a window to new opportunity for Libyan journalists. Willing to rebrand the face of the regime and to attract his opponents in the cadre of an alleged state reform initiative, Saif launched an ambitious media project composed of a main TV channel (*al-Libiyya*), two newspapers (*Oea (oealibya.com)* and *Quryna (quryna.com)*) and a news agency *(Libya Press)*. The project provided its journalists with a much more open window where censorship was limited to the person of Gaddafi. This project came as part of a general reform plan in which the regime could finally engage its main opponent, the Muslim Brotherhood. In a 2006 speech, Saif identified four issues that could not be discussed: Islamism, the "security and stability of Libya,"[31] Libya's "territorial integrity"[32] and finally, Muammar Gaddafi himself.[33] All other areas were no longer immune to criticism. Coinciding with the *Al-Ghad* media project was the launch of local newspapers and radios and the appearance of foreign press in news-stands after a 25-year ban. Three foreign news agencies opened offices in Tripoli.[34]

However, the media's newfound bravery was short-lived. After only a few years, it buckled under the pressure of internal battles between the old and new guards. The main flagship channel of the project—*al Libiyya TV*—was suddenly shut down in 2009 after it aired a programme featuring a

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30. Reuters, Special Report: How Gaddafi scion went from reformer to reactionary, 11/04/12. Retrieved online 19/12/12 http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/11/us-libya-saif-idUS BRE83A0DL20120411

31. Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, speech given at the Second Meeting of the Youth of Benghazi, Benghazi, August 20, 2007, http://gdf.org.ly/index.php?lang=en&CAT_NO=114& MAIN_CAT_NO=9&Page=105&DATA_NO=252 (accessed August 15, 2009).

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

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controversial Egyptian journalist. The publication by *Libya Press* news agency of an article criticising the old guard caused the immediate dismantling of this service as well as the arrest of several journalists. The newspaper *Oea*,[35] which shut down after it published an article calling for the return of a prominent Libyan dissident,[36] re-opened in 2010 under the name of *Sabah Oea* ("the Day of Oea") and pledged allegiance to Gaddafi. The *al-Libiya* flagship channel was re-branded as *al-Jamahiriyya 2*, its freedom drastically cut and the channel used as the regime's main propaganda machine during the revolution. Saif Gaddafi proved unable to protect this young media project which witnessed a continuous re-branding and change of management that finally transformed it into a new version of the old-fashioned state media. Although disappointing in its outcome, the *al-Ghad* media project is still considered by most journalists I interviewed within this field investigation a rare opportunity to experience first-hand professional journalism.

For Mahmoud Misrati, editor-in-chief of *Libya al Jadida* newspaper (currently gaining popularity in Tripoli), his work as a reporter for *Oea* newspaper was his first real experience of journalism. "*We stopped using redundant discourse in storytelling; the format of the publication was really newsy,*" he said. "*We could do investigative work with relation to people's daily problems and polemic topics such as corruption and the high prices for goods.*" This opinion is not shared by all. Mohamed Baio, who held several high-level positions within the state media including a recent stint as head of the GPC, is not convinced. For him, the *al-Ghad* experience was all show. "*They took the best of Libyan talents, but the change was restricted to the form and not the content,*" he said. "*This project was a bubble that finally exploded.*"

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35. http://www.moheet.com/2010/11/12/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%81%
   D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%
   D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF-
   %D9%84%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A5%
   D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%AC%D8%AF/

36. http://www.rnw.nl/arabic/article/middle-east04112010

If the political content remained stagnant, the editorial style used by the media project was a complete departure from the old-fashioned state media style. Although largely cosmetic, this in itself was a major change in the national media industry. The training opportunities offered to journalists as part of this project were the only channels through which they could build upon their core competencies. The relative openness of *al-Ghad* media outlets encouraged state media to push the boundaries of what was permissible.

> *"We would not be able to run media outlets today without the experience of al-Ghad project. We had proper training then and we learned for the first time about something called professional skills."*
>
> **—Mahmood al-Sharkasy, talk show host, *al-Assema* TV station**

> *"I joined the Libya Press team and trained in news writing. While the national news agency was very poor in quality, we were closer to people's problems—to the street. We were trained by Libyan journalists who used to work for Al Jazeera. We had the pulse of the street [and] we could experience investigative journalism, but we also had many limitations. Libya Press was not providing any news on Gaddafi's activities. We left this for the national news agency (JANA)."*
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> **—Rana al-Akabani, former journalist at *Libya Press* news agency**

The Reconstruction Process: Heading to the Unknown

Amid strong opposition, the Libyan parliament voted recently for the re-establishment of a ministry of information to deal mainly with the legacy of the former regime and especially to put some order in a chaotic sector.[37] The fears are from the possibility of re-establishing a state-controlled media which, with the heavy legacy of the former regime, would stifle freedom

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37. http://www.libyaherald.com/2012/11/26/national-congress-votes-to-create-new-ministry-of-information/

of expression. The transitional bodies established after the revolution to reorganise the media sector took radical measures with regard to the state media legacy, thus establishing a complete rupture with the past. After the revolution the transitional power nominated a media minister, Mahmood Shammam,[38] an opposition figure who lived in the US for many years. Media was later put under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture and Civil Society. The Committee for Supporting and Encouraging the Press (CESP), formed in the aftermath of the regime's fall, took the decision to dismantle the state's main newspapers and to publish new ones in order to sustain employment (around 1,200 staff, most of whom are technical and administrative). Questions remain as to how to properly manage the media transition. For example, should the legacy of the state media be preserved? Is there any possible function for state media in the post-Gaddafi regime? How can the topic of state media inefficiency—such as employee redundancy, poor training and lack of leadership—be broached?

It is clear that transitional bodies had no vision of how to deal with these issues and did not have sufficient power to implement the few decisions they did make. There is a general perception that state media has no raison d'être in post-Gaddafi Libya, a sentiment shared by those who used to lead the media industry. There were discussions about transforming the old state media into a provider of public service following the example of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), especially in the first months of the transition. This vision is now less appealing given the poor conditions of the former state media and the growing trends of encouraging private media. However, the decision to dismantle the former state newspapers is viewed by former state journalists as punishment for their complicity. For most of them, they lost their media headquarters as a result of NATO air strikes. Although the transitional body tasked with managing the legacy of the old state newspapers chose to rent new offices, the limited space of these new headquarters and their inadequacy to provide proper newsroom facilities is aggravating the problems of the new state-funded newspapers.

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38. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/11/201111221259638191.html; see also http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20120707-mahmoud-shammam-ex-ministre-patron-presse

According to the "Decision Seven" issued by the transitional government's Ministry of Culture, the new state media apparatus will be limited to only one state TV station, one radio station and one newspaper.[39] However it is still unclear which media are considered "state media" and, most importantly, what role they will play. The newly founded newspapers that replaced the former state media apparatus were created by the Committee for Supporting and Encouraging the Press without any clear criteria and without sufficient resources. Staff of these new publications are a mixture of citizen journalists and former low-level state media journalists. The identity of these new newspapers—funded by the state but without editorial control—is unclear and its future uncertain. Their content is still far from professional and they are frequently accused of replicating practices of the old state media by flattering figures of the new regime. The daily *Febrayer* newspaper[40] (in allusion to February, the month of the outbreak of the revolution) is considered as the new state newspaper. Its editorial quality is low and heavy criticism has led to calls for its closure/re-branding. Another state-funded weekly *(al-Masar)* recently halted publication after its editor-in-chief was accused of supporting the former regime. Another state-funded weekly *(al-Bilad al Aan)* is employing staff from the former state media who did not have managerial positions in an attempt to reintegrate them. The sustainability of all these publications is questionable. The future of these publications is uncertain; they are loose in structure, understaffed, face limited funding from the Committee and lack real vision and planning from project initiators.

"I am sure that establishing a new state media system in Libya is impossible. The staff and capacities are so poor. We need years and years of training and support to be able to deliver professional journalism."

—Mohamed Baio, former head of General Press Corporation

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39. http://www.reinventinglibya.org/lnmu.php
40. http://www.febpress.ly/

"I don't believe in state media today. If they will allow state-funded media to be critical of the government, what will be the difference between these newspapers and the private ones?"

—Abdel Razzak Dahesh,
former editor-in-chief of *al-Jamahiriyya* newspaper

According to the head of the Committee of Supporting and Encouraging the Press, the aim of these new newspapers is to provide a new work structure for the former state media staff as well as to encourage state-funded publications in the outlying regions. However, these new fragile newspapers are not able to attract the former state journalists who simply refused to return to work while still earning wages. According to the head of the committee Idris al-Mismari, "journalists returned to work according to personal decisions. I cannot force people to go back to work, although this situation is causing us a huge problem. This is a transitional phase and we don't want to cause anyone harm. In Libya, a salary is considered a right to the person and their family especially in this sensitive period. We don't want to create animosities." His plan is to incrementally integrate the former state media into the private media so as to gradually phase out state media. For encouraging this process, private newspapers are "offered" staff whose wages will continue to be paid by the state as well as equipment and publishing facilities in return for sharing some advertisement revenues with the Committee. The long term goal is that these private newspapers will manage to assume complete responsibility for their staff. It is not clear if this plan could pan out but the Committee is actively signing agreements with a variety of new private publications.

If transitional entities managed to take some decision with regard to state-funded print media, the situation of broadcast state media remains opaque. Most of the old state TV and radio stations are not back to business controlled by factions and armed militias. For instance the flagship *al-Libiyya TV* channel was renamed as *Libya station* by the Ministry of Culture, opting for it to be the only official TV station. However the station characterised by its high technological capacities is proving the most problematic case of this media transition. Due to managerial problems and a power struggle over controlling its assets, it is now only broadcasting old documentaries and revolutionary songs.

