Syrian Diaspora Mobilization: Vertical Coordination, Patronage Relations, and the Challenges of Fragmentation in the Pursuit of Transitional Justice

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Abstract

The 2011 Syrian uprising saw the rise of several Syrian diaspora organizations seeking transitional justice (TJ). In this article, we ask why these organizations have been unable to present a coherent and unified TJ agenda. We show how a sequence of mechanisms (transnational brokerage, vertical coordination, and patronage relations) have led to fragmentation in the pursuit of justice. The analysis is divided into two sections. First, we discuss the onset of patronage relations made possible by brokered alliances and vertical coordination. Fuelled by differing conceptions of justice and confidence that the regime would quickly fall, organizations proliferated and fragmented. Second, we show how the entrenchment of patronage relations has largely precluded horizontal coordination, even as groups shifted strategy in the wake of changing conditions in Syria. We then argue that collaborative efforts among diaspora groups have largely failed to overcome the rigid patronage relations established early in the mobilization phase.

Keywords: Syria, transitional justice, diaspora, brokerage, patronage, vertical coordination

Introduction

Syrians abroad have long been interested in justice for human rights violations committed in their home country. The Syrian Civil War has galvanized these demands as approximately half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million have been forced to flee their homes, many of whom have sought refuge in Europe and elsewhere in the West. Yet, the conflict is but the latest iteration of displacement. Many fled after 2005 when increased repression marked the end of the Damascus Spring, a moment of optimism for gradual political change. Even going back to the 1970s, many left to escape the Assad regime's oppression. Thus, it is unsurprising that Syrian diaspora groups and transnational activists alike demand justice for mass atrocities.

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What is unusual is that these demands have been framed in transitional justice (TJ) terms. Christine Bell (2009, 5) defines transitional justice as a “field of scholarship connected to a field of practice on how to deal with past human rights abuses in societies in transition.” As of mid-2018, transition seems unlikely; Assad’s victory appears inevitable. Yet, activists adopted TJ language from the beginning of the uprising in 2011. In fact, many diaspora activists were familiar with TJ from studying truth commissions in Morocco and South Africa before 2011. Moreover, most observers anticipated a swift revolution. As a result, diaspora groups rushed to articulate frameworks for establishing a new political order, including dealing with the past. TJ rhetoric also provided a means through which Syrian groups could signal a compatibility with Western conceptions of justice and donor government interests.

However, justice mobilization has been fragmented. This is partially the result of optimism of a swift revolution and conflicting conceptions of TJ. More importantly, donor patronage enabled the proliferation of competing organizations. As the civil war worsened and international jihadists flooded Syria to exploit the security vacuum, donors began prioritizing humanitarian assistance and counterterrorism, which reduced funding for Syrian TJ groups. With transition increasingly remote, diaspora organizations’ tactics and goals have changed, but collaboration beyond joint press statements condemning atrocities remains a struggle.

In this article, we draw upon interviews over the past four years with Syrian TJ activists and transnational non-Syrian activists (henceforth referred to as ‘transnational activists’ to distinguish them from Syrian activists who also operate transnationally) with whom they have collaborated to explain why the Syrian diaspora has been unable to present a coherent and unified TJ agenda. By employing a social movement theory framework, we show how *vertical coordination* and *patronage relations* with transnational activist networks and donors precluded *horizontal coordination* among Syrian diaspora organizations. By brokering links with donors and providing assistance in articulating TJ agendas that suited the interests of funders, transnational activists were able to help secure financial and diplomatic support for diaspora organizations. We argue that access to policy-makers and funders produced incentives to prioritize vertical coordination over horizontal coordination with similar Syrian organizations. Even as conditions on the ground have made horizontal coordination more imperative, these efforts have largely failed to overcome the rigid vertical relations established early in the mobilization phase.

The article begins with a review of current thinking on diasporas in the TJ and transnational social movement literatures. Specifically, we examine how the network-based mechanisms of brokerage and patronage, as well as strategic behaviors of vertical and horizontal coordination have shaped internal movement dynamics as well as relationships with outside actors (see Koinova and Karabegović, this issue). Then, we use our interview data to trace how Syrian groups' TJ strategies have changed as conditions on the ground in Syria and international interest in the conflict have evolved. We conclude by reflecting upon the lessons for TJ and diaspora mobilization scholarship.

