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Diaspora Journalism and Turkey's Virtual "Imagined Communities": Syrian Media *Di(y)aspora Gazeteciliği ve Türkiye'deki "Hayali Sanal Cemaatler": Suriyeli Medya*

Tülây Atay*

Abstract: The media provides a field of self-expression for individuals, as well as an area for them to announce other avenues of self-expression they're participating in. Individuals usually express their thoughts and feelings at moments of solitude when they are away from their loved ones and their homeland. Such themes of longing, alienation, solitude, connection, home, and separation are quite often the subject of literature and songs. Those who live far from their homeland, or who have been forced to do so, are more attuned to the events unfolding "back home," and more sensitive to the plight of their fellow citizens. Even the most ordinary news from their homeland can be an exciting piece of information. This study is linked to the author's own journeys, and its timing was made more fitting by the earthquake. The author has distilled her own knowledge and views from the ocean of existing literature available to them and brought them together. This article examines every aspect of the concept of the diaspora; its main focus is to showcase how a displaced community living in a foreign county has attempted to create a network of mass communication. As well as investigating the profiles and the eco-politics of six Syrian-origin media companies based in Turkey, interviews with directors and employees reveal the views on diaspora media of those who fled to Turkey as a result of the "Arab Spring" rebellion. Turkey has always been a land of migration due to its geographical location, but this is perhaps the first time in its history that it has been so closely acquainted with the concept of diaspora media.

Keywords: Journalism, Diaspora, Eco-Politics, Syrian Media, Türkiye.

Özet: Medya, bireylerin kendini ifade edebilecekleri bir alan olduğu gibi kendini ifade ettikleri diğer alanların da duyurulabilmesine imkân sağlayan bir mecradır. İnsanların duygu ve düşüncelerini ifade ettikleri zamanlar genellikle yalnız oldukları, sevdiklerinden, memleketinden uzakta oldukları zamanlardır. Bu nedenle özellikle edebiyat, müzik alanlarında; özlem, gurbet, yalnızlık, bağlılık, memleket, ayrılık gibi konuların işlendiğine sıkça rastlanır. Memleketinden uzak yerlere giden -gitmek zorunda kalan/bırakılan- insanlar hem memleketleri hem de orada yaşayanlarla ilgili olaylara karşı daha duyarlı olurlar. Memleketinden aldığı "sıradan bir haber" bile o kişi için heyecan verici olabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, yazarının kendi yolculuğu ile bütünleşen ve zamanlaması depremlerle isabetli hale gelen bir yazıdan ibaret. Yazar kendi entelektüel ve kişisel birikimini literatürün okyanus büyüklüğündeki bilgisinden damıtarak bir araya getirdiler. Makale, diyaspora kavramını tüm boyutları ile ele alarak temelde, ana vatanından başka bir yere göç edip yerleşen bir kitlenin ev sahibi ülkede oluşturdukları kitlesel iletişim kurma çabasını ortaya koymayı amaçlıyor. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de yerleşik Suriye kökenli 6 medya kuruluşunun profillerini, eko-politiğini ortaya koyarken yöneticileri/çalışanları ile yapılmış görüşmeler sayesinde "Arap Baharı" başkaldırıları sonucu Türkiye'ye sığınan/göç eden grubun diyaspora medyası hakkındaki bakış

Cite as/ Atf: (Responsible Author), Assistant Professor, PhD & PhD, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Journalism.

Antakya, Hatay, Türkiye. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0746-7127> & atayavsar@gmail.com & atayavsar@mku.edu.tr

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açılarını saptamaya çalıştı. Türkiye coğrafi konumu açısından hep bir göçler ülkesi oldu ama belki de tarihinde ilk kez “diyaspora medyası” kavramıyla bu denli yakından tanışıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gazetecilik, Diaspora, Ekonomi Politik, Suriyeli Medya, Türkiye.

Introduction

According to the Institute of the Turkish Language (n.d.), the word diaspora is a loan word from French, and it has three meanings: (a) a country where members of a nation or faith community exist as a minority that is different than their country of origin, (b) members of a nation who have left their homeland for other countries, (c) Jewish communities in countries outside of their homeland. Nisanyan’s etymological dictionary (n.d.) and the Turkish Language Association dictionary (n.d.) differ in their spelling of the word in Turkish, and state that the word “diaspora” is used both in French and English. The word diaspora refers to the community of nationals of a country outside of their home country, particularly Jewish people. The Nişanyan dictionary (n.d.) states that the word was derived from the ancient Greek δῖασπορά (*diaspōrā*), meaning scattering, disseminating, which was formed by adding the prefix “die” to the word σπεῖρω, σπορ (*speirō, spor-*) meaning “planting seeds, sprinkling.”

