

## **Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building during Conflict**

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### **Introduction**

State failure, following the outbreak of internal conflict, continues to preoccupy global attention, especially in view of its cross border implications (Kaldor, 2003).<sup>1</sup> Serving as havens for terrorism, failed states put the lives of their own citizens and of citizens of the rest of the world in danger. The importance of the state building component of international intervention as a basis for peace is evident in the literature (Brikerhoff, 2005; Paris, 2004; Mac Ginty, 2011; Edwards, 2010; Roberts, 2011). Nonetheless, international efforts directed at institutional building, are still weak (Brikerhoff, 2005). State fragility needs to be seen as a series of complex governance dynamics shaped by the interaction between international and local factors during the conflict phase and not only in the post conflict phase.

During conflict, state-failure shifts governance from the state to other players at the local level. Citizens are compelled to fill the sovereignty gap via local groups, religious authorities, tribes and clans. This may extend to warlords and terrorist organisations tied to political, social, military or economic networks operating at local, regional and global levels (Zoellick, 2008). At the international level, state-failure shifts governance to global governance actors such as foreign governments, international organisations or private institutions. At the heart of international governance lies the neoliberal peace that, following the work of Paris (2004), promotes institution building of both the state and civil society as a basis for peace. Much criticism is raised against this approach. It is deemed unsustainably aimed at creating a top-down neoliberal order and control over conflict-torn states and societies regardless of the latter's rights and human security (Richmond, 2005). Nonetheless, as Mac Ginty (2011) illustrates, the neoliberal peace is not all powerful, for international processes may change and/or be changed by local actors and their dynamics, thus resulting in a hybridised governance characterised by inter-linkages between state, society and economy operating at multiple levels – local, regional or global (Mac Ginty, 2011; Edwards, 2010).

The Syrian case of state-failure is no exception to these governance dynamics. The country's dire humanitarian crisis, disintegration of political authority and the manipulation of public services as war tools have created a void, which multiple actors have stepped in to fill. These include: Youth networks, Civil Society

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organisations, Local Councils, Sharia-based institutions, the Free Syrian Army's civil administration, Syrian Islamic Liberation Front, Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party structures, and the jihadist groups, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Khalaf, 2013). The most powerful of these are the latter Al-Qaeda affiliated and jihadist groups but these continue to face resistance from traditional authorities and civil society groups. The latter illustrates a certain governance ability and agency at the local level, yet it does not seem to have escaped the neoliberal peace project. Following Paris' advocacy of institutionalisation prior to liberalisation, institution building at the state and civil society level seems to have become the priority of international interveners in Syria. Both local and international forms of governance continue to compete, change and hybridise. Currently, these forms of governance do not represent an inclusive state-building process but they do provide Syrians with a minimum order in the middle of conflict. Thus, while Syria during its current conflict may be without government in many of its areas, it is not without governance.

## Research Scope, Methodology and Structure

**Scope:** This article aims to break new ground in academia by bridging the existing knowledge and practice gap on governance during conflict. It seeks to understand the governance dynamics during conflict in the non-government-controlled parts of Syria. It pays particular attention to civil society and state building processes. In doing so, the study spans historical and geographical width. Historically, to understand the roots of the conflict, it assesses the state-civil society-market dynamics of governance in Syria prior to 2011. Nevertheless, its focus is on contemporary Syria between March, 2011 and May, 2014. Geographically, its particular attention and in-depth analysis is on three areas in the non-government-controlled parts: Al-Raqqa (the city), Deir Ez-zor (Al-Mayadeen and the city) and Aleppo (the city). These have been chosen as per key dimensions differentiating each area as detailed in parts 4A, 4B and 4C of this article. These dimensions are: 1. The security situation reflected by the degree of violence and chaos locals are experiencing; 2. The economic situation and whether the area is rich in resources; 3. The socio-economic background of the locals and 4. The geopolitical importance of the area. Comprehensive treatment of the period prior to 2011 and after May 2014 is beyond the scope of this study.