Diasporas, transnational social movements, and transitional justice

Diasporas have become a focal point of study in recent decades, including studies of their emergence, political activism, and impact (e.g. Shain 2002; Sökefeld 2006; Smith and Stares 2007; Orjuela 2008; Koinova 2014). By diaspora, we mean "[…] a social collectivity that exists across state borders and has succeeded over time to (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links" (Adamson and Demetriou 2007, 497). In fact, diasporas often have links to several contexts beyond the homeland and host state, thus their derived power and mobilization trajectory must be viewed through their sociospatial positionality in multiple contexts (Koinova 2017). Diasporas' extensive transnational linkages are key to their significance as transnational actors (Ambrosio 2002; Lyons and Mandaville 2012; Brinkerhoff 2016; Marinova 2017).

While diasporas are no longer neglected in conflict studies as some previously argued (Smith and Stares 2007), they remain little researched with respect to TJ (Koinova and Karabegović 2016). Nonetheless, a burgeoning literature seeks to fill this gap (Roht-Arriaza 2005; Quinn 2010; Haider 2014; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016; Koinova and Karabegović 2016; Orjuela 2017; Karabegović 2017; Baser 2017). Some of these studies emphasize diasporas as protagonists. For example, Naomi Roht-Arriaza (2005) gives much of the credit for the eventual pursuit of legal accountability for military era crimes in Latin America to exiles who launched cases against former junta members in courts across Europe in the 1990s. Joanna R. Quinn (2010) finds that the Haitian diaspora was instrumental in bringing about Haiti's National Truth and Justice Commission in

1994. In some cases, diasporas' target of mobilization may not be governments. The Bosnian diaspora, for instance, pressured the multinational corporation ArcelorMittal to establish a memorial at the former Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the company purchased the facility (Koinova and Karabegović 2016).

The existing literature presents several lacunae that the Syrian diaspora's experience address. First, studies rarely unpack fragmentation and contestation *within* diasporas. Camilla Orjuela's (2017) examination of memorialization debates among Sri Lankan and Rwandan diasporas highlights such divisions, but more attention is needed to uncover exactly why this happens. As we will emphasize, competing perceptions of TJ and patronage relations have nurtured divisions among Syrian TJ groups. Second, as Koinova and Karabegović (this issue) note, inadequate attention has been afforded to causal mechanisms linking diasporas and TJ. We identify specific strategic (vertical coordination) and network-based (patronage) mechanisms through which diasporas mobilize for TJ. Thirdly, the TJ literature has long been concerned that a transnational network of justice activists and experts in global civil society and within foreign aid bureaucracies, what some have called the 'TJ industry' (Madlingozi 2010; Gready 2010), was promoting Western notions of justice. While we do not find that Syrians are articulating TJ views contrary to their own preferences or strictly to obtain support, our study specifies ways in which the global TJ industry exerts influence.

Transnational social movement theory provides concrete mechanisms through which international actors influence local TJ processes, thus making valuable connections between the literatures on diaspora politics and TJ mobilization. A rich literature links social movement theory with the study of diasporas (e.g. Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Sökefeld 2006; Adamson 2012, 2013; Koinova 2011a, 2013; Amarasingam 2015), including mobilization among the Syrian diaspora (Jörum 2015; Moss 2016a, 2016c, 2016b; Baeza and Pinto 2016). These studies of the Syrian diaspora do not specifically address TJ. Rather, they focus on the Assad regime's transnational repression and the difference in mobilization for and against the regime in Europe and the Americas.

There are two primary reasons why social movement theory is useful for studying diasporas. First, diasporas are in and of themselves constructed through processes commonly associated with social movement emergence (Sökefeld 2006; Adamson 2012). Both are the result of social, cultural, and political mobilization by independent actors for a variety of political

purposes. Second, the evolving nature of Syrian TJ mobilization tends to reflect mechanisms identified under the rubric of contentious politics. Below, we examine transnational brokerage as well as two novel mechanisms that have not yet been included in studies of diaspora mobilization: vertical coordination and patronage.

Transnational brokerage

Several contributions in diaspora studies point to the importance of brokerage mechanisms in political mobilization (Koinova 2011b, 2014; Adamson 2005, 2013; Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013; Koinova and Karabegović 2016). Transnational brokerage connects otherwise disconnected social actors (Tarrow 2005, 190). Brokers are entrepreneurs who gain power by linking disparate networks to fill 'structural holes' (Burt 1992; Goddard 2009). Such linkages are key for the transfer of ideas, financial and other material resources, and documentation for TJ purposes. Positioned at the nexus of disparate networks, diaspora entrepreneurs are well-suited to assume the role of broker, mediating between various stakeholders. Diasporas derive particular in-between advantages to initiate and pursue political change based on their disposition, migration experience, and hybrid identities (Brinkerhoff 2016). We use this mechanism to point to transnational connections among several disconnected parties: the diaspora, Syrians in the homeland, non-diaspora activists and experts, and donor government policymakers. As we show, multiple actors assume the role of broker in order to gain political leverage and build support for their TJ interests.