In an article focusing on the concept of the diaspora, Yıldız (2013) claims that the word needs to be clearly and properly defined as a matter of urgency and reveals the 2500-year history of the word by citing reliable sources. The word diaspora often brings to mind the notion of being in a minority, or being “the other,” which causes pejorative associations. Yıldız (2013) says that not every ethnic group can be labelled as a diaspora and pointing at the changes to the definition and interpretation of the word through its historical journey, states that the word has become “*a regular component of the lexicons of newspaper journalists and broadcast media*” (Dufoix, 2008: 30). Yıldız (2013: 312) recommends that the contemporary study of the subject focus on four different branches: the essence of the word, the location of the community, host country, and related country.

Ogunyemi (2015) seems to have taken heed of that suggestion. His book, of which he’s also the editor, examines diasporas of various ethnic and religious origins through the lens of journalism and its audience. Identity-building in the diaspora usually reflects the tension created by the comparison of fond memories of the home country and the material comforts of the home country. This statement is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson’s (1995, 2006) groundbreaking work “Imagined Communities,” which purports that the diaspora is more of a state of mind. Anderson (1995, 2006) tries to illustrate the existence of an imaginary community by using newspapers as an example. According to him, newspapers allow people to practice the same “mass ritual” (morning communion) every morning, and people engage in this worldly task simultaneously. People think the same thoughts and focus on the same events without knowing, as they circle an imaginary world. Anderson bases his view on the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1968) and Elizabeth Lewisohn Eisenstein (1968). (Habjan, 2016; Chari, 2015).

Vertovec (1997) highlights the ambiguity of the term “diaspora,” and interprets the word in three different ways. The first definition is linked to Jewish communities across the world and creates a “negative” impression due to the connotation of displacement. The word diaspora has a negative connotation in many different communities. Vertovec (1997) describes this primary meaning of the word as “diaspora as a form of community,” while he defines the other two meanings as “a type of memory/remembrance” and “a method of cultural production.”

Today, millions of people in our “global village” live outside of the countries they were born and raised in, and there are almost no countries left without a diaspora population (Baser and Swain, 2010, p.37). There’s a branch of nearly every community of various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds in foreign countries that has settled abroad for different reasons, as well as certain districts in their host country that they predominate/are driven to. An example is the district of Kreuzberg in

Berlin, which is heavily populated by Turkish people who arrived in Germany as guest workers and is known as “little Istanbul” (Dell, 2021; Kaya, 1997).

The “Arab Spring” Rebellion and the 2011 Syrian Refugee Crisis

Mass protests against the existing political regime in Tunisia began in December 2010, and throughout 2011, protests spread across other Arabic speaking countries in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region in waves. These mass demonstrations were advocating for democracy and spread quickly from one country to another thanks to social media. Governments were overthrown in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. These rebellions by societies across the Middle East and North Africa aimed to get rid of oppressive regimes and install progressive, democratic leaders, unfortunately, in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, they morphed into armed conflicts and civil wars that are still ongoing (Blakemore, 2019).

Hedge (2016) examines the phenomena of migration and being an immigrant through the lens of the media. In his book, he tells the striking story of an immigrant/refugee published in the “Brazilian Voice” newspaper, a regional newspaper in the US state of New Jersey whose target audience is the Brazilian diaspora. Though the story of the Brazilian refugee winning the jackpot in the lottery is intriguing, the fact that the author only counts Spain and Italy as host nations of Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees who have fled their war torn countries and does not mention the Republic of Turkey at all — though it hosts nearly five million Syrian citizens under temporary protection — detracts from the book. The transformation of the demographic makeup of Turkish provinces in the south and southeast of the country due to the influx of refugees following the 2011 Syrian civil war, and instances of “hate speech” against Syrians encountered in Turkish media can be valuable additions to the third chapter of the book in subsequent editions. According to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) data, the number of Syrian refugees registered in Turkey as of September 2019 is 3.667.435 (2019a; 2019b). It is also interesting that Greece isn’t mentioned in the book as a host country for refugees, and sadly, a critic of the book by Mevsimler and Ponzanesi published in *Feminist Media Studies* in 2017 does not touch upon this aspect of it (Atay, 2019; Mevsimler and Ponzanesi, 2017).