**Methodology:** This research relies on both primary and secondary data. The author has extracted primary data through quantitative and qualitative methods over a period of 6 months until May 2014. Qualitatively, the research benefits from a large number of Skype interviews. It also benefits from tedious field work involving discussion groups and face-to-face interviews with key Syrian civil society activists, politicians, Local Council members, staff in the National Coalition and in international and private organisations, researchers and intellectuals based in Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. *Unless otherwise stated, information provided is drawn from this primary data.* Quantitatively, the research builds on data drawn from a previous research project (Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria (2011-2014)). This collected semi-structured questionnaires from 94 civil society organisations in non-government-controlled parts in Syria. The researcher's secondary data relies on official sources, books,

academic reports, articles, publications and social media sources when confirmed by credible activists. Theoretical knowledge and expertise is drawn from the political economy, sociology and anthropology fields.

The main strength of this research is its access to local civil society groups inside Syria, benefiting from the author's background as a Syrian and her strong relationships with local civil society trust circles. The variety of methods by which the data is collected, also adds to its credibility. Meanwhile the main limitation is that the situation in Syria and key actors continue to change drastically. This, added to the minimal transparency of main international interveners about their work in Syria, has made it extremely difficult to collect information in a holistic manner and to draw clear-cut findings. Much has yet to be understood as realities are unveiled in Syria.

**Structure:** The article is divided into five parts. Part 1 lays out a theoretical framework. Part 2 assesses the historical context of governance leading to the conflict in Syria and describes the new hybrid governance. Part 3 explains governance during conflict in Syria as a hybrid between local and international dynamics. Part 4 culminates with the richest part of the study's field work – case studies of three non-government-controlled areas: Al-Raqqa, Deir Ez-zor and Aleppo. It then ends with concluding remarks summarizing the findings.

## **Part 1. Theoretical Background**

### **1A. Clarifying Concepts**

The manner in which academics and policy-makers sometimes reduce conflict to an overly neat analysis, between a few groups over a specific issue is misleading; it overlooks other layers of conflict and the agency and the diversity of local actors (Mac Ginty, 2011). Conflict is multidimensional, is in continuous change and involves hybrid dynamics (ibid). "Hybrid governance" results as local governance shapes and becomes shaped by civil society and state building bottom-up and top-down processes. Explaining this process necessitates first redefining the following vaguely interpreted notions during conflict:

**Governance:** The difference between government and governance is in the multiple layers and localities of power (institutionalised and informal), in the number of actors involved and the activities regulated (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013). The definitions of the UK Department of International Development (DFID) and UNDP are most useful in this regard. DFID defines governance as 'how institutions, rules and systems of the state—executive, legislature, judiciary, and military operate at a central and local level, and how the state relates to individual citizens, civil society and the private sector' (DFID, 2001). The UNDP (1997) applies governance to states, the private sector and civil society and strives towards a mutually supportive relationship between these sectors (MacGinty, 2011, p. 160). Thus, governance during conflict is about multi-layered power dynamics across and within the state, market and civil society spheres. It hosts a diversity and fluidity of actors, systems, institutions, procedures and boundaries at the international and domestic levels.

**State Building:** A key component of governance and peace building in international interventions is state-building (Edwards, 2010). Paris and Sisk define state building as “the construction of legitimate, effective governmental institutions” (Roberts, 2011, p. 12). Chandler refers to it as “constructing or reconstructing institutions of governance capable of providing citizens with physical and economic security” and linking them to global governance regimes (as cited in Roberts, 2011, p. 12). This (re)construction goes beyond technocratic exercises of rebuilding state infrastructure and involves political, social and economic activities with profound impact on the nature and relationships between the civil society, state and market (MacGinty & Williams, 2009). As such, state building during conflict involves constructing new or reformed governance, signalled by improved *legitimacy*, *effectiveness* and *security provision*.

**Civil Society:** A main actor of state-building during conflict is Civil Society. ‘Locke, Hegel, Merkel and Lauth suggest that civil society is “the space in between” where the political, economic and private spheres interact (Fischer, 2006). Arato and Cohen add that the private sphere is not excluded from civil society as private issues like women’s rights are part of the public debate (Kaldor, 2003). However, contemporary discourse tends to institutionalise civil society, to separate it from what is political and to veil the difference between the local and international (Pouligny, 2005). Meanwhile, during conflict, civil society comprises heterogeneous informal actors, with inclusive and exclusive identities, whose function revolve around survival, hence existential politics. Civil Society is an arena of both civility and incivility which academics term “conflict society” (Marchettia & Tocci, 2009). Hence, this study refers to the original definition of civil society as the space between the state and market, interacting and overlapping with both. This could embrace diverse spaces, actors and institutional forms varying in formality, autonomy, power (Centre for Civil Society, 2008) and “civility” across borders.