Transnational activists assumed the role of broker by establishing linkages between Syrian activists and policy-makers. These technical experts are important in influencing global TJ norms, preferences, and practice (Skaar and Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2013). The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), for example, has provided technical assistance and helped facilitate TJ initiatives worldwide since its creation in 2000 (Van Antwerpen 2005; Subotic 2012). In Syria, former United States Ambassador for War Crimes Stephen Rapp and groups such as the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) and the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG) have played a critical role in linking Syrian TJ groups with donor governments.

In turn, diaspora groups link various actors to homeland affairs. First, they connect migrant populations to homeland affairs (Koinova 2011b; Adamson 2013). Second, they enable donor

governments to advance their own foreign policy interests in the homeland. Finally, Syrian diaspora groups provided transnational activists with access to data and evidence in Syria that enables them to enhance their reputations as leaders in the global justice and accountability movement.

Vertical coordination

These brokered alliances may lead to vertical coordination between diaspora groups and their non-diaspora partners. The vertical dimension of coordination is similar to what Kriesi et al. (1996) refer to as 'external structuration', by which they mean how social movement organizations coordinate action with allies, such as political parties, outside the movement itself. Vertical coordination recognizes that these alliances often have a hierarchical nature to them. The hierarchical nature symbolizes that Syrian diaspora organizations have assumed a subordinate position vis-à-vis donors and transnational activists. Diaspora organizations are important voices in these coordination structures, but do not necessarily possess the means to fundamentally alter policies. Conversely, the superior position of allies reflects direct access to power, or at the very least, more formal integration into policy debates.

To be sure, coordination among movement organizations also is important for collective action (Tarrow 2005; Tilly and Tarrow 2006). Within our framework, alliances among diaspora organizations operating within the same field are horizontal coordination because organizations assume relatively similar power positions. We argue that the vertical dimension of coordination was a dominant feature of early Syrian TJ mobilization. While such relations enhance diaspora organizations' survivability, they also potentially entrench them in rigid vertical relationships. Diaspora organizations risk becoming gradually more dependent on vertical coordination to secure organizational survival. Seen as a sequential process, vertical coordination may lead to a form of dependency, ultimately producing a patron-client relationship. Increasingly embedded in such structures, horizontal coordination among diaspora groups may become more challenging.

Patronage

Patronage is most commonly used to depict how financial and other types of resources are exchanged for political support (Schmidt et al. 1977). Social movement research has demonstrated that patronage relations can both facilitate and obstruct mobilization (Edwards and McCarthy

2004; Auyero, Lapegna, and Poma 2009; Lapegna 2013). Patronage relations are often complex and involve some degree of mutual benefit for the parties involved. As highlighted in the discussion of brokerage, diaspora organizations seek funding and access to political actors in exchange for providing states and transnational activists with local expertise and primary data (e.g., evidence of human rights violations). Such relationships may advance both diaspora and host state interests, as research on diasporas and United States foreign policy has demonstrated (Marinova 2017). However, as the vertical dimension implies, patrons are dominant in this relationship. Instead of merely cooperating based on mutual interests, the mechanism of vertical coordination can transform into a relationship characterized by dependency rather than voluntarism.

Competition for patronage, however, can generate divisions among different groups within a diaspora. Despite agreeing on the ideal of TJ, individual Syrian diaspora initiatives frequently envisage the process and end-goal differently. For example, diaspora organizations have designed various pathways to achieve TJ in Syria, emphasizing different forms of justice (e.g. retribution vs. reparations). Patron-client relationships can thus function as a mechanism facilitating separation and/or competition of otherwise similar justice agendas in the diaspora. The reason for this is that patronage presents diaspora organizations with challenges related to autonomy and legitimacy.