The power struggle over controlling former TV and radio stations is hindering its revitalisation. For instance, the former *al-Jamahiriyya* TV station, which was the first TV station under Gaddafi, witnessed fierce battles over controlling its staff and its logo. According to Ali Mohamed Salem, head of the TV station's news services, the transitional government tried to impose new management which was counteracted by staff strikes and sit-ins. The station finally imposed itself as the main state TV—although, by law, it is not any longer—and refused to give this role to the former *al-Libiya* TV station, which is struggling to keep afloat. The government in the end accepted this de facto situation, providing the al *Wataniya* TV station with exclusive rights to cover official events. Like other state TV and radio stations its management is continuously in flux due to internal decisions taken by the remaining staff and power exercised by its guards, most of whom are former rebels.

"Our newspapers today are still the same as what they used to be under the former regime. The same news is published by all publications without any change. Journalists are used to copy/paste statements from sources. Sometimes I find myself forced to express my opinion on the quality of the production and to intervene with management."

—Idriss el Mismari, head of the Committee for Supporting and Encouraging the Press

"Our newspaper was established to be the voice of the revolution. This phase has now ended. This newspaper should be transformed into a real professional newspaper. For this, we need professional staff, real journalists, a disciplined internal structure and to acquire more courage in tackling topics in relation to people's problems. The newspaper needs a complete re-invention. I believe that starting fresh could be less hectic than fixing a problematic structure."

—Ahmed al Ghomari, managing editor, *Febrayer* newspaper

Regulation and Journalists' Unions

Although national laws under Gaddafi provided for freedom of speech and of the press within the confines of the principles of the revolution, the media production was in practice under the tight control of the government and the security apparatus. A set of oppressive rules in the press codes was frequently used for the imprisonment of journalists who could even face the death penalty. The press avoids publishing any material that could be deemed offensive or threatening, particularly to Islam, national security, territorial integrity or Gaddafi.[41] However the description by journalists of their media practices demonstrates that laws had less impact on them than self-censorship, regime control and security bodies in frequently interrogating and arresting journalists. Another tool was to remove a journalist from their position or stop them from producing, or to assign them to a less important role or even a different industry.

After the fall of the regime, Article 14 of the Interim Constitutional Declaration guaranteed freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The Declaration repealed laws restricting freedom of the press, speech and expression until such a government was in place to enact a new legislative framework. As extensive media legislation is still lacking, existing libel and defamation laws allow people the right to take up civil claims.

Media regulation was and still is a major question in the process of reorganising the media sector. While the transitional power could not agree on the authority who would take charge of media reorganisation, it seems that the new government is more inclined to reinstate a ministry of information. Before the revolution, the Ministry of Information was abolished and media was put under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture. However, the NTC chose to appoint a "minister" for media in its executive board immediately after its formation. When the transitional government was formed in late November 2011, it decided to put the media sector again under the umbrella of the

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41. See http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2009/libya

Ministry of Culture and Civil Society. Vague plans for the establishment of a media council to oversee the media sector without executive powers are still struggling to materialise.

The media sector was again reorganised, mainly with the issuance of Decree 44 (May 2012) establishing a High Media Council which would report directly to the NTC and which will be responsible for overseeing the media sector. This body is to be tasked with reorganising Libya's media sector with substantial functions such as formulating regulations and laws for media, adopting a code of ethics and granting necessary licences for various media groups.[42] This body was provided authority over the assets of state media, print and broadcast and all media centres in and outside the country. This reorientation was met with heavy criticism. For example the members of the High Council were chosen by official nomination. This situation led to the suspension of the decisions related to the High Media Council until the conclusion of the elections of the General National Congress.[43]

Discussions around the model for reorganising the media sector were and still are very much focussed on the idea of establishing a High Media Council to oversee the sector in lieu of a ministry of information with executive powers. Those who support this idea believe that nominating a minister for information will lead undoubtedly to the return of a hegemonic government with deep implications for independent media. However, the High Media Council itself became subject to a power struggle. Under the former regime, journalists' unions were permitted under the banner of "association" which limited their function to that of a social club. A conference in Jadu in the Nafusa mountains in June 2012, the third in a series of journalist gatherings previously held in Tripoli in January 2012 and Benghazi in May 2012,[44] resulted in a second High Media Council elected—though this time by journalists. With 21 elected members this media council sparked a new wave

42. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Decree_number_44

43. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Letter_Ref:_497/2012

44. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Media_Policy#Minister_of_Media

of criticism, mainly for the fact that the body that elected it was formed largely of citizen journalists and technicians rather than clearly defined professional "journalists."

Although the NTC endorsed this new body by issuing Decree 62 (July 2012), it confirmed at the same time its transitional role "until the General National Congress assumes its duties and responsibilities and takes the actions it deems necessary thereof."[45] The struggle between these two bodies both claiming to represent journalists led to a situation where the media community is further divided and voices are urging an information ministry to clean up the mess.

Chapter Recommendations

► It is crucial that the media community finds its way to elect representative bodies. These bodies would be tasked with defining the role of a professional journalist, issuing press cards, launching debates on ethical codes, lobbying for better work conditions and salaries for journalists among other tasks.

► There is a crucial need for a specialised body to be granted executive power so that they may take charge of the reorganisation of the former state media and the drafting of laws for the private sector. This body should not be elected but rather seek nominees among those who have both the international expertise and the knowledge of the local media industry. An electoral process would not guarantee the chosen members will be apt to lead this operation.

► It is imperative for the Libyan national media industry to learn from the experiences of transitional countries and expert opinion. Isolationism from regional and international environments means Libya and its media sector suffered tremendously. The transitional phase is an occasion for the Libyan media industry to benefit from external critique.

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45. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=Decree_Number_62

► The drastic measures taken by the transitional bodies with regard to the former state media are perceived as punishment to the sector and serve as a rupture between the past and the present. Re-integrating former state media staff is a must especially with the acute lack of skills and leadership within the national media community.

► Rethinking the role of state media instruments is more than crucial. Managerial and editorial decisions should not be random decisions based on personal moods but according to a planned vision based on needs and possibility for development. Although the state media sector was manipulated by the former regime for many years, this sector could still develop into a public service provider on condition of adequate organisation, regulation and training.

► The continuous changes witnessed by the former state media sector under the transition exacerbated its problems and provided its journalists with a volatile and non-secure work environment. It is crucial that the new government adopt a consistent policy based on long-term vision and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, putting an end to the power struggles endemic to the media sector.

► Although the private sector is coping much better with the transitional phase, there is a need for providing this sector with a regulatory framework for its broadcasting outlets and guarantee of a more stable work environment for its journalists and media workers.

Newsroom Dynamics, Professionalism and Its Relation to New Political Power

Libyan media has increasingly moved towards accommodating a plurality of voices. Once monopolised by few sources of information, it has evolved to become an open and diverse market where information sources are multiple and can be held accountable. However, this process is hindered by diverse obstacles: the lack of adequate skills within the media community due to isolation from modern media practices for many years, the inability of tribal-led Libya to allow for debate as a pillar of democratic society, the lack of experience on the part of new government and a culture of media manipulation and oppression that was spread under the former regime.

Relationship to News Sources/Political Sphere

With the fall of the regime, the relationship between journalists and their news sources has become more interactive and democratic. The complexity of the new political arena formed in the aftermath of parliamentary elections and the formation of the new government[46] is allowing journalists to practice

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46. http://www.al-sharq.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?AID=212502&CatID=103&Title=%D8
     %B2%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86+%D9%8A%D9%8F%D8%B9%D9%84%
     D9%86+%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84+%D8%A7%D9%84%
     D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9+%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9
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     %8A%D8%AF%D8%A9

their role in questioning the new political power albeit with limitations. The struggle between different political factions has produced a beneficial result: journalists now cross-check the veracity of information from different sources, a notable move to increased transparency in a country where the news was once under total blackout. The game of "news leaks" is very much driving political reporting; belligerent politicians find media to be an excellent platform for flagging the shortcomings and mistakes of their rivals. However, this is a dangerous game where inexperienced journalists can be easily manipulated. How can journalists, who were once trained to receive pre-packaged news stories from the national news agency, now work to maintain delicate relationships with sources? According to Mahmoud el-Misrati, the editor-in-chief and owner of newspaper *Libya al Jadida*, leaks have become his saving grace in allowing him access and insight to uncover backstage politicking:

> *"Leaks are more honest and transparent than official sources. For example, we were told about a suspicious deal brokered by the Ministry of the Interior. We asked the minister and he gave us false information. An honest employee inside the ministry leaked us the relevant document. As long as the ministry was not able to issue another document to counter the one we received, we can pretend that the information we have is valid."*

For the host of a political talk show on *Libya al-Hurra TV station*, the political struggle is allowing him greater access to originally sourced information. According to Mohamed kamal Bazaza, a former engineering student who found himself as a talk show host without any previous training, sources provide fodder for political discussion:

> *"I have informed sources within my personal network. I use this information to challenge my guests. I benefit from the tensions between representatives of different political parties in the parliament. If I meet someone from this party, they will provide me with tips against another party."*

If questioning players in the new political sphere is finally possible in the post-Gaddafi era, it is not a simple and straightforward process. Journalists and their sources have yet to become fully acclimatised to this move away from

the practices of the former regime. This has greater implications for media outlets—new and old alike—that, though no longer provided with news by dictation, are still financially supported by the state.