In a nutshell, state building with its diverse measures, does shape local governance. Simultaneously, the latter is also affected by the context and agency of civil society with all its components. The result is “hybrid governance” across multiple layers, spaces, actors, institutions, procedures and boundaries.

### **1B. The Hybridity Model of Governance**

The hybridity notion proposed by Mac Ginty (2011) focuses on the interaction between the international-promoted liberal peace and local dynamics in the post conflict phase. It illustrates that the liberal peace project is not all-powerful; it is hindered by its contradictions and by local powers and norms. This study extends this view to the time frame during conflict as it argues that it is exactly the conflict period that sets the stage for the peace that follows. This is via both international top-down and local governance dynamics.

**Governance from the top:** At the international level, liberal governance interventions have broad political, economic, social and cultural implications for local governance. They may alter the nature and orientation of the state, civil society and market and the dynamics between them (MacGinty, 2011). During current conflicts, this is advanced by the focus on institution-building and civil society.

The preoccupation with state/institution-building seems to follow Paris' notion of supporting 'institutions' before changing political practices (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). In his argument, Paris prioritises (re)constructing institutions to restore basic security, which he views as the main challenge to reconstruct failed states (Paris, 2004). This raises some issues. First, as important as institution building are the kind of institutions and the manner of implementation: often the process is dictated from above aiming to transform local norms into liberal ones (Roberts, 2011). Institution building may side-line human rights in the name of competence and stability (Jenkins & Plowden, 2006). Second, state building can prolong state failure and contribute to insecurity if not supported by changed political practices. Backing corrupt institutions in the name of state building advances abusive authority and fuels conflict (Call, 2008). Such institutions fail to act as a guarantor for civil society development, and of healthy governance (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013).

Another recent key international governance focus is civil society. Again, several issues arise around the kind of civil society promotion and the manner in which this is done. Some interventions acknowledge local civil society and support its local ambitions without imposing their own views. Other interventions opt to engineer a civil society that chimes with their preferred form, thus limiting the more diverse local expressions of civil society (Mac Ginty, 2011). This is the case even when interventions claim to encourage local ownership and participation; power redistribution is often marginal and manipulated as local actors are obliged to conform to certain norms and practices (ibid). Critically, international interventions may tilt the balance between the state and civil society (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, et al., 2013).

**Governance within:** Locally, where government institutions cease to exist, with the destruction of infrastructure and the disruption or complete failure of the delivery of basic services (health, shelter, education, sanitation, electricity, etc.), the result is mass dislocation, insecurity, massive sufferings and limitations of livelihoods. Indeed, life deteriorates to a struggle for the most basic needs that are markedly different from those of citizens living in safe zones. However, locals living under conflict, as suggested from examples ranging from Afghanistan to Somalia and Bosnia, do not remain passive; they create systems of governance to make their situation more predictable and liveable.<sup>1</sup> Spaces or "pockets of authority" are created wherein diverse actors press competing claims for power and kinds of order (Edwards, 2010). Civil society –with both civil and uncivil segments– is a major actor, but so are warlords, tribes, armed groups, international actors and extremists groups. They fight, cooperate, overlap or co-exist until customary arrangements are reached among them. Their success or failure in establishing local governance (Brikerhoff, 2005; Edwards, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Zoellick, 2008) can be measured according to three dimensions: Effectiveness, Security and Legitimacy. *Effectiveness* means regular and equitable provision of basic needs such as electricity, water, food, jobs, etc. This may involve more sustainable measures related to restarting and/or regenerating an economic cycle and livelihood opportunities. *Security* involves securing the lives of civilians in a systematic rather than ad-hoc manner through the creation, maintenance and management of the police, judicial system and armed services. Security extends to defending infrastructure, homes, schools, sources of livelihoods like power lines, pipelines, roads, homes and schools from looting and