Autonomy has been addressed when it comes to diaspora-homeland relations (see Koinova 2012), but patronage mechanisms also present unique challenges for autonomy vis-à-vis patrons. Maintaining a close relationship with allies provides a host of avenues to influence policy directly, and it is thus beneficial to "'play the game' of the international community" (Koinova 2011a, 439). While diaspora organizations often frame claims in liberal discourse in order to obtain support (Koinova 2011a; Orjuela 2017), the pull to do so may be even stronger when such organizations are entrenched in patronage relations with Western donors. Diaspora actors may find it particularly difficult to distinguish their own interests from that of their patrons because diverging too far puts the flow of resources in jeopardy. Align too close with their allies and they become more exposed to external influence and the agenda of their patrons (Shain 2002; Marinova 2017). While donor governments hold the key to progress on TJ issues, diaspora organizations risk becoming absorbed by their demands.

Reduced autonomy may raise questions about diaspora organizations' legitimacy. Legitimacy is a key resource, but a scarce one among newly established diaspora organizations. While patronage may be essential for organizational survival, it raises questions of legitimacy, particularly in the eyes of diaspora constituents and actors in the homeland. That the diaspora is outside the country in conflict is problematic in and of itself. Moreover, a lack of autonomy can enable rival interests to question an organization's legitimacy and, consequently, complicate collaborative efforts among diaspora activists. Effectively, diaspora organizations are subject to a delicate balancing act, forced to grapple with questions of autonomy and legitimacy while struggling to maintain their organization and pursue their TJ goals.

Methods

Our analysis of TJ mobilization within the Syrian diaspora is based upon data collected from in-depth interviews with twenty-four Syrian activists, primarily executive directors of organizations, and transnational activists, supplemented by relevant reports from activists, governments, and the UN. Table 1 lists the Syrian organizations examined in our study. We began identifying our subjects by mapping diaspora TJ initiatives based upon press reports. We then expanded our list via snowball sampling. The interviews were carried out in person or over Skype since 2014. We employed a semi-structured interview design, which facilitated conversation with the informants. It allowed them to reflect upon their work, helping us to identify the main facets of TJ mobilization in the diaspora. This strategy also facilitated the development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee, which was particularly important since the topics discussed were sensitive. Some informants were especially hesitant to share confidential information about themselves and their organizations.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Our goal is to demonstrate the links between transnational brokerage, vertical coordination, patronage, and movement fragmentation. Process tracing is well-suited to this. Process tracing involves the examination of potential causes of observed outcomes without using large-N comparisons (George and Bennett 2005). Rather, the method uses within-case comparison by collecting data from multiple groups within the diaspora, and by interviewing several respondents

at different points in time. The combination of various sources of data, as noted above, produces a wealth of data with which to analyze diaspora behavior.

Transitional justice mobilization among the Syrian diaspora

The protests that began in Dara'a in March 2011 prompted widespread collective action among Syrians abroad. Demonstrators called for the removal of the al-Assad dictatorship, which has ruled Syria for more than four decades. Prior to 2011, activism in the Syrian diaspora was limited, owing to the restrictions imposed by the extensive security apparatus operating through the *Mukhabarat* and Syrian embassies (Jörum 2015; Moss 2016b). The unprecedented level of anti-regime mobilization included specific demands for justice, dignity, and accountability as well as formalized frameworks for political transition. These claims galvanized diaspora organizations that took root in 2011 and 2012, most of them located in the West. In this section, we demonstrate how transnational brokerage, vertical coordination, and patronage sequentially contributed to a fragmentation of TJ claims in the Syrian diaspora. We do so by providing examples drawn from conversations with Syrian activists engaged in such issues and by examining the implications of fragmentation in the context of changing circumstances on the ground in Syria and the evolving priorities of the international community.

Transnational brokerage, vertical coordination and the onset of patronage relations

As TJ mobilization in the diaspora developed in the early days of the uprising, it became increasingly clear that their claims were fragmented. Syrians both in the diaspora and at home associated TJ with different, often conflicting elements. Informant 21 (March 2017) recalled that early on there were approximately ten to fifteen versions of TJ, many of which were not sufficiently informed by global practice. Divisions revolved around various ideals of justice. Some, like the Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC), advocated for accountability measures and focusing primarily on retribution for past abuses. Such ideas were often rooted in specific events that caused significant trauma for particular communities, such as the Hama uprisings of 1982 for religious Sunnis and the Qamishli riots of 2004 for Kurds, but also included calls for justice for decades of arbitrary arrests and disappearances. Other organizations, such as Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) were less interested in criminal justice, promoting instead more restorative and reparative notions of TJ. Put differently, such organizations focused more on

coming to terms with traumas of the past and uncovering ‘the truth’. As such, they were more concerned with victims rather than perpetrators of abuse and sought reconciliation.