Diaspora Media/Journalism/Publishing: A Conceptual and Methodological Framework

Based on the theoretical approach in Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) book “Modernity at Large”, which discusses the cultural consequences of globalisation, Hedge (2016) states that national economies are shaped by three different factors in the age of globalisation. These three driving forces are: (1) Speculative cash, (2) New financial tools, and (3) High-speed information technologies. In this context, Hedge (2016) purports that migration creates an insecure workforce, and that the state cannot provide security for the workforce created by migration. Globalisation and privatisation erode the individual’s social rights.

In some cases, migration can create a privileged middle class. For instance, the Indian diaspora working and living in the Silicon Valley in the US are granted special privileges by the Indian government/state. For the government of the Philippines, the diaspora is important because of its purchasing power. Another instance of a diaspora wielding its power is how Mexican immigrants in the US are able to influence the outcome of local political elections in Mexico through using social networks. The “diasporic” use of social networks and mass communication methods in order to influence national politics is striking in the cases of Sri Lankan Tamils, Kurdish people, and the Uyghurs (Hedge, 2016).

Georgiou (2006) illustrates the power of the media to create “new areas anew” for groups of migrants, based on the experiences of Cypriot immigrants in London and New York. Tsagarousianou (2017) mentions the “value of the retelling of experiences through diaspora media”.

Hedge (2016) highlights the influence of diasporic activism via internet forums and social media on the national politics of migrants' home countries, and referring to Witteborn's (2014) ethnographic research, he emphasises that digital media does not always carry positive connotations when it comes to the migrant individual's ability to connect to others. Sometimes, refugees and female refugees in particular are ashamed of their status as refugees and stay away from digital (social) media; or digital media can become a threatening space for women. In some instances, social media can act as a magic wand that makes the imaginary real. Male labourers from Southeastern Asia working in the United Arab Emirates admit in interviews that their lives resemble living in a labour camp, however, the posts they share on their social media pages include meticulously crafted selfies that create an imaginary world removed from their actual reality (Hedge, 2016).

In a study conducted shortly after the civil war began in Syria, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) interviewed 10 Syrian diaspora media activists living in 5 different countries (Turkey, Finland, the Netherlands, Russia, and Sweden), and used the term “brokerage” to refer to the work of the activists, who did not regard themselves as journalists. Though brokerage is a commercial term, in communication sciences it can be used in the sense of “representative” or “conduit”. In their extensive interviews with the Syrian diaspora activists, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) asked the interviewees whether they saw themselves as “citizen journalists”; their suitability criteria for local news and images before broadcasting them; their target audience; and the way they used information and communication technologies. In order to add more depth to this study, we have included the diagram created by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) which clearly explains the roles played by Syrian diaspora activists as “brokers of information and news.”

In this study, Syrian diaspora media existing within the borders of the Republic of Turkey is analysed methodologically based on content analysis and narratives of social media accounts.



Figure 1: The roles played by Syrian diaspora activists as “brokers of information and news” following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013, p.2192).

Diaspora media is not limited to radio stations, television channels, print magazines, or newspapers. For instance, websites such as “vaybee.de”, an online forum for Turkish people living in Germany, can also be considered a form of diaspora media. Broadly speaking, diaspora media can be defined as media “created by and for immigrants, which meets the needs and caters to the interests of diaspora members”. In other words, diaspora media is the “smaller” alternative to mainstream mass media (Bozdağ et al, 2012; Dayan, 1999).

The Position and Eco-Political Structure of the Syrian Diaspora Media in Turkey

Before delving deeper into the current standing of the Syrian diaspora media in Turkey, an overview of Syrian media and its broadcasting outlets would be opportune.

According to a study by the Middle East Institute which examines the state of Syrian media following the civil war, there are currently 196 news outlets/broadcasting companies in Syria. The report divides these companies into four distinct categories:

1. Media outlets which support the current regime in Syria (pro-regime): 37% (72/196)
2. Media outlets which support the opposition (pro-opposition): 20% (39/196)
3. Independent media outlets: 20% (39/196)
4. Independent other media outlets: 7% (14/196) (Issa, 2016: 6).

The report (Issa, 2016) also states that there are 71 media outlets that support opposition political parties, and 72 which support the current regime.



The Syrian constitution guarantees freedom of press and freedom of expression. However, according to a publication by the Library of Congress in the USA, a state of emergency law was implemented when the Baas Party seized power in 1964 and remained in effect until 2011. This state of emergency law stipulated that any independent media organisation wishing to publish a regular publication or start a publishing house had to apply for a licence from the Ministry of Information first. This allowed the Syrian government and the ministry in question to have total control over media outlets in the country, and prevent any piece of information, news, or commentary that they regarded as harmful to the regime from being released to audiences/readers for decades (Collelo, 1988).