The recent experience of Zeinab al Habbas, a former language corrector in the old regime's press publications and later a reporter for *Febrayer newspaper,*[47] is very much reflective of this complexity:

> "The official I interview welcomes me usually saying that they are open for my questions. When I publish their answers, they call my editor saying that I caused them trouble, although I recorded the interview. Sometimes they send letters to the editor saying that the newspaper is looking to create trouble for them. For instance, I published information I got from the minister of energy about electricity shortage during (the fasting month of) Ramadan. The news was on the front page given its importance and it was picked up by local media. The minister called me extremely angry and pressured me to deny the information. I refused arguing that this will impact my credibility and that the information is accurate and recorded. He called a TV station and told them that the information was false."

New political players are still largely operating within the confines of the former regime's media clampdown. In the pre-revolution era news was what people discussed at home behind closed doors and sensitive information was, even when verified and sourced, subject to nondisclosure. News broadcasts were vetted by the regime and often conflicted with factual reports. Libyan politicians are still struggling with the fact that information is now promulgated and can no longer be confined to closed quarters. In other words, they can no longer dictate the news agenda since media has become diverse and increasingly transparent.

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47. Febrayer newspaper was launched immediately after the revolution and supported financially by the state. Its name is in reference to February, the month of the revolutions.

Libya Media Transition: Heading to the Unknown

"Before, we used to have only one red line: Gaddafi and his family. After the liberation, we have hundreds of red lines. If I criticised a political party, I would receive an angry phone call. If I criticise a minister for their performance or decisions, I—or even the media institution where I work— become labelled as troublemakers and the ministry could sometime refuse to deal with us anymore. I might also risk losing my job."

—Mohamed Saghir, freelance reporter, former reporter for the regime *Libiyya* TV channel

"There is a new tool to terrorise media: the accusation of causing national discord. Every time we tackle a problem, we are accused of causing national discord. If we criticise a politician his tribe would accuse us of being racist or biased. There are stories that media cannot tell today. Being critical in Libya today is not possible. The other party cannot accept criticism as a legitimate expression of opinion."

—Gumaa el Osta, owner of *al-Assema* TV station

If traditional news sources are struggling to maintain control over the flow of information, they are now facing unexpected competition from social media. New media, mainly Facebook, is no longer solely a platform to interact with audiences; it has become a major source of news for even mainstream media (most journalists interviewed admitted to using Facebook as a main source for information). Newly established private TV stations have commonly been subjected to accusations of using Facebook as a source for serious and unverifiable allegations. Moreover former journalists for state media have migrated to Facebook where they use their personal pages to publish articles and comments according to personal agendas. These journalists, who have not returned to work in mainstream media, are reluctant to integrate into newly-established media institutions. Thus, they turn to Facebook as their main platform for publishing. These Facebook pages are frequently used as a platform for spreading baseless accusations and libellous statements These are then often used as news sources for mainstream media.

"The source of information is not clear anymore. Before, the source was identified and thereby responsible for the accuracy of the information. Now, I am not sure if what media is saying is real information or just rumours. No one can assume responsibility for the accuracy of the information. The source of the news is no longer responsible. They can even be unknown."

—Abdallah Rached, former state media journalist working now for *al Bilad al-AAn,* a new state funded weekly

"Nothing can be hidden anymore. For example, we were waiting for the new government to be announced the next day. The press had already published the ministers' names. The names were leaked to the press. This is all positive as leaks feed us with news. There is a high level of transparency especially with the activity on Facebook, although rumours are creating confusion. The tribal incitement on Facebook even impacted the official decision-making in the incidents between the cities of Misrata and of Bani Walid.[48] The government had to take tough decisions based on the incitement carried out via Facebook."

—Rana Akabani, former journalist in state media, reporter for Correspondents.org project

Skills and Professionalism

It is undeniable that the media industry in post-Gaddafi Libya witnessed a critical change. However, the swift turn from an extremely monitored media regime to an extremely open and disorganised one has left these journalists

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48. Dozens of people are believed to have been killed, and some 200 injured in the recent violence between the cities of Misrata and BaniWalid in Western Libya, after a former rebel responsible for the killing of Gaddafi, was captured and tortured in BaniWalid, a former stronghold of Libyan ex-leader. Pro-government forces, many of whom are from the rival town of Misrata, were shelling BaniWalid for several days, igniting tribal frictions between the two cities known for a long history of hostility. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20077404

'lost in translation'. What does it mean to be a journalist? How can one work without clear guidelines, directives and boundaries? What does it mean to be professional and how? Under the former regime, the form and the content of the media production were a major problem. The media industry was conceived as a platform to express a multitude of opinions and practiced under the former regime as such. According to Abdel Razzak Dahesh, who was the longest running editor-in-chief in the history of Libyan state media:

> *"Gaddafi's Green Book considered the press an amateurish hobby and not a real profession tasked with uncovering the truth. Gaddafi conceived of the press as union publications where each profession has its own publication tasked with reflecting its views."*

Political or non-political, media production– broadcast and print alike— is linked to the regime's national, regional and international agendas. An obvious indicator is its storytelling style: all stories, even light ones about cultural events, typically start with lengthy non-newsy introductions that do nothing other than praise the regime for its achievements. One of the main problems Libyan journalists are facing in this new transitional period for media is figuring out what exactly the news is. This is the result of years of applying pre-packaged news pieces. However, those who are popularly called the "media of the revolution"—ordinary citizens who contributed to reporting the events of the revolution—have the upper hand; this new body of "journalists" has proven to learn quickly and without reliance on media stereotypes.

The brief openness of the media sector under Gaddafi in the latest years of the regime provided Libyan journalists and their audiences with exposure to a variety of media content. However the state-owned media reform was restricted to upgrading equipment to more modern technological tools and with no impact to the content itself. According to Mohamed Baio, former head of the GPC:

> *"We managed to have a better media product in the latter years of the former regime but only in form. Our problem was the lack of real journalists, the professional ones. The quality of the journalist is much more important*

than the technical capacities. The problem of Libyan media is that it did not succeed in attracting Arab talents and became totally isolated from its Arab environment."[49]

In post-Gaddafi Libya, journalists can experience new genres such as investigative reporting, feature writing and portraits. However, according to most journalists interviewed, the most prominent pieces are political reports. As such, news writing and political reporting seems to require better coaching and guidance from editors (who, along with their staff, appear to be poorly prepared for the transition). A hands-on approach was the standard approach for Libyan journalists to learn their profession. Most of those interviewed did not study journalism at university but rather some related discipline such as political science, arts or economics. Many of them recounted that journalism was not a career choice but was instead serendipitous or just a good job opportunity. According to Samira al Hojaili, the head of Journalism at the media and communications faculty at Tripoli's university, courses provided to media students were mostly theoretical and totally disconnected from the reality of the market. The main handicap, Hojaili said, is the inability of former state media to provide training for media graduates, thereby pushing those graduates into other industries.[50]

The National News Agency and the Challenge of Professionalism: A Case Study

The Libyan News agency[51] (formerly *JANA, the Jamahiriya New Agency*), established in 1946, was transformed into the conveyer of the regime's messages nationally and internationally during the Gaddafi regime. The agency was under the tight control of Gaddafi himself and the dictate of the powerful information bureau, responsible for providing directives on how to

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49. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.
50. Interview with author, Tripoli October 2012.
51. http://www.lana-news.ly/ar/

tackle each and every news item even when unrelated to the internal affairs of the regime. For instance, a storm hitting the US was reported as nature's anger against imperialistic America; former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein could not be named without adding "the traitor" as honorific. This was considered general news and was propagated by state media's political news slots with amendments forbidden. There was no need for direct government intervention; journalists and other employees managed to self-censor as a mean to avoid "mistakes" often punishable by drastic measures such as imprisonment or loss of employment. The agency was tasked with providing Gaddafi with daily briefs on international and national news. State control over the agency's production facilitated tight control over and manipulation of political news, both related to internal and international affairs. This was not limited to content but also affected news formatting which had to follow a strict formula. Any initiative beyond this format, even a minor one, was interpreted as rebellion and could lead to imprisonment.

After JANA was rebranded into *Libyan News Agency*[52] *(LANA)*, the modernisation of this old-fashioned body into a professional news provider has proved to be a thorny process. The rebranding operation started with an attempt to change the discourse from redundant and non-newsy reporting into a newsier format where the main elements of any story are clearly presented. The agency is still far from achieving this major change. Bashir Zooghbiya, elected by the transitional government as head of the agency's steering committee (later pushed out by the agency's staff), recounts the difficult process of rebranding the agency.

> *"We told the staff that each news item has to have an identified source and that any statement should be recorded. This was our major battle: regaining the trust and respect of sources as a professional agency providing accurate and objective news."*

This reorientation is proving difficult. The rehabilitation process started with training local correspondents in different regions of the country so they could

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52. http://en.libyamediawiki.com/index.php?title=News_Agencies

better decipher internal Libyan affairs for an international audience. This is not an easy task with the limited number of correspondents (30 journalists for 240 admin staff) and poor reporting skills, a legacy of the former regime.