The multiplicity of TJ visions also reflected different activities related to TJ. The Violations Documentations Center (VDC), for example, focused exclusively on documenting abuses whereas the Syrian Expert House (2013) concentrated more on devising a policy plan for political transition. Further divisions among organizations pertained to the methodology behind documentation and political preferences in the event of an actual transition. A plethora of organizations operated, some large and professionalized, whereas others were what Informant 1 (June 2014) described as “three guys operating out of a room in Istanbul.” The desire to make a positive impact in Syria, regardless of TJ vision, necessitated some form of organizational stability and professionalism. This produced a perception, and to some extent a reality, that external funding was essential. Thus, producing good relations with potential donor governments was understood to be key to making a difference.

The connection between diaspora organizations and donor countries materialized through the mechanism of brokerage. By providing expertise and training on TJ issues, transnational activists were able to help diaspora groups formulate a TJ agenda consistent with global TJ discourse and the interests of Western donors in order to secure funding. Despite the absence of a political transition, TJ discourse represented an opportunity structure (Orjuela 2017) that enabled Syrian activists to advance long-standing justice demands. Furthermore, activists’ connections to important policymakers allowed them to facilitate the transaction of both material and nonmaterial resources between diaspora organizations and donors. An important function of transnational activists’ brokerage role has been to mediate the interests of the diaspora and those of the international community. Syrian diaspora organizations also brokered new links, but between Syrians in Syria and policymakers in the West. By facilitating testimonies of victims, diaspora organizations have been able to connect policymakers and publics to the conflict in Syria. These links enabled vertical coordination from the ground in Syria to the international community.

The links produced by transnational activists offered an unprecedented avenue for diaspora organizations to pursue TJ issues. Taking advantage of these newly brokered links, Syrian diaspora activists sought to coordinate and sustain relations with powerful supporters. Many of these supporters had political interest in Syria and thus saw a mutual benefit of allying with diaspora actors to legitimize their own goals. Well-connected organizations like IREX and ICTJ were

particularly influential in linking Syrian TJ organizations with various donors and cultivating coordination among them. Several other organizations such as PILPG, the United States Institute of Peace, David Crane's Syrian Accountability Project, William Wiley's CIJA, European Endowment for Democracy (EED), and No Peace Without Justice have performed similar roles in several host state contexts in the West.

The role of IREX in bridging the gap between American policymakers and SJAC illustrates how vertical coordination and patronage relations emerged. Early in 2012, United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, publicly announced the need for an accountability initiative for Syria and tasked the Bureau of Democracy, Human Right, and Labor with promoting it. IREX, an organization experienced in obtaining United States government grants, worked with Syrian activists to establish SJAC later that year. Promoting SJAC's mission, IREX legitimized the diaspora organization's claims in the eyes of American policymakers and thereby facilitated vertical coordination. They also provided expert help in establishing the administrative features of SJAC, offering advice on financial reporting and compliance. By enabling coordination between the new accountability initiative and the United States government, IREX effectively provided SJAC with direct access to policy-makers and, consequently, sustained funding. The vertical coordination with American policymakers became indispensable for SJAC in its pursuit of TJ objectives. In turn, SJAC became an important Syrian voice issuing TJ claims consistent with American interests. The coordination between them was an example of a mutually beneficial host state-diaspora relationship (Marinova 2017).

Nonetheless, the link undermined SJAC's autonomy and challenged its legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians, both at home and abroad. SJAC came to be closely associated with American policy (Informant 20). The transfer of material and non-material resources between the two parties resembled dependency rather than simply coordination of TJ activities. To counter the legitimacy concerns, SJAC began planning to move out of IREX's office in 2015. The move helped mitigate the perception of SJAC as merely a conveyor of American policy. However, diaspora actors and donor governments alike scrutinized the vertical coordination and patronage relationship between SJAC and the United States.

We observed similar trajectories among other Syrian diaspora organizations. STJ, for instance, received training from ICTJ on the formulation of TJ demands and the collection of data. PILPG facilitated meetings with representatives of the American Department of State in order to

promote the organization's work and garner political support. EED also was an important broker, instrumental in enabling vertical coordination with European donors and entrenching STJ in a patron-client relationship.

There were costs to relying upon donors, however. Informant 21 explained how difficult and time-consuming it was to secure stable funding. Conforming to donors' norms, standards and requirements were preconditions for support. As one Syrian activist put it, donors said, "We can provide you with funds, but you need to do this and that" (Informant 20, August 2017). Consequently, diaspora groups had incentives to adopt certain elements of international TJ discourse that would resonate well with donors in Europe and elsewhere. Many organizations found themselves balancing their own interests against those of their patrons in a similar manner.