Though the state of emergency was lifted in 2011, when it comes to freedom of speech the state of the Syrian media has gone even more downhill. The regime increased its control over journalists, and deported international reporters from the country. According to an online 2023 report published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Syria is the world's fifth most oppressive regime in terms of freedom of press and freedom of expression. Reporters in Syria are completely banned or prevented from accessing certain regions and areas, and the regime uses the media as a tool to propagate its own ideology. Government-controlled media outlets receive news reports from the government-run SANA News Agency, and the information they publish is often thinly-veiled propaganda (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.).

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, the state of the media in Syria is complex and unstable; a portion of broadcasting outlets are under complete control of the government, while others are controlled by armed groups and the opposition. Pro-opposition media outlets generally broadcast/publish from outside Syria in the form of diaspora media (BBC, 2023).

This study examines six media outlets broadcasting online which are based in Turkey and ran by members of the Syrian diaspora. Before examining each media outlet in detail, the summary information for 2 TV channels (Syria TV, Orient News TV), 1 newspaper (Enab Baladi), "radio station (Radio Rozana), 1 magazine (Kalamoon Magazine), and 1 Youtube channel (Nedal Malouf, freelance journalist) have been provided in the table below.

Table 1. The list of the Syrian media outlets operating from Turkey.

Name of Media Outlet	Type of Media	Current Web Addresses, Social Media Pages, and Links to Broadcasting Apps (as of July 2023)	Language	Location
<p data-bbox="245 544 368 577">Syria TV</p> 	Online TV channel and website	<p data-bbox="582 544 858 577">https://www.syria.tv/</p> <p data-bbox="582 595 1198 663">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJsZ22yL1IW0R2u0jnnyYog</p> <p data-bbox="582 680 1094 714">https://www.instagram.com/syr_television/</p> <p data-bbox="582 732 1070 766">https://www.facebook.com/syrtelevision/</p> <p data-bbox="582 784 1067 817">https://www.threads.net/@syr_television</p> <p data-bbox="582 835 975 869">https://twitter.com/syr_television</p> <p data-bbox="582 887 1190 1077">https://www.linkedin.com/company/syria-television-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B2%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7/?originalSubdomain=tr</p> <p data-bbox="582 1095 1169 1128">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria_TV_(Turkey)</p> <p data-bbox="582 1146 1074 1180">https://www.tiktok.com/@syriatelevision</p> <p data-bbox="582 1198 946 1232">https://www.baaz.com/syria.tv</p> <p data-bbox="582 1249 914 1283">https://t.me/TelevisionSyria</p>	Arabic	Istanbul, Turkey
<p data-bbox="245 1292 381 1326">Orient TV</p> 	Online TV channel and website	<p data-bbox="582 1292 884 1326">https://orient-news.net/ar</p> <p data-bbox="582 1344 1058 1377">https://www.facebook.com/OrientNews</p> <p data-bbox="582 1395 943 1429">https://twitter.com/orientnews</p> <p data-bbox="582 1447 1153 1480">https://www.youtube.com/user/televisionOrient</p> <p data-bbox="582 1498 1075 1532">https://www.instagram.com/orient_news/</p> <p data-bbox="582 1550 1193 1617">https://www.instagram.com/orient_turk/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFiZA%3D%3D</p> <p data-bbox="582 1635 1046 1668">https://www.youtube.com/@orientturk</p> <p data-bbox="582 1686 1185 1753">https://www.facebook.com/turkorient?mibextid=LQQJ4d</p> <p data-bbox="582 1771 1190 1861">https://www.tiktok.com/@orientturk?fbclid=IwAR1eCyh9BV9Vo2JY_6PoACTE-YkXnEU0Ffntw9-te9WI_hAm8W8QeWWhoN3Y</p> <p data-bbox="582 1879 1201 1971">https://twitter.com/TurkOrient?fbclid=IwAR3stRgeKKHe5zp7a1kLgW9gJlzieEmFRxjQ_FBYV4KxSWG0Y-7CTn73v7g</p>	Arabic, Turkish	Istanbul, Turkey