Abdel Basset Abou Daya, head of the news department, describes this process:

> *"The first challenge was to kill the fear factor inside journalists. We told them you can publish a story and if you make a mistake, that is fine, it can be corrected. It was essential for them to adapt to a situation [where] no leader is no longer sacred and there are no red lines other than the unity of Libya and the safety of its territories. The sub-editor is able to publish a story without the editor-in-chief's permission. Before, even a simple story needed approval."*

This is not an easy task. According to Bashir Zohbiya:

> *"It is extremely difficult for journalists to improve upon the practices they learned and applied for years in news reporting. In the first anniversary of the revolution, they wrote stories using the same glorification style that used to be applied in covering the regime's revolution anniversaries. They just replace the phrase 'September Al Fateh revolution' (of Gaddafi) to 'the February revolution'."*

In the aftermath of the revolution the news agency was put under the direction of a steering committee of five members; the former leading figures, whose passports were confiscated by the rebels, had not returned to work. The members of the steering committee used to be senior journalists and/or managers in the agency who have no formal ties to the former regime. However the real decision-makers inside the news agency are its staff. For example they have already managed to push the head of the steering committee out. These internal struggles plunged the agency into such turmoil that it obstructed news production. The lack of leadership for the steering committee handicapped its own ability to take strategic decisions especially with regard to appointing new staff and developing training. In the post-revolution media, the transitional nature of the appointed management as well as the links between journalists and rebels (as some journalists used to

fight with the rebels) make the hierarchy structure loose and unintelligible, according to senior staff interviewed.

The news agency is trying to impose itself as the main provider for local news with management pushing journalists out of the newsroom and into the streets to report on daily events. The agency is striving to build networks of contacts with the new power structure that requires more than mere state-sanctioned veneration. This necessitates a complete restructuring of the agency, including a pay scale reconfiguration (most of them earn 500 to 1,000 LD as monthly wages[53]) and a new approach to maintaining workplace efficiency and discipline (for example firing staff is still not a socially and culturally accepted measure in Libya). According to Abdel Baset Abou Daya:

> *"One of our main problems is chaos. I cannot even ask a journalist to work a night shift. They understand the new freedom they have to mean that they can do whatever they want."*

Media Institutions' Dynamics

The media industry under the former regime was run by a centralised system governed by a linear and continuously changing structure. Media institutions themselves were governed by an equally centralised system where the personality of the editor-in-chief was instrumental in determining the performance of the newspaper and its flexibility in approaching red lines. The editor-in-chief could somehow push the boundaries without breaching it. The trust the regime had in these prominent editors-in-chief and their loyalty allowed them greater room to manoeuvre.

> *"Media institutions were like all other sectors under the regime: institutions of heads. When the heads were gone after the revolution, the institutions faced a real vacuum."*
>
> **—Razan el-Moghrabi,**
> **former editor of a cultural magazine and writer**

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53. Around 300–700 dollars.

The personalisation of the media industry is a remnant of the Gaddafi era. The personality of the editor-in-chief, director or owner of a news network or station can still be detrimental to its tone and performance. According to most journalists interviewed, the lack of newsroom structure or an editorial line is the result of both the amplified role of the editor-in-chief and the inability of the media to live up to its expectations as a news provider. Abdel Razzak Dahesh, former editor-in-chief of *al-Jamahiriya newspaper*, argues that his intervention was a necessity given the poor quality of journalists:

> *"I had to be pragmatic. I had to monitor the production otherwise the quality would be very poor. Some journalists used to ask to write their questions for doing an interview."*

The sudden fall of the old leadership and the lack of internal structure with clear roles and hierarchy has led to a situation where former junior to mid-level staff are now in leadership positions; the main criteria for nominating new leadership is independence from the former regime, not professional experience. According to Idriss el-Mismari, head of the Committee for the Support and the Encouragement of the Press, the new managers are *"enthusiastic colleagues willing to do something different. Some of them have some previous experience in journalism under the former regime."*[54]

> *"The new management is extremely poor in managerial skills. There is an illusion that leadership (in media and other institutions) is a reward. This is why there is a competition today for these leading positions among leading opportunists and not leading professionals. We had first rate leadership in state media but we did not form second-rate leadership: the managing editors, directors… This is the problem today."*
>
> **—Mohammed Baio, former head of the General Press Corporation**

The situation in the private sector is equally volatile. Most of the new private media are run by a basic managerial structure which in continuously changing. Conceived as a tool to express the voice of the revolution, these media were

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54. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

simply a platform for serving a cause—especially considering a number of their staff were also rebels. A situation brilliantly expressed by the presenter of privately owned *Libya al-Hurra TV station*—the first to convey the voice of the revolution—broadcasting from a small studio. As per Mohamed Kamal Bazaza:

> *"Media mistakes were tolerated. I did not have the mentality of a presenter but that of a rebel. I still don't 100% have that mentality. I still think I have a message to send to Libyan people."*[55]

Media started to move towards establishing an institutional structure and to depart from the revolutionary discourse. Songs and slogans praising the revolution became less prominent in TV programming in favour of broadcasting political activities.

> *"We changed the name of the radio from Sawt Libya al-Hurra (voice of free Libya) to Benghazi FM. The old name was very much linked to the revolution. The revolutionary tone is played down; we are covering political life. This comes first. We still have a revolutionary tone to some degree. We began to include some songs and social slots. We adopted a calmer tone but the revolution is still present."*
>
> **—Ahmed al Mukassabi Benghazi FM,**
> **main programmes presenter**

> *"We are no longer talking about revolution. We have social series and talk shows. We decided to use neutral discourse: 'the former regime of Gaddafi' and not 'the despot,' 'the tyrant' or other negative popular descriptions."*
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> **—Chairman of *Libya* TV Mohsen el-Shaeri**

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55. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

Libya Media Transition: Heading to the Unknown

Flourishing Talk Shows: Debating Politics

Talk show programmes flourished in post-revolution Libya as an unprecedented exercise of public debate. With the lack of news slots in most broadcast media, these talk shows provided slots with the latest news from different regions of the country. However the lack of experience on the part of both the talk show hosts and their guests—who were usually from the new political sphere—makes these programmes far from professional. Most hosts had no previous experience or training in media and were simply thrown in to sink or swim. Enjoying unprecedented audience participation, most talk shows feature controversial topics and the opportunity to phone in. In other cases hosts literally present from the streets where random people are asked to express their opinions on the latest political developments. In some cases, spur-of-the-moment opining degenerates into insults, slander and defamation.

In post-revolution Libya—rife with tribal tension, political struggles and spread of arms—debating politics in the public sphere is a dangerous practice. Talk show hosts therefore had to learn how to navigate touchy subjects. Under the revolution and in the first months of transition, the main goal of these shows was to encourage dissent of the former regime. Zainab al Zaidi, a former social programmes presenter in the former state media, was one of the main talk show hosts who voiced the message of rebels:

> *"My task was then to make Libyans cry. I myself was crying when I spoke about the regime's atrocities. It was crucial to liberate Libyans from fear."*[56]

With the increasing complexity of political affairs post-revolution, talk show content became more mundane and is struggling to tackle controversial issues inherent to Libya's new political sphere. For *al-Assema TV*'s principal talk show host Mahmoud al-Sharkasy it is simply impossible to host opposing voices on the same platform, especially since most of his guests refuse to participate alongside their rivals. If al-Sharkasy was not afraid to tackle topics

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56. Interview with authors, Tripoli, October 2012.

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such as the power of extremist militias and the lack of rule of law among others, the continuous threats he is receiving has pushed him to finally become less critical. *"They sent me indirect threats reminding me that I have a family and children,"* he confided. *"I am not afraid of them but I became wiser and less enthusiastic. I am now calculating risks and limiting its scope."* When al-Sharkasy tackled the growing role of the Mufti—the higher religious authority in the country appointed after the fall of the regime—on one of his talk shows, dozens of the Mufti's supporters demonstrated near the station's offices asking for a face-to-face with the presenter. *"My manager asked me to go out and to talk to them,"* he said. *"I refused. I have nothing to tell them. I was doing my job."*[57]

The learning experience of Mohamed Kamal Bazaza, a university student who became a talk show host of Libya *al-Hurra TV* station, reflects the dangers of hands-on learning in the complex political transition. He recounts:

> *"Armed groups have the same culture of Gaddafi. They could even kidnap me. I am careful in my uses of expressions. For example I often say 'phalanges of the revolution' instead of militias. The word 'militias' is not accepted by our audience. I also make sure not to relate the news to myself. I only announce the news and leave the comment for my guest. I never comment on it myself."*

While the presenter of *al-Hurra TV* station is careful with his expressions by self-censorship, *Benghazi FM radio* presenter Ahmed al Mukassabi claims that "friendship" with militia leaders is granting him some protections. The presenter, who used to work under the former regime and defected soon after the outbreak of the revolution, recounts:

> *"I hosted a leader of armed phalanges who put his guns on the table between us. I was not afraid. Although he is quite strict, there is some friendship between us. They trust me because of my position against the regime. This does not impact the debate itself. I support phalanges when they do good things but I can be critical in matters related to the spread of arms and insecurity."*

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57. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

Training and Media Development Efforts

Most Libyan journalists benefit from training, albeit poor training. The former regime's centre for information was rebranded as a specialised body for documenting the developments in the press and facilitating journalistic training. The centre acts as the main intermediary between training organisations and journalists. According to the head of the centre Khaled Ghoulam, it has developed a database of around 1,200 journalists. As Ghoulam explains:

> *"Before, we used to accept any request for training. Today journalists have to go through a process of selection based on an application. We cannot accept anyone."*

Alongside the centre are other local initiatives providing media development organisations with links to the community of journalists. The lack of criteria in accepting trainees and the absence of a body representing journalists means the process is mainly based on solid contacts journalists have within these intermediate centres.