Interviewees recognized that the close relationship with donors made it difficult to coordinate action among diaspora organizations. Combined with growing anger over the international community's inaction as the civil war intensified in 2012-2013, Syrian TJ organizations strived to distance themselves from their donors to improve their legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Syrians, both at home and abroad (Informant 1, August 2017). Discussing close relations among diaspora organizations and their donors, Informant 7 claimed that getting Syrian organizations out of their supporters' grip was an important, but challenging objective. Transnational activists helped professionalize Syrian diaspora TJ organizations in addition to providing them with legitimacy in the eyes of donors, new financial opportunities, and direct access to policy-makers. The close relationship that SJAC had with IREX and that other diaspora organizations have established with other donors have complicated the quest for legitimacy and made it difficult to coordinate actions horizontally with other diaspora organizations. Furthermore, it has made it more difficult for diaspora organizations to work with Syrians at home.

In sum, transnational brokerage was vital for connecting diaspora organizations, transnational activists, and donors. Diaspora organizations garnered international political and financial support for their TJ agenda. However, strong vertical coordination came at the expense of horizontal coordination efforts among various TJ organizations. The reliance on donors became the Achilles heel of many organizations. Several informants claimed that prevalence of funding sources contributed to fragmentation on TJ issues. Conforming to donor requests ensured survival, but entrenched them in what resembles a patron-client relationship, challenging their legitimacy among Syrians at home and abroad. Overcoming this drawback has proven difficult.

The rigidity of vertical coordination and patronage relations

As the dynamics on the ground in Syria and the priorities of international actors changed, diaspora groups have struggled to adapt. Over time, states have increasingly perceived a tradeoff between peace and justice in Syria, and have reduced their rhetorical and financial support for TJ. Transnational activists' role has increased in recent years as they too sought to keep global attention on atrocities in Syria. Many Syrian informants saw this as a mixed blessing, as their interests did not necessarily coincide. In the wake of these changing circumstances, many Syrian groups have adjusted their strategies. In doing so, they have recognized the need for greater collaboration among themselves. While there has been some progress, this section argues that the vertical coordination and patronage relations established early on continue to inhibit horizontal coordination. Specifically, waning donor interest has increased Syrian organizations' incentive to reinforce vertical ties by highlighting their individual contributions in order to maintain access to dwindling patronage.

Several informants highlighted 2013 and the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (*Daesh*) as a turning point in their work. During the year, conditions on the ground in Syria changed dramatically. The presence of *Daesh* grew, culminating in the January 2014 declaration of Raqqa as its capital. Its capture of Mosul and Tikrit in Iraq five months later deepened regional and global powers' fears. The United States and its allies began airstrikes against *Daesh* in August 2014. Meanwhile, hopes for a settlement between the government and the main opposition were frustrated when the Geneva II talks failed in early 2014. As of mid-2018, although the threat posed by *Daesh* is diminished, Assad looks likely to win the war, making any form of TJ process increasingly remote.

At the international level, the UN has inconsistently engaged with TJ issues. Diaspora organizations often speak of the UN efforts with frustration. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, for example, has generally avoided any talk of justice and accountability for fear it will create further obstacles to peace negotiations. Blocked by Russia and China, the UN Security Council also has been unable to advance a justice agenda. The UN Human Rights Council did establish the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria in August 2011 to document violations, and in December 2016, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution to establish the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), mandating it to collect and analyse evidence of human rights violation in Syria.

Syrian diaspora organizations, however, feel ambivalent about both UN initiatives. They want to support international action that brings justice closer to a reality, but SJAC's Executive Director Mohammad Al Abdallah (2017) argued that the UN's inaction on Syria and the failure of the Commission of Inquiry increased "distrust of the international community among Syrians." Several informants felt that the Commission of Inquiry exploited Syrian organizations for evidence. Informant 22 said, "There was no two-way communication". Informant 1 (August 2017) and 22 were similarly critical of the lack of input Syrian groups had in the drafting of the IIIM. Moreover, Informant 22 worried that the IIIM will be a rival for funding as it relies upon voluntary contributions from donors. Despite this discontent, many organizations signed memoranda of understanding with the IIIM in April 2018 as it represents the only justice efforts the international community has been willing to engage in.