			https://www.facebook.com/OrientNewsEn/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orient_News https://www.linkedin.com/company/orient-media-group/about/ https://www.linkedin.com/company/orient-tv/about/		
	<p>Enab Baladi</p> 	Online newspaper	https://www.enabbaladi.net/ https://english.enabbaladi.net/ https://podcast.enabbaladi.net/ https://www.facebook.com/enab.baladi/ https://twitter.com/EnabBaladi_Eng https://www.instagram.com/enabbaladi/?hl=en https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enab_Baladi https://www.linkedin.com/company/enab-baladi/ https://t.me/Enabbaladi_en https://soundcloud.com/enabbaladi	Arabic, English	Istanbul, Turkey
	<p>Radio Rozana</p> 	Online radio	https://www.rozana.fm/ https://www.rozana.fm/ar https://www.rozana.fm/en/feed.rss https://nabd.com/rozanafm https://www.youtube.com/user/ROZANAFM1 https://www.instagram.com/rozana.fm/?hl=en https://twitter.com/RozanaRadio https://www.facebook.com/Rozana.fm/ https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/rozana-radio https://cfi.fr/en/news/radio-rozana-journalists-training-syrian-media-incubator https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/gaziantepden-dunya-dort-bir-yanina-sesleniyorlar/1428013 https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2019/03/26/gaziantep-radio-a-voice-for-syrians-across-the-globe	Arabic, English	Gaziantep, Turkey

<p>Kalamoon Magazine / Harmoon Centre</p>   	<p>Online magazine</p>	<p>https://www.harmoon.org/en/news/kalamoon-the-syrian-journal-of-human-sciences-released-the-18th-issue-with-main-file-the-syriacs-past-and-present-their-history-and-role-you-may-find-abstracts-of/</p> <p>https://www.harmoon.org/en/about-us/</p> <p>https://www.harmoon.org/en/reports/</p> <p>https://www.harmoon.org/%d9%85%d9%86-%d9%86%d8%ad%d9%86/</p> <p>https://www.linkedin.com/company/harmooncenter/</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/HarmoonOrg</p> <p>https://www.instagram.com/harmoon_center</p> <p>https://twitter.com/HarmoonCenter</p> <p>https://syrian-sfss.org/</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/SyrianSFSS</p> <p>https://syrian-sfss.org/</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGJFbDUG5H04Pmn-O9RGRFg</p>	<p>Arabic, English, Turkish</p>	<p>Istanbul, Turkey</p>
<p>Nedal Malouf</p> 	<p>Youtube channel for Syrian news</p>	<p>https://www.youtube.com/c/nedalmalouf</p> <p>https://syria.news/</p> <p>https://www.linkedin.com/in/nedalmalouf/?originalSubdomain=tr</p> <p>https://twitter.com/nedalmalouf?lang=en</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/nedal.malouf/</p> <p>https://www.tiktok.com/@nedalmalouf?lang=en</p> <p>https://www.instagram.com/nedalmalouf/reels/</p> <p>https://clubhousedb.com/user/nedal.malouf</p> <p>https://rss.com/podcasts/nedalmalouf/</p> <p>https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%86%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%84_%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%81</p> <p>https://twitter.com/syriannewsco?fbclid=IwAR1a3WdHorPHntCscrC0T9wg0Gosg8ET0VZIenOAXi1xbncAvX9ncVTTncs</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/syriannewsofficial?mibextid=LQQJ4d</p> <p>https://www.instagram.com/syrianews/?igshid=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA%3D%3D</p>	<p>Arabic</p>	<p>Mersin, Turkey</p>

Syria TV (Online TV Channel)

Habertürk newspaper journalist Nagehan Alçı (2022) visited the Syria TV management office in Istanbul and wrote a column about her experiences, in which she claims that despite both communities (Turkish people and Syrian people) sharing the same country, they are separated from each other and do not know each other well:

“Founded in 2018 and broadcasting in Arabic, Syria TV is managed from its offices in the district of Sefaköy in Istanbul and funded by a Qatar-based organisation. Its audience comprises both diaspora Syrians in Turkey and other countries, and Syrians back in their home country. The channel broadcasts via satellite and online, and its programme schedule includes politics, finance, arts and culture, and entertainment. The director of Syria TV, Hamzah al-Mustafa, moved from London to Istanbul to take on the job. Nearly all of the channel’s 230 employees are of Syrian origin and have a good grasp of Turkish. There are almost 25 media platforms founded in Istanbul by Arabic entrepreneurs who have moved here from Arab countries. Three of those (Syria TV, Orient, and Aleppo Today) have been founded by Syrian entrepreneurs. According to Syria TV director al-Mustafa, there are two distinct groups of Syrians in Istanbul: Around 70% of the community’s population are wealthy and religious/conservative Syrians living mostly in the district of Fatih. The other 30% are secular/liberal Syrians. Economically disadvantaged Syrians live primarily in the district of Esenyurt, while secular/liberal Syrians live in Şişli and Beyoğlu. The conservative faction of the community keeps to themselves, while secular/liberal Syrians choose to integrate with people from Turkey.”