Journalistic training programmes generally focus on basic skills such as news writing, interview techniques or field reporting. According to journalists interviewed, most of these programmes are similar with no distinction between media platforms—such as radio or television—and without taking into consideration the difference in professional levels of trainees. Most criticism of the quality of training provided focusses on the quality of trainers, mainly brought from other Arab media industries facing similar problems, and the short length of these sessions (spanning just a few days). Most of the positive feedback provided by journalists was related to specific programmes where media development goes beyond a simplistic approach to training to long-term coaching and where trainers are working alongside newsroom journalists. The biggest hindrance to professional media training is the disjuncture between these training sessions and local newsrooms needs.

"The frontline media community—citizen journalists—is quite ready to transform into successful professionals. They have unusual energy and capacities. They are not professional but they have trained on the ground under extremely limited resources. They are very enthusiastic by comparison to most of those who worked in the regime's media."

—Hussam Zaagar, head of Free Media Centre

"The problem with training is that it is based on connections with the wrong people; they are working with civil society groups. They want to deliver their programmes, that is all. Now they (media development organisations) have started to contact media institutions directly, and this is much better."

—Mahmoud al Sharkasy, Talk show host, *al-Assema* TV station

"Those who are providing training are not that qualified. The content is also not relevant and the duration is very limited. You cannot produce a journalist with two weeks of training. It is not possible to bring someone and transform them into a journalist in a few days. As for the former media staff: it is not possible to re-animate a dead body. Training should focus on media graduates and those successful experiences and talents in the Arab world."

—Mahmoud el Misrati, editor-in-chief, *Libya al Jadida* newspaper

Chapter Recommendations

► Training should be tailored to newsroom realities. Given the specific conditions of Libyan media, mainly its isolation from a modern working environment for many years, it is crucial for this training to bring an answer to the specific challenges facing the rebirth of this media industry.

► Alongside the provision of training on basic media production, there is an acute need to provide specific training on business management as well as leadership for editors and managers, especially where these skills

are lacking. Providing specific training for specific needs such as talk show management, news presentation, investigative reporting, reporting of elections and parliamentary reporting among other topics is crucial. Being able to define these needs requires an in depth understanding of the nature of the media industry and direct interactivity/dialogue with its main actors.

► Beyond the simple training of how to write a new piece or interview, it is important to move to a system where media development activities contribute to the empowerment of media institutions through a long term structure of coaching/mentoring that will enable journalists and editors/managers to benefit from the experience of their counterparts via collegial and horizontal communication.

► Media literacy should be a major element of media development programmes. There is a need for a media literate public in post-Gaddafi Libya. Consumers and citizens need to be aware of the opportunities as well as the risks offered by the newly opened media. The testimonies of journalists interviewed in this study demonstrate that one major problem is the inability of audiences to understand the role of media and to respond to it adequately. This is also relevant for the new political actors who have a limited understanding of the role of a free media in a developed democracy.

► Professional journalists need professional and solid institutions providing them with a secure working environment. Establishing new institutional structures and newsroom dynamics as well as new editorial decision-making processes are crucial to move towards professional and viable institutions. Few media organisations started to define roles within a clear internal structure. It is important to empower these new trends by providing newsrooms with adequate expertise.

► It is crucial to raise journalist awareness about the nature of their role. Once considered to be the mouthpiece of the regime, these journalists need to safeguard their newfound freedom by resisting external control and self-censorship. It is a battle that should be led by journalists themselves with the support of media development agencies.

Working in a Transitional Environment

Libyan journalists had to adapt quickly to a fluid and risky media environment. Their lack of job security also meant they had to adapt to the special conditions of the political transition; the growing power of armed groups proved them to be the real rulers of the country. Human rights watchdogs frequently reported abuse at the hands of these militias as internal power struggles became a real challenge for the transitional government. Under these conditions, working in media could prove to be risky.

Who Runs the Place?

Gaddafi's regime ended with the fall of Tripoli in the hands of rebels in August 2010.[58] However, with the intensification of warfare, most Libyan state media stopped operating weeks prior. They went off the air with the arrival of rebels in Tripoli. While old state newspapers stopped publishing, broadcast media—more specifically TV stations—continued to report for short periods, announcing the fall of the regime and airing revolutionary songs. Not only was the political regime in turmoil but so was the media. With Benghazi leading the way, the revolution spread throughout the eastern regions of the country enabling local media outlets to have the upper hand on the media sector.[59]

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58. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8715116/Libya-timeline-of-the-last-hours-of-the-Gaddafi-regime.html#, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15422262

59. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/23/benghazi-joy-end-libya-tyranny

The fall of Tripoli proved crucial in the media war; central media were blamed for the regime's survival because of their role in spreading its propaganda. The silence of these media was considered the tangible proof that the regime became from the past.

Mustafa al-Touarghi, an *al-Libiyya TV* journalist who joined the rebel forces, was among the first to enter the station after rebels stormed it. *"We first stopped the broadcasting,"* he said. *"After this we restarted the radio broadcast with revolutionary songs. We aired a communique announcing the fall of the regime. After this, we interrogated employees who were still inside the building. Those who used to flatter the regime were arrested. Some were asked to remain at home with their salaries paid. We confiscated the passports of some of the staff. They are requested to remain inside the country until the judiciary takes the file into their hands."* He frames these acts under "the revolutionary legitimacy" which—according to him—grants the rebels the authority to take such measures.

The first days after the liberation of Tripoli were chaotic. A power struggle between different groups over who had ownership rights over the state media apparatus was concentrated in Tripoli. This power struggle is best illustrated by the conflicting decisions taken by various transitional bodies on the fate of these media outlets. This power struggle was not restricted to media facilities but also covered state buildings, with various groups laying claim to a stake. A notable example of this internal strife is the battle for control over the flagship al-*Libiyya TV*, which was the main TV station of *al-Ghad* Media Group. The station went off the air after the fall of the regime. Controversy ensued when the privately held, and Benghazi-based, *Libya al-Hurra TV* station moved to Tripoli and broadcasted from the headquarters of *al-Libiyya* with its own logo plastered across their newscasts. There are disputed versions about this alleged "occupation" of *al-Libiyya TV* station by *Libya al-Hurra*, which later ended with the latter's withdrawal. *Libya al-Hurra* director Saleh Majdoub refuted this version of events and contends the decision to broadcast from state TV headquarters was a symbolic gesture:

"In that time, there were no institutions. Under the legitimacy of the revolution, all can change. We wanted to seize the occasion. We went to the local council of Tripoli. They were convinced about our project. We wanted to be the new

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official voice of the state. It was important that the voice of the revolution be transmitted through a TV station which was a symbol of the regime. This would be instrumental in supporting the revolution which was still raging in the country."

Immediately after the fall of the regime, most of the old media apparatus facilities were under the protection of former rebels or armed groups. The majority of these groups are still providing "protection" for these media outlets and are accused of making editorial decisions under the so-called flag of "revolutionary legitimacy." According to Mariam Hajjaji, appointed director of radio *al-Libiyya*, "*the real bosses are our guards. I am not able to take decisions because if I take any measure against staff, the guards will support them against my decision. The interference was to the extent that some of them went into the studio and asked the presenter to leave. In some cases, they just shut down the broadcast. We talked to the Ministry of Culture. They said we don't want confrontation.*"

"We don't interfere with the programmes; we now act under the legitimacy of the state. We are part of the state, but we can forbid former staff from entering the building if they have blood on their hands."

—Mustafa Taourghi, al-Wataniyya head of security, former rebel, former journalist

"The rebels are not controlling the TV stations. Sometimes they express some opinions and it could be the right thing to do. For example, a former employee who used to be a regime supporter came to the station asking to be paid for previous work. They objected to paying him... Sometimes they (the rebels) are alerting us about the right things to do. I call this a revolutionary caution. We are still in transition. Things will return to normal after a while."

—Ali Mohamed Salem, *al-Wataniyyah* TV head of news

With the return to live broadcast some of these newsrooms witnessed internal "intifada" by the staff, such as pushing out managers appointed by

the transitional power. While these cases differ from one outlet to another, the common denominator behind most staff objections was refusal to accept external leadership. The problem of discipline inside these newsrooms is another prominent one where managers, appointed under the transitional phase, struggle to assert their authority and to impose order. It was very frequent to hear from managers that it is very difficult to impose staff time-keeping or other administrative tasks, setbacks equally witnessed inside new private media. In some cases, like the former National News Agency—now called *Libya News Agency*—these internal struggles led the appointed manager's resignation thus disrupting daily news production. Bashir Zohbiya, who was managing the agency, explains:

> *"Most of the journalistic staff have the mentality of employees and not journalists. They asked for additional work without really working. They understand freedom in that they can do whatever they want. One of the staff was absent from work and when he returned, he brought me a letter from a rebels' faction stating he was on a special revolutionary mission!"*

Who Funds the New Libyan Media?

The lack of transparency and consistency is another prominent handicap of transitional Libyan media: the former state media is still funded under the same system. Most former state media staff are still on payroll and continue to receive salaries although most of them are not working.

With the unprecedented opening up of media to the private sector, the industry is booming with new projects. Most of these projects are perceived as linked to political agendas, the most vehement critics labelling them as "the coalition of guns and funds." If politicians avidly use the new open media sector for their own interests, business executives are equally complicit; broadcast outlets are the most attractive media platform for both political battles and business opportunities. The radio sector boom has proven it to be the most popular media.