Changing circumstances in Syria also have dramatically affected the behaviour of donors. Patron funding dried up as many donors reduced spending on Syria or redirected it to anti-terror or humanitarian efforts. Interviewees cited Switzerland as the most faithful TJ supporter along with the Scandinavian, British, and Dutch governments. Diaspora organizations with ethical concerns about accepting support from governments that were simultaneously worsening the humanitarian crisis by fighting against *Daesh* found themselves with fewer options (Informant 22, 2017).

In light of changing relations with states and transnational activists, Syrian groups' strategies have changed. Informants 1 (August 2017) and 23 argue that the failure of the Geneva II talks in early 2014 led groups to abandon devising TJ plans and raising awareness about TJ. Informant 4, who worked for an international NGO, said that creating TJ blueprints was "a waste of time, completely useless, and a waste of resources" because conflict is still ongoing and there is no meaningful way to involve Syrians in the country in the design process. Many groups disappeared during this time. For those that survived, with the prospects of implementing TJ increasingly remote, groups emphasized other activities such as documenting human rights violations, training Syrians within Syria to collect evidence, delivering humanitarian aid, and pursuing criminal cases in third countries. In doing so, many organizations' core missions changed to better reflect the interests of donors and transnational activists.

When organizations obtain funding, it has had profound effects on organizational behaviour. Donor funding has generally been very short term, typically four to six month contracts.

As a result, as Informant 24 noted, organizations have to spend lots of time fundraising rather than doing TJ work. Dwindling patronage may have had some positive consequences, however. Over time, Informant 22 notes, while the number of organizations declined, their professionalization and expertise grew dramatically. Combined with less reliance on financial support from donors, this has increased their autonomy and possibly enhanced their legitimacy.

The relationship between diaspora organizations and transnational activists also have been strained in recent years. Over time, Syrians have become less sanguine about their cooperation. Several informants were critical of what appeared to be increasingly self-interested behavior on the part of non-diaspora activists. Informant 22 decried "'international experts' who do not speak Arabic and have not spent time in the region, yet present themselves as Syria experts." Informant 24 said that, when they need information for a report or a token Syrian for a panel they are organizing, international NGOs come calling. As he put it, however, "Syrians must lead, rather than just be brought in as examples or witnesses."

One major tactical division relates to the value of pursuing criminal cases now, which is something most transnational activists support. With the Security Council unwilling to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court or to create a special tribunal for Syria, some groups have pursued cases in third country courts under universal jurisdiction principles. The centerpiece of this effort has been the so-called Caesar Files, named for the codename of a Syrian military photographer who smuggled more than 50,000 photos documenting government abuses out of the country in early 2014. However, this effort has exposed other divisions among Syrian groups. Some organizations, in collaboration with prominent international experts like Ambassador Rapp, Crane, and Wiley, view this data as a critical means of advancing accountability now. Moreover, some think that the publicity might deter future atrocities. Other groups are more wary. Because defendants are not in custody, Informant 1 (August 2017) feels it is a waste of time. More importantly, he fears these trials will unrealistically raise victims' hopes and reduce pressure on the international community to reach a political solution. Even groups who are part of the effort are somewhat ambivalent. Informant 23, whose organization has been working with CIJA, characterized their foreign partners as "looking for something easy and visible."

One area where major efforts have been expended to promote horizontal collaboration is in documenting atrocities in Syria. This was a central purpose of the Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG), an umbrella organization formed in 2014. Membership varied

between 14 and 18 organizations in subsequent years. Informant 24 argued the TJCG was a way for groups to pool their strengths. Some had better finances than others, for example. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression has consultative status through the UN Economic and Social Council, which enables access to the UN system. More generally, groups' different relationships provide access to different people. Informant 22, who was part of the TJCG, says members were initially "very self-absorbed in own organization, but over time have come to see they must work together." Nonetheless, the rigid vertical relations established early on continue to inhibit deeper horizontal collaboration. As a new round of peace negotiations got underway in 2016, the perceived need for greater collaboration increased as Syrian groups worked to ensure that TJ was not forgotten. One major initiative was to map violations. However, cooperation proved difficult. As Informant 5 notes, the size of one's database is a key selling point when seeking funding from donors, so sharing creates a competitive disadvantage. Informant 1 (August 2017) says that even TJCG members questioned its purpose. As of early 2018, the TJCG no longer had an online presence and appears dormant. With the Syrian Justice Conference held in Istanbul in February 2018, the Free Syrian Lawyers Association and its ally the Center for Rule of Law and Good Governance sought to improve horizontal coordination among Syrian groups, yet little evidence beyond a join final statement supports genuine collaboration.