Orient TV (Online TV Channel)

Orient TV’s head office is located in Dubai, and it has an additional management office in Istanbul. After broadcasting exclusively in Arabic for a long time, the channel has recently added Turkish to its broadcast languages on social media.

According to the channel’s LinkedIn page, Orient TV was founded in 2009 in Dubai as an “opposition” channel. It has two offices, one in Dubai and another in Istanbul. The Istanbul office was restructured following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and the channel’s output focuses on political, financial, and social news about Syrians in Syria and in Turkey (Orient News, n.d.).

Journalist Oktay Yılmaz was a guest on one of the channel’s programs on March 15, 2023, and when confronted with the claim that “the Turkish armed forces on the Syrian border killed three people and tortured eight others,” he categorically denied and protested the claim, upon which he was asked to leave the studio. Yılmaz attempted to file a court case against the channel for defamation against the Republic of Turkey, and the presenter and director of the program were taken into custody. They were released after being questioned by the police (Shamaa, n.d.).

In October 2021, a member of the public stated in an interview while explaining the poverty they were experiencing: “We (people from Turkey) can’t afford to buy bananas, while Syrians eat them by the pound,” which prompted some Syrian migrants to post videos of themselves eating bananas on their social media pages. Orient TV reporter Majed Shamaa was penalised for broadcasting a news story about the incident (Babilie, 2021).

Orient TV was founded in Syria in 2009 by Syrian businessperson Ghassan Aboud. Due to the conflict in Syria, the channel moved its offices to Dubai in 2011. The Istanbul office was opened in 2015, and the channel continued broadcasting over TV until 2020. Since then, broadcasting has resumed over social media only, due to administrative, technical, and financial concerns, as social media is the most financially viable and prevalent form of communication. As Orient Net News, we have been broadcasting over various different social media networks for the past three years, including Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Telegram, and Threads; our accounts include Orient

Net, Orient News, Orient Turk, TeleOrient, and Orient Plus. The Orient News Facebook page has 16 million followers, its Youtube channel has 2.5 million followers, and its Instagram page has 900.000 followers. With the exception of Orient Turk, all the content broadcast by the Orient group is available in Arabic for its readers in Syria and other Arab countries.

Orient News's Turkish broadcasting arm, Orient Turk, began broadcasting around two years ago. It produces content upholding equality, human rights, and freedom both in Turkish and Arabic, and its key principles include standing up against the rising tide of hate speech against Syrian refugees in Turkey and not getting involved in Turkey's internal politics. Yahya Alhaj Naasan thinks that Orient Turk has made impactful broadcasts in their host country Turkey, as the far-right Victory Party chaired by academic and politician Ümit Özdağ started a campaign to shut down the Orient Turk channel, distributing pamphlets and starting the hashtag #shutdownOrientNews on X (formerly Twitter). Since its inception, Orient News has been funded by Ghassan Aboud and employs a network of 250 reporters around the world.

Enab Baladi (Online Newspaper)

Enab Baladi is an online newspaper based in Istanbul, and it publishes news in English in addition to Arabic.

Enab Baladi is an “independent Syrian media outlet” which began broadcasting in 2011. It is accessible via its website www.enabbaladi.net. According to the information available on its website, it has 47 staff members who work as editors, reporters, columnists, video reporters, and translators. By publishing news and investigative journalism reports, documenting human rights violations in Syria, and surveying the public about important social issues on a local level, Enab Baladi both informs Syrian citizens and supports a democratic society by upholding freedom of press. Since its founding, the newspaper has advocated for peaceful methods of resistance, and has focused on combating sectarianism and hate speech.

Enab Baladi is published weekly on Sundays, and it is distributed to thousands of readers in northern Syria as well as Syrian refugees in some larger cities in Turkey.

In Arabic, Enab Baladi means “the grape of our beautiful homeland,” and it's named after the grapes grown in the Darayya district of Damascus, where the newspaper was first published. The newspaper is printed in the south of Turkey and sent across the border into Syria. The “Syrian Written Media Distribution Network” distributes the paper to readers in Aleppo and nearby towns, Idlib and nearby towns, and the rural districts of Hama and Latakia across more than 300 distribution points. In the Kurdish majority region of Afrin, Enab Baladi has been distributed since August 2014, while it has been distributed in Damascus and the rural south of Syria since the beginning of 2012. Enab Baladi reaches a large audience of subscribers and readers through its website and social media pages, the latter of which have a following of more than 800.000. In the summer of 2012, volunteer amateur reporters working for Enab Baladi received their first formal journalism training in Beirut, which was overseen by international instructors, and was a beneficial process. Since then, Enab Baladi staff have participated in many educational workshops offered by renowned international media institutions, allowing them to gain more skills to share their reports as diaspora journalists with members of the Syrian diaspora in Turkey as well as readers in their homeland. Since its founding, Enab Baladi has been financially supported by voluntary contributions from readers; in recent years, it has been granted regular funding by Syrian and international institutions.