The private media are usually categorised according to popular perceptions: those liberal (mainly supporting former transitional council leader Mahmood Jibril), those who are supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and those funded directly by Qatar. This perception of simplified alliances is rejected by these main actors who usually present themselves as independent and funded only by Libyan business and advertising revenues. There are unconfirmed reports about Libyan media receiving funds from business executives of the former regime who are living abroad. Allegations about the Muslim Brotherhood pouring huge funds into different media outlets are also rampant yet unconfirmed. I interviewed Saleh Majdoub, chairman of Libya *al-Hurra* TV *station*, about the Libyan media landscape post-revolution. I questioned him about the link between *Libya al-Hurra* and the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom the TV station is viewed to be politically aligned. In response he stated "*I am a member of the group but the group does not finance the station.*"[60]

The battle between pro-liberal and pro-Islamic agendas, raging in several transitional Arab countries, is also reflected in the new and diverse Libyan media landscape. *Al-Assema* TV station is generally perceived as the platform for liberal anti-religious voices, a description that it not totally refuted by the owner of the station Gumaa el Osta. He said "*during the elections we did not hide our affiliation and support for the candidacy of Jibril (Mahmoud Jibril, the head of the National Forces Alliance who won the elections), but we treated the other equally in terms of broadcasting their electoral publicity slots.*"[61] *Libya al-Hurra* TV station is considered the main voice of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. The station was accused of bias towards extremist Islamic factions in its reporting on popular demonstrations in Benghazi.[62] The head of the station Saleh al-Majdoub refuted the Islamic label stating that the TV station is at equal distance from various affiliations.[63] *Libya al-Ahrar,*[64] broadcasting

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60. Interview with author, October 2012.

61. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

62. See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/21/benghazi-anti-militia-protest_n_1903846.html

63. Interview with author, Benghazi, October 2012.

64. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNbgI4jAGYI

from Doha with large operations inside Libya (its main office is in Tripoli), is considered the most-viewed TV station as well as the most professional news source. According to al-Tai Consulting report,[65] focus groups organised around the country demonstrated that the station, which acted as the main voice of the opposition during the revolution, is the most popular among Libyans—although the most controversial. The station, popularly called Libya "al-Ashrar" instead of "al- Ahrar" ("the bad" instead of "the free"), is accused of serving the agenda of its funder, Qatar. The station is also accused of supporting controversial propositions such as dividing the country. However the head of the station's office in Tripoli, Ibrahim el-Mezwoghi, refuted all these accusations. For el-Mezwoghi, these allegations are related to the fact that Libyan audiences have not yet accepted the notion of free debate and, thus, consider any critical voice as an attack against a group or a tribe.[66]

Most of these new media outlets were born to support the rebels by countering state media propaganda. The majority of these media ventures were born outside the country, mainly in Tunisia and Egypt. Some are struggling to adopt a business model or to redefine their identity in the post-revolution era while some others simply did not survive the transitional phase. Take for example the testimony of Gumaa el Osta, former chairman of the Libyan Chamber of Commerce and a well-established businessman. El Osta, who owns *al-Assema TV station*, had this to say:

> *"The TV station was born for the revolution phase only. We wanted to stop this project with the fall of the regime, thinking that the former state media would resume work. This did not happen. What pushed us to continue was the discourse carried by some media accusing those who remained inside the country under the regime of treason. With the proliferation of media funded by the Muslim Brotherhood, we found that we had a patriotic mission to continue broadcasting; the goal was not media itself but the challenges of the new politics."*[67]

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65. To download the report, see http://www.altaiconsulting.com/expertise/democraty-governance

66. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

67. Interview with author, October 2012.

However the TV station is struggling to adopt a sustainable business model. According to el Osta, he is willing to implement a public/private hybrid funding model for the network; although the door is open for the public to buy shares, he will retain a 51 per cent stake so as to maintain its editorial line.

While these new broadcast media outlets are not required to reveal their sources of funding, they must obtain from the Ministry of Culture a minimum six-month temporary licence with the possibility for renewal. In print media, it is not clear if new private publications must adhere to any licensing system. One of the main challenges for these new publications is how to subsist on limited funds for printing and distributing; with the fall of the regime, these industries are no longer propped up by the state. Since most of these publications are not yet sustainable, it is impossible to find accurate figures on the distribution of these new publications.

Small projects are generally funded by the business activities of their owners. However most of these media owners had no previous experience in media and their interest in it was often a means to buy their way into political conversation. Thus the majority of these projects lack long-term planning and are based on volunteer staff or poorly paid youth. Some projects were launched by doctors, engineers, university students or other professionals, but they rarely survived the pressure and the realities of the media industry. The owner of *Tripolis* magazine, a medicine student who took arms during the revolution, considers the publication his "baby."[68] He managed to publish a few issues despite limited financial resources and volunteer staff. *Tripolis* is just one example of hundreds of personal projects taken on in a more open media landscape, though most have since halted production. While some have proved to be viable, some of these projects are driven by advertisements. *Radio Zone*[69] for youth is a good example. The radio station, which broadcasts western music and social talk shows in the Libyan dialect, is popular among

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68. Interview with author.

69. See the radio website http://tunein.com/radio/Radio-Zone-1007-s165643/

youth and university students and is owned by three partners. According to one of the owners, the tone of the radio station was based upon market trends as the goal was to establish a particular niche in the market. Even so, the radio station is not attracting enough advertisements to cover its operating costs.[70]

In their quest to adopt a business model, these new media projects have two main options: to accept the patronage of wealthy business executives who in return have some editorial input, or to secure monthly sponsorship from ministries and governmental departments in the form of advertisements and/or sales from copies. These two solutions appear to be more secure than relying on the unpredictable nature of advertisements prominent in the private sector. Mahmood al Misrati, the chairman of *Libya al-Jadida* newspaper, managed to move from a weekly to a daily publication by using a combination of resources: financial support from the state Committee for Supporting and Encouraging the Press (in return for providing former state media staff with employment) and advertisements revenues. He is mainly relying on freelancers paid piecemeal with few full time employees. The growing popularity of the publication attracted some offers from business executives who offered to buy shares or fixed advertisements slots. Selling the newspaper's shares seems risky for the owner of the publication who, like el Osta, wants to preserve its identity and independence.[71]

Although some of these projects are showing signs of sustainability, though solid political or business patronage, others are proving to be more random in execution. *Jawhara* radio station, increasingly popular in Tripoli, is very much reflective of this situation. In response to my question about his plans for sustaining his project, the merchant owner of this new private station simply pointed his finger to the sky in allusion to God: God would help him find sufficient funds to keep his radio station live. All will be fine.[72]

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70. Interview with the author.

71. Interview with author, October 2012.

72. Interview with author, October 2012.

Field Reporting in a Hostile Environment

News slots and field reporting have returned to Libyan media after being used as a propaganda tool for many years under the former regime. However, news bulletins and field reporting are still to a large extent very limited and far from being professional in new Libyan media. For example few TV stations have news bulletins or other adequate coverage. Most of these stations recently started providing news slots with limited capacities, such as broadcasting one main news bulletin at prime time in the evening. There are varying reasons as to why new (and surviving old) Libyan media have been unable to provide adequate news coverage. Some are internal such as the lack of experienced personnel and the absence of appropriate newsroom structures. However, the nature of the transitional phase with its volatility and lack of security is hindering the development of professional and comprehensive news services. Most of what is provided in news coverage is still largely amateurish in its form and content. For instance, stories are hardly updated and news bulletins have no fixed allocated time or frequently extend beyond it. It is also apparent some news coverage—especially from state-funded media—is replicating the news agenda of the old regime such as general reverence and the granting of major coverage to governmental/parliamentary activity.

The inability of Libyan audiences to comprehend free and professional reporting is also a major handicap. It is leading to a situation where media is frequently portrayed as party to the struggle. The lack of professionalism of these media outlets and their clearly dictated political alliances, especially during crisis, are consolidating the popular belief that media is responsible for factional tensions in the country. A good example is the recent tension between the cities of Misrata and Bani Walid. These two western cities were in dispute over the alleged torture and killing of a Misrati rebel, believed to be involved in the killing of Gaddafi, by militias in Bani Walid. The situation escalated dramatically with Libyan forces launching an operation against the town of Bani Walid; an eight-day battle ended with the deaths of at least 20 people and more than 200 wounded.[73] The impasse which fuelled

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73. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/24/bani-walid-captured-by-libya-government

historical tribal frictions between the two towns highlighted a real challenge for Libyan media: balanced reporting. In their coverage on the Misrata/ BaniWalid tensions, most media failed to report both sides of the story for fear of retaliation. This means it has been difficult for Libyan media on the ground to establish facts based on accurate reportage and instead degenerate into taking sides. Some media outlets have even resorted to reporting news from politically charged Facebook pages where comments appear to incite discord. The local TV stations of the two towns, located in media markets that have flourished since the revolution, took the lead in the incitement campaign.

According to Ibrahim el-Mezwoghi, the head of *Libya al-Ahrar TV* network's Tripoli office, professional and balanced field reporting is next to impossible:

"Tribal frictions and geographical divisions make it impossible for media to claim neutrality or provide unbiased account of events. Covering news is becoming increasingly difficult. Ordinary citizens often interpret news based on tribal affiliations. Some of our correspondents were threatened and others were literally beaten. We do not know who the real rebels are. Some became rebels after the fall of the regime."

This position was echoed by Saleh Majdoub, the chairman of *Libya al-Hurra*, whose Benghazi offices were attacked just a few weeks after we visited in October 2012.[74]

"We have covered the events from inside Bani Walid many times. This is not a problem in itself. The problem is if I want to send a reporter to cover the event from inside Bani Walid, they will be forced to say only what the people of the city want them to say, under the threat of being attacked. This is why we sent our reporters to the borders of the city where they interviewed people while fleeing."