Despite attempts at producing a coherent TJ vision for Syria, the diaspora has been unable to overcome the consequences of strong vertical coordination structures and patronage relations. Competition for funding remains a core obstacle, and the relative decrease in its availability has cemented the groups' differences. Changing tactics have yet to produce concrete results in the form of extensive cooperation – even on documenting atrocities.

Conclusion

The Assad government's repression of peaceful protestors in 2011 unleashed an unprecedented level of activism among the Syrian diaspora. Non-Syrian transnational activists were eager to broker relationships between Syrians and donor governments, and the subsequent coordination and patronage relations created outsized expectations among the diaspora of their potential to shape a new Syria. Such vertical relations, however, raised autonomy and legitimacy concerns among Syrians, both at home and abroad. Moreover, the availability of patronage sustained a plethora of organizations, working – at least implicitly – in competition with one another. In the context of

changing donor interest and worsening conditions within Syria, diaspora organizations have endeavored to adjust their strategies and detach themselves from donor interests. Nonetheless, the vertical coordination structures and patronage relations established early on have inhibited collaboration among diaspora organizations.

The Syrian diaspora's TJ mobilization advances our understanding of transnational mobilization in important ways. First, we introduce the notion of *vertical coordination* and *patronage* to describe situations in which relations between diaspora organizations and their patrons are cemented by the provision of resources. As we show, vertical links can retard the development of coordination among movement organizations. Competition for patronage has been a major source of tension among Syrian activists, thereby inhibiting horizontal coordination even when circumstances made such cooperation more imperative. Even when Syrian groups sense the benefits of vertical coordination are waning, horizontal coordination has been limited. Several interviewees mentioned the resentment TJ activists within Syria feel because they have not gained the resources, security, and celebrity of their counterparts in the diaspora. Thus, we identify specific mechanisms through which the global TJ industry shapes local TJ processes.

Second, transnational experts connected Syrians with donor governments, which was important for building and sustaining diaspora organizations. In turn, transnational activists gained from Syrian groups brokering connections with Syrians within the country to collect evidence that would support high profile legal cases around the world that enhance their own reputations. Syrian groups and transnational activists both gained legitimacy with different audiences from their interactions. Nonetheless, this is risky for diaspora groups because these relationships raise questions about their autonomy.

Finally, the Syrian case reveals fruitful areas for future research. First, we highlight the contentious politics within diasporas over TJ philosophies and strategies. Most previous research situates diaspora activists as protagonists fighting against hostile or indifferent home and host country governments. Studies of other diasporas may reveal whether diaspora fragmentation is more likely in diverse societies in the midst of conflict and/or with histories of identity-based political and economic marginalization. Second, other causal mechanisms identified in this issue deserve greater attention with respect to Syria. We need to know more about scale shifts that may occur as Syrian activists engage a variety of audiences. In addition, activists' attempts to reframe debates (challenging the alleged tradeoff between peace and justice earlier in the conflict or the

growing emphasis on returnee needs and property restitution as the war winds down) needs further study. Finally, coalition building among TJ activists in different Middle East diasporas has not received attention.

Table 1: Syrian transitional justice organizations in the diaspora

Organization	Country
Assyrian Network for Human Rights	None listed
Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria	Turkey
Coalition for a Democratic Syria	USA
Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies	USA
Dawlaty	Lebanon
Fraternity for Human Rights	Germany
Free Syrian Lawyer Association	Turkey
Human Rights Guardians	None Listed
Hurras Network	Turkey
International Supporting Women Association	None Listed
Justice for Life – Syria	None Listed
Kawakibi Organization for Human Rights	USA/Turkey
Rule of Law Support Center	None Listed
Syria Justice and Accountability Center	USA/Netherlands
Syrian American Council	USA
Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression	USA
Syrian Archive	Germany
Syrian Emergency Task Force	USA
Syrian Expatriates Organization	USA
Syrian Expert House/Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies	USA
Syrian Institute for Justice	Turkey
Syrian League for Citizenship	Lebanon
Syrian Network for Human Rights	USA
Syrian Nonviolence Movement	USA
Syrian Observatory for Human Rights	United Kingdom
Syrians for Truth and Justice	Turkey
The Day After	Turkey
The Syrian Committee for Detainees	None Listed
Transitional Justice Coordination Group	None Listed
Ur Nammu	None Listed
United for a Free Syria	USA
Violations Documentation Center in Syria	Netherlands
Women Now for Development	France

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