Radio Rozana (Online Radio)

Radio Rozana was founded in Paris in 2013, and in 2014 it opened its Gaziantep office. The online radio station also broadcasts over 98.5 FM. Radio Rozana has social media pages that post both in Arabic and English, and states on its website that they “believe in the younger generation and embrace human

rights and freedom of speech.” The founder of Radio Rozana is Syrian journalist Lina Shawwaf, who states that their broadcasts from the offices in Gaziantep and Paris reach an audience of 2.5 million people in Turkey and 7.700.000 people globally. Like other Syrian diaspora journalists in Turkey, Shawwaf was forced to move out of Syria and leave behind her 26-year career in journalism in 2011. She states that Gaziantep has become a haven for diaspora Syrian journalists. Director of programming Münie Ryyübi states that their broadcasts appeal to every segment of Syrian society and focus on issues that concern the Syrian diaspora in Turkey, such as the prevalence of child labour. Listeners are able to participate in phone-ins to share their views.

Kalamoon Magazine - KM (Online Magazine)

Kalamoon Magazine is published by the Harmoon Centre for Contemporary Studies (HCCS) and its offices are based in Doha, capital of Qatar, and Istanbul. As well as organising events in different countries, the HCCS also runs the Arabic Culture Forum in Istanbul. HCCS was established under the Arabic Research and Political Studies Centre, which was founded in Qatar in 2010. HCCS is an independent non-profit research centre in the field of social sciences and humanities. Its aim is to increase participation in civil society and to spread awareness of democracy. It conducts studies and research on Syrian issues, as well as regional and international relations of Arab countries. The centre promotes values based on democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights.

The Kalamoon magazine is published by the HCCS and does not have a permanent head office; it is put together online by a team of 10 working under the leadership of Professor Salama. Professor Salama states that each of their staff members lives in a different country in exile (Turkey, Sweden, France, Germany etc.) and though they have been working together online for many years, they’ve not yet had a chance to get together in person. Kalamoon is financed by the HCCS and the Arabic Research and Political Studies Centre. The magazine having a limited budget, they endeavour to compensate researchers and writers whose work they publish as fairly as possible.

Kalamoon is published four times a year and its contents mainly focus on academic research and articles on Syrian affairs. Each issue of the magazine comprises approximately 100.000 words. The aim of the journal is to highlight Syrian issues and discuss them on an academic level, and more importantly, to connect diaspora Syrian academics to add more impact and reach to their work. The magazine has a dedicated section for Syrian postgraduate students studying outside of the country, in which their master’s and PhD dissertations are published.

Kalamoon magazine publishes peer-reviewed works by all academics writing or translating studies on Syrian affairs, though it gives priority to Syrian academics and postgraduate students who have had to flee the country due to the civil war and now live abroad. A special section was added to the magazine following the February 6 earthquake that includes studies and articles about the impact of the earthquake and the support provided, as the earthquake struck both Syrians living in the north of the country and Syrian refugees in the south of Turkey heavily.

Nedal Malouf (Freelance journalist, Youtube content creator, General Director of Syria News)

Nedal Malouf was born in the Syrian capital of Damascus in 1969. He studied engineering at the University of Aleppo and journalism at the University of Damascus. Malouf conducts research on Syrian and Middle Eastern history and is a leading activist in creating an electronic archive of culture heritage. He moved to Turkey after the Syrian civil war, and he currently lives in Mersin and runs the Syria News website from there.

Malouf founded a social sciences research centre called the Syrian Economic Society in 1996, and in 2004, he was among the team that created Syria’s first privately run online news website Syria News, which was published in Arabic. According to data from Alexa, Syria News had more than

500.000 visitors in 2009, and Nedal Malouf has remained its general director since the beginning. Syria News is known as a pro-opposition website that reveals and criticises the current government's shortcomings.