If field reporting of current events is becoming increasingly dangerous, investigative journalism is something newsrooms now tend to avoid. A trend

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74. http://english.ruvr.ru/2012_10_22/Alhurra-TV-office-destroyed-by-furious-protesters-in-Benghazi/

of tackling polemic topics followed immediately after the fall of the regime. However, frequent threats to journalists have led to a situation where both journalists and their managers are not so keen to expose themselves to unpredictable dangers, especially since most threats are anonymous. Most journalists interviewed who said they received threats for investigating new taboos—mainly militias and religion—said these threats were sent to them as mobile messages from an unknown sender. One journalist who published a story about Libyan Jews said he received an anonymous mobile message asking him "not to approach this area." The frequency and unpredictability of this kind of intimidation that threatens personal harm or injury plunged journalists and their editors into confusion; while the former regime clearly defined areas that were not to be broached, the new red lines are vague and unpredictable. As journalists have now implicitly accepted these restrictions to be new red lines, this is leading to a situation where the political process is occupying the major part of the media coverage. Few stories tackle real polemics such as the spread of arms, the influence of militias, the weak role of state institutions such as the national army, extremist pressure and intimidation and the growing role of religious institutions represented by the Mufti.

"We were beaten and attacked from those who present themselves as rebels. When we criticised the supreme security committee,[75] I was called to their offices and interrogated for six hours. On the occasion of the publication of an inaccurate news report related to the same committee, I was called again with my manager and interrogated for 11 hours. Once, I was sent for field reporting on a conflict between two cities. I was stopped by one of these cities' militias. They asked me which channel I worked for. Then they slapped me on my face and asked me to leave. They told me I should be thankful that they did not do more."

—Mohamed el- Saghir, freelance TV reporter, former reporter for *al-Assema* TV channel

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75. Former rebels who gathered under this umbrella and are claiming being under the remit of the Ministry of Interior.

"I asked a reporter from my team to do an investigative report on prison torture. The reporter met a victim of torture and a prison guard. When she went back to office, she was so scared from what she saw and heard that she asked to stop working on this report. We lately stopped tackling this issue."

—Mahmoud al-Sharkasy, *al-Assema* TV station, talk show host and anchor

The Media Reconciliation

The Libyan media community post-Gaddafi is composed of three distinct groups. The first group is the staff of the former state media apparatus, few of whom work in post-revolution media institutions while senior editors and managers are at large or assigned at residence pending trial as per the rebels' orders. The second group is what is called the "media of the revolution" or "the frontline media." This group of citizen journalists who documented the rebellion's developments is largely composed of doctors, engineers and other working professionals. The third group of emerging figures in the media sector is largely made up of former vocal dissenters from the Gaddafi era who have no previous newsroom experience and are mostly writers and cultural figures. An implicit power struggle for control over the media sector is raging between these three groups with the first group, the only one with previous media training, proving to be the weakest.

After the revolution, a campaign of labelling and making unfounded accusations divided the media community. Those who are labelled as prorevolution were pitted against those who are accused of being pro-former regime, popularly called *Tahaleb* ("algae"). This campaign is not limited to the media sector but extends to all other industries where leading figures were removed from office under an administrative purge of remaining figures from the Gaddafi era. The High Commission for the Application of the Standards of Integrity and Patriotism, an independent body formed by the transitional council post-revolution tasked with overseeing the appointment

of new leadership in official positions, is not linked to the former regime.[76] This Standards and Integrity body, mandated to disband at the end of the transitional phase, has sparked controversy over its practices. For example some media officials were banned from returning to office in former state media entities by the authority of this body. Some are simply assigned at residence with their passport confiscated by rebels as they await judicial review while others managed to flee the country to neighbouring Tunis or Cairo.

"They issued their decision without even interrogating me, accusing me of being the enemy of the revolution of 17 February. I knew about the decision in a communique published by the press forbidding me from working in official positions. I went to court and won a ruling in my favour abrogating the committee's decision. They appealed the ruling before the higher court. I am waiting now for the decision of the higher court. They are simply replicating the experience of the information bureau (the central information apparatus) of Gaddafi."

—Former leading media figure interviewed under confidentiality

After the fall of the regime, I gathered my former team of al-Shams newspaper to discuss publishing a new newspaper with a new discourse. In the middle of the meeting, three armed persons stormed the room and took me away. They interrogated me and insulted me. I finally managed to talk to their leader who appeared to be wiser. They let me go after they took my passport. After a week, I managed to contact their leader who finally accepted to give me back my passport.

—Abdel Hakim Maatouk,
former editor-in-chief of *al-Shams* state-owned newspaper

If the leading figures of the old media guard are excluded from participating in its restructuring—by prosecution or intimidation—the mid to junior staff of the former state media are also reluctant to resume work. Many factors

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76. See http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12411&article=705163

are behind this reluctance for journalists to resume activity. For one, the transitional power lacks authority. In addition, journalists maintain status as salaried employees whether or not they show up for work. But most importantly, the new media environment does not seem attractive to journalists; most of the new state-funded press publications were established without a clear vision. The internal structures of these institutions are very fluid and struggling to develop into a modern and functional one. In addition to the problem of insecurity and the lack of any protection for journalists, the clash between the journalists and newcomers (i.e. former citizen journalists) proves to be a major obstacle.

> *"The work environment is tricky. I work according to my mood. The country is in total chaos and the newspapers have internal problems. In my newspaper, there is dispute over its identity. It was first launched in Benghazi and then moved to Tripoli. The Ministry of Culture is supporting the Tripoli branch but staff in Benghazi are claiming ownership of the newspaper. Some journalists have been arrested and beaten; you don't know who your enemy is and who your friend is. There is no one to protect us."*

> **—Warda Mohamed, reporter, *Libya* newspaper**

> *"The revolution brought us a new wave of journalists who have no link to the industry. We find ourselves invaded by thousands who pretend to have worked in media during the revolution—although we never heard of them. The real journalists are at home. The newcomers took over using their revolutionary connections…"*

> **—Mariyam al Hajjaji, head of *al-Libiyya* FM radio**

Although negatively portrayed by Libyan audiences as the conveyer of regime propaganda, these mainstream journalists from the old state media played a "revolutionary" role during the rebellion and contributed to the weakening of state media propagation: by boycotting their workplace, they referred to their actions as a form of civil disobedience. Most of those interviewed said they contributed to the revolution by providing regional satellite TV channels,

such as al-Arabiya and Al Jazeera, with information about the internal developments of the rebellion and the regime's reactions and operations. This information was invaluable for Arab channels that proved to be strong voices for the rebellion.

So, who are the journalists of post-Gaddafi Libya? This remains a difficult question. For the new media community formed mostly of young newcomers and former citizen journalists, there were no real journalists under Gaddafi as those who used to work in state media were simply the mouthpiece of the regime. Broaching the topic of professional journalism before the revolution, is usually met with a sarcastic smile: which media are you referring to? For those who used to work under the former media regime the newcomers are invading the industry, contributing to the endemic problems of mainstream media and lowering the pre-existing poor quality of journalism. For these old-school journalists, an ordinary citizen cannot be fast-tracked into a professional journalist. However, it is evident that former citizen journalists and young newcomers are the most enthusiastic to be integrated into the new Libyan media landscape. This means they are also the most welcome by the industry, regardless of their competence or training. Some of them have attended training courses but in most cases, they are trained in practice inside the media outlet with quick development from amateur to professional standards expected.

I was met with various examples of young presenters who were given their first on-air programme without any previous training or knowledge of the broadcasting industry. For instance one of the presenters of the morning TV show at *al-Wataniya* station ("good morning Libya") is a lawyer who works on a volunteer basis because she "likes the job."[77] Private media are reluctant to provide jobs for staff of former state media and instead opt to recruit new talent who must learn on the job. This is especially so for TV presenters; engaging well-known media figures from the Gaddafi era is strictly prohibited.

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77. Interview with author, Tripoli, October 2012.

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"Libya is the only country where a journalist is liable for writing an opinion article. A journalist can flatter someone today and criticise them tomorrow. Journalists are free to change their positions. Unfortunately, today there is an awful trend for exclusion. This is leading to impoverishment of all the industries from qualified professionals."

—Mohamed Baio, former head of the General Press Corporation

"We tried to engage journalists from the former media. They could not work at our rhythm; they are still working under the mentality of the state media where they consider themselves to be employees. I told them they have to work or they will be fired."

—Mahmoud el Misrati,
owner and editor-in-chief of *Libya al-Jadida* newspaper

Chapter Recommendations

► The continuous divide between old and new, pro-revolution and pro-regime, is contributing to the major problem of the Libyan media industry and its lack of media skills. The labelling of journalists into competing camps is making the reconstruction of the media industry laden with politics. A unified media community is crucial for the reconstruction of the media industry especially with the endemic lack of national skills.

► Guaranteeing transparency in media funding is crucial to the ability of independent media to thrive and to win the trust of its audience. Any regulatory framework should consider funding transparency a major requirement for any media project, as well as implementation of fair competition laws.

► Training and support programmes for Libyan journalists should include a clear vision for planning and managing media projects. Similarly the need for new projects to adopt a business model is essential as they are more likely to prove to be sustainable and, thus, a successful media project.

► It is the responsibility of the government to provide security for journalists and to take complete control over former state media assets and buildings. However, it is the duty of journalists to voice the abuses and intimidations they are victim to and lobby for their security and rights. It is crucial to empower the media community to lobby for their rights in the political and public arenas nationally and internationally through building nets of pressure groups from within this community. This is one of the main fields of intervention for international agents working on media development in the country.

Conclusion

Media transition in Libya has adopted a radical approach: a complete rupture from the past. While there is progress in moving away from old media practices entrenched in a hegemonic regime, this could be an illusion in the case of Libya. The dismantling of former state media institutions has led to undue punishment of former media staff, believed complicit in the former regime's oppression, who are now stigmatised and excluded from the new Libyan media outlets. This lack of leadership within the new Libyan media landscape, a direct result of no institutional knowledge or vision, has handicapped the reconstruction of the media industry. This political pressure to exclude skilled workers is exacerbating the overall lack of professionalism and skills development, a long-standing problem in Libyan media.

The management of the media transition was volatile and completely lacked long term vision. It was generally managed by officials who had no expertise in media newsrooms. This is understandable in view of the lack of leadership skills, most of them accused of having been part of the former regime. Experienced Libyan journalists living and working abroad are also unwelcome, considered as outsiders to the local media industry.

The management of the media transition brought major problems, compounding the poor legacy of the former regime's media landscape. The current power struggle over controlling the state media has plunged the industry into turmoil. It has led to further fragmentation of this media sector for long time mistrusted by the Libyan audiences.

New media projects launched with state funds are unsustainable and lack newsroom structure while the newly-flourishing private media sector is chaotic. The absence of transparent funding models and questionable operating standards has replicated the larger media discourse inherent to the Gaddafi era.

Libyan media's deficiencies are vast and cover all facets of production. For one, the media industry's decades-long isolation from the Arab and international markets poses a particular challenge to its reconstruction by comparison to the transitional media industries in Egypt and Tunisia. Media reform in Libya therefore requires tailor-made solutions that can address the specific needs of the national mainstream industry.

While most training available to media staff with little professional experience focusses on basic media practices, it is crucial that these courses provide programmes that are targeting media practitioners of different media platforms (print, magazine, television and radio) as well as different levels of media professionalism (junior reporters as well as senior managers). This process should be based on a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges facing the media industry. It is a must that these programmes target institutions and contribute to their development towards professionalism. In doing so, international and regional agents working in media development should base their operations on a deep understanding of the media industry, its needs and its challenges—a matter that necessitates direct connections with this industry. It is clear that most of the training programmes had targeted citizen journalists recruiting trainees through local centres. They must now focus on media institutions and therefore target their staff with specific training programmes.

Moreover, in order to bear its fruit this training should be sustainable, tailored to the realities of newsrooms and embracing elements of long-term coaching/mentoring for journalists and their media institutions.

The media reconstruction process is strongly linked to the political reconstruction of post-Gaddafi Libya. The political transition is progressing

slowly and painfully while tribal tensions are impacting media culture. If independent media is a main pillar in state building, Libya's budding media industry is still searching for its role in a complex political climate. Whereas the new Libyan media is finally able to question and thoroughly investigate political actors, its ability to act as a catalyst for the democratisation process is hindered by its structural shortcomings. A strengthened media would be a vital player in the state rebuilding process as well as the consolidation of the fragile post-Gaddafi security and national reconciliation.

National traditional media in Libya is generally perceived as a political tool that is able to contribute to the stabilisation of the new democratic regime while equally exacerbating historical tribal frictions via hate speech; the national media is routinely accused of spearheading "national dissension" through campaigns of political or tribal incitement and its treatment of unconfirmed rumours. However, this situation is often used as a ploy to muzzle the new Libyan media in their attempts to uncover abuses and to tackle controversial topics. This is leading to a situation where media is not able to tackle polemic national issues under the banner of the need to safeguard national unity. If journalists' training is crucial, media literacy programmes are equally important to remedy the inability of both audiences and the new political sphere to comprehend the nature of media and its role in consolidating democratic systems.

Today, Libyan journalists are not free. While the fall of the Gaddafi regime liberated journalists from their role as publishers of state propaganda, implicit red lines—such as militias, arms and religion—have now pushed journalists to self-censor and obstruct media operations in the name of their own personal security. A brief period of press freedom at the regime's downfall meant a steep rise in investigative reports on endemic issues at the heart of Libya, such as prison torture, rape and the supremacy of militia rule. This trend is now in regression due to the growing pressures and dangers surrounding investigative journalism. Debating current events and political agendas through lengthy talk shows looks like a safer choice for media outlets.

In the post-Gaddafi era, journalists are threatened, intimidated and attacked; the menace posed by the former regime's security apparatus has simply been replaced by that of armed groups and militias. While these groups have been held responsible for human rights abuses, their growing hegemony is nonetheless a major threat to the state's authority.

It is the responsibility of the Libyan government to provide a secure environment for media to operate and to flourish. It is also the government's responsibility to safeguard the assets of state-funded media and to liberate it from the dominance of armed groups. However, it is the responsibility of the media community to voice abuses and to lobby internally and internationally to secure rights and safety. The fragmentation of the national media community and the absence of a unifying body that represents its interests have further weakened its ability to lobby for a secure and professional work environment. A more apt media community would suggest a greater awareness of the nature of its role, especially considering the lack of professional independence under the former regime.

The testimony of Mohamed al Saghir summarises so perfectly the plight of Libyan journalists. Al Saghir, a former state media journalist, was arrested and tortured after he voiced his opposition to the Gaddafi regime on Al Jazeera during the revolution. With the liberation of the country, al Saghir thought that he could finally work free of fear. However, he has since been arrested and interrogated twice by former rebels after reporting on controversial topics such as the bombing of religious shrines. "Before we had one Gaddafi," al Saghir lamented. "Today we have hundreds of Gaddafis." In a post-Gaddafi Libya, professional journalism has proven itself to be a mirror reflecting its past. There remains a long journey to achieve professional and unbiased media.

Major Highlights

► **Skills and Professionalism:** The lack of national skills, especially at the leadership level, was a major handicap of the national Libyan media industry. This is further exacerbated by the inability of the old state media staff to integrate into the new media institution, mostly under intimidation. Libyan journalists are struggling to move beyond the entrenched traditions of glorifying the "leader." If adopting a newsy format appears to be an achievable target for these journalists, more sophisticated media genres such as investigative journalism and field reporting is still lacking in newsroom practices Major obstacles are the lack of security and legal protection for journalists as well as the inability of audiences and the new political sphere to tolerate an open media debate

► **Media and the New Political Sphere:** Journalists are finally able to question the new political actors moving beyond the role of simple conveyer of the regime's message. They are liberated from the outdated news formats laden with the redundant discourse of glorification. However, this identity change is hindered by politicians attempting to use the same censorship/intimidation tools of the former regime and the growing tribal tensions which obstruct field reporting in regional areas. The flourishing of Facebook as a news source is impacting both the political reporting of media staff as well as the official political agenda itself.

► **Media Policy:** Specialised expertise is needed to lead the thorny process of the reconstruction of former state media and the drafting of laws for the private sector. This body of experts should be granted executive power and should enjoy both international expertise and the knowledge of the local media industry. Approaching this process as a reward for those who were supportive of the revolution has led to a chaotic media transition lacking long term vision.

► **Training**: Journalism training is still volatile, focussing on short term formats and not tailored to answer the specific problems of the local media industry. For this training to be efficient, it has to evolve towards a coaching system and to address different needs for different media platforms. It has to target junior journalists as well as leaders and managers. Providing managers with viable business models is crucial in supporting the sustainability of newfound media projects.

► **Media Institutions:** Libyan journalists operate without the support of professional and solid institutions that could provide them with adequate production tools. Establishing new institutional structures and newsroom dynamics as well as new editorial decision-making processes are crucial to move towards professional and viable institutions. Most of the new media institutions are operating according to former dynamics where the head of the media outlet has a monopoly over the editorial decision making processes. Few media outlets managed to adopt internal structures in which roles and responsibilities are defined clearly. Media training/ coaching should contribute to consolidating these new trends.

► **State media:** An open debate about the future role of state media in the post-Gaddafi era has yet to be launched among journalists and in the public arena. This is vital to the fate of this media industry. The volatile management of this sector under the transition has led to continuous changes, exacerbating its long standing problems and providing its journalists with a fragile work environment. A long term vision is much needed to define a professional function for this sector and its journalists beyond the simple role of conveying the message of the regimes. It is the responsibility of the government to launch this process and to put an end to the power struggles endemic to this media sector.

► **Reporting under militias:** Libyan journalists are subject to different forms of direct and indirect threats from militias and former rebels groups whose power is posing a real threat to the state building process in the new Libya. This pressure—expressed in some cases of attack—is reducing journalists to self-censorship by fear of retaliation. This situation

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is leading to implicit new red lines forcing journalists to avoid tackling controversial topics—religion and militias' arms especially—and to focus their production on reporting the new political system. Investigative journalism and field reporting are the most challenging media genres for newsrooms under the precarious security situation.

▶ **Media Funding and Transparency:** The private media sector flourished for the first time in the history of the Libyan media industry. However, hundreds of new media outlets were launched without clarity on their funding and with questionable production standards replicating, in some cases, the old media regime practices. Guaranteeing transparency in media funding is essential to safeguard the independence of new media from political agendas. Any regulatory framework should consider funding transparency a major requirement for any media project, as well as implementation of fair competition laws.

▶ **Journalist awareness**: Libyan journalists are paying high prices to do their job. They are operating without the protection of a professional media environment and adequate regulations. They are facing audience rejection, the pressure of the new political power and the intimidations of former rebels and militias. However, it is for journalists to protect their fragile, newfound freedom by resisting external control and self-censorship. This requires continuous coaching to maintain awareness about the nature of their role as journalists. The support of international experts is also required to establish representative groups and lobbying tools enabling journalists to fight for their right as a unified community. The undue labelling of journalists into competing camps has hindered this process.

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