The SimilarWeb website, which provides website traffic data, states that the Syria News website was visited a million times between April-June 2023. Visitors use smartphones (52.39%) and desktop computers (47.61%) in nearly equal amounts to access the website. Approximately half of the website's visitors are from Syria (44.48%), while the second most popular location to access the website is Turkey (10.37%). Syria News's Facebook page is its most popular social media account, and the percentage of visitors to the channel's Facebook page (63.66%) is much larger compared to visitors to its Youtube and X (formerly Twitter) pages.

Syria News is financed by businessperson Firas Tlas, who is the son of Syria's former minister of defence Mustafa Tlas and the owner of the MAS Economic Group, which includes food, retail, and real estate enterprises. In contrast to other Syrian news websites that need to rely on a limited number of staff due to financial constraints, Syria News has 50 full-time employees. Another striking feature of many news websites such as Cham Press, Sham News, Damas Post, Syrian Steps, and Syrian Days, including Syria News, is the usage of the word Syria or a Syrian location in the title to broadcast to the world that they're "Syria's voice on the internet" (De Angelis, 2011).

Malouf started a Youtube channel under his own name in 2011, and since then he has been producing content relating to current news in Syria. Malouf's Youtube channel had 60.000 subscribers as of July 2023, and according to data on Youtube, his output of 1400 videos have been viewed a total of 37.000.0000 times.

Nedal Malouf got involved in journalism as a hobby after graduating as an engineer in Syria, and in 2005, after completing his undergraduate degree in journalism, he founded the news website Syria News. Syria News collaborated with the BBC to offer journalism training, and at the time, it was Syria's most popular website by far, attracting more traffic than even Facebook. After 2011, Nedal Malouf had to flee the country due to the oppressive political regime, and he migrated to Turkey. At the time (from 2011 onwards) Syria's border with Turkey in Hatay was still open, which allowed Malouf and his colleagues to travel back and forth between the two countries for work purposes for a few more years. Malouf experienced a reclusive period between 2014-2018 and decided to study the Syrian civil war, which had a huge personal impact on him, and Syrian history. He also set up his own Youtube channel during this time and continues to share videos today. When asked about the driving factor behind deciding to start a Youtube channel, Malouf referred to the changing dynamics of the media. He stated that journalism as a profession is different than the way it used to be, and social media has removed the necessity for journalists to work under a particular institution, which is a reversal of how things used to be. Malouf seized the opportunity to broadcast without being tied to a particular place thanks to the internet, and he has chosen Turkey due to its higher quality of IT infrastructure. The news he produces focus on Syria only, and Malouf states that he finances the Syria News website and his Youtube channel out of his own pocket; his Youtube channel has enough subscribers currently to bring in revenue. He wishes to produce content that will also pique the interest of people from Turkey, but for that he needs to work with a local team, which means requiring a bigger budget. Like many Syrian migrants, Nedal Malouf dreams of going back to his home country one day, but stresses that that cannot be possible without significant political change.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Syrian diaspora community has chosen Turkey as a place to live for many years, and it is no different for diaspora journalists, intellectuals, and other media workers. An interesting feature of the media outlets established in Turkey by members of the Syrian diaspora is that they have made Turkey the centre of Syrian media broadcasting and publishing; though Syrian migrants have formed diasporas

in many different Middle Eastern and European countries post-2011, the media and publishing sector is primarily based in Turkey. Another notable feature is that the target audience of Syrian diaspora media outlets based in Turkey is exclusively Syrians/Arabic speakers, which points to a disconnect with the host country Turkey when it comes to mass communication, as evidenced by the fact that Syrian diaspora media outlets do not broadcast in Turkish despite being based in Turkey, with the exception of Orient Turk. Some of the media platforms examined in this study also use English as their broadcasting language. The six media outlets selected for this study were the most popular in their field, and their shared aim is to create a fairer and democratic community, though the Syrian diaspora media appears to have fallen short of explaining those aims clearly to their “host” community. Due to this, the Syrian diaspora media in Turkey is slowly moving away from being a part of the “fourth sector,” and causing polarisation amongst communities, whether they’re aware of it or not. At this point, it is also worth mentioning that the media outlets of host country Turkey are also in a state of ignorance or deliberate neglect, which would be an opportune topic for a further study. In the long term, the Syrian diaspora media’s preferred stance of insularity rather than acting as a bridge between communities will not be of any benefit either to the diaspora or to the host community.

This study aimed to shed light on why the Syrian diaspora media chose Turkey as its preferred location in the form of a wholistic and preliminary introduction. We hope that other researchers examining issues relating to the Syrian diaspora media can use it as a source of inspiration.

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2. The author of this article has no conflict-of-interest declaration.

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