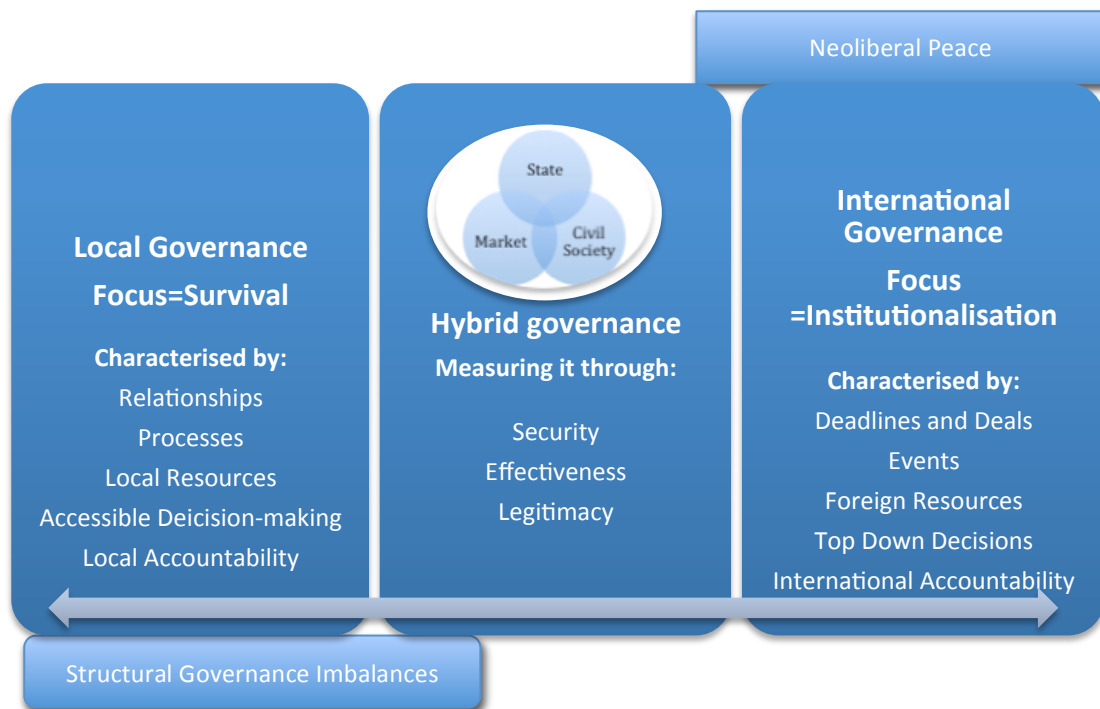
destruction. *Legitimacy* refers to a “complex set of beliefs, values and institutions (endogenous and exogenous) about the social compact governing state–society relations”. In conflict, legitimacy is related to the provision of basic services and security measures in a manner accountable to local citizens.

**Hybrid Governance:** Although international intervention is at an advantage in marshalling immense economic and cultural power, there are limits to this power. While international actors’ own political and economic problems may be one problem, a bigger issue is the resistance they face from local actors who may defer, defect and/or change the nature of interventions (MacGinty, 2011). This is especially the case as the notions of governance and power may be interpreted differently by local actors.

Figure 1, which illustrates the theoretical framework of this study, highlights this dichotomy and the hybrid space in-between. Indigenous local governance in conflict situations is complex, informal and revolves around survival while feeding off structural governance imbalances. It is continuously changing, public and accessible, depends on relationships and respected traditional or charismatic figures as sources of legitimacy and relies on local resources which add to its accountability and transparency in decision making and thus to its legitimacy (Edwards, 2010; MacGinty, 2011). Meanwhile, governance measures followed by international actors are often neoliberal, top-down; arrange deals in a technocratic manner behind closed doors while engaging with national elites; prioritise reaching deals and meeting deadlines over building relationships; and rely on external personnel, ideas and material resources (MacGinty, 2011). Governance during conflict is seen as a process by the locals but treated as a series of events by the internationals (ibid). This difference paves the way for uncivil actors who understand these power structures as well as local structural issues better, to pursue their own warlord governance and/or state-building agendas.

As a result, the governance that is created on the ground during conflict is a hybrid of what is old and what is new, of what is local and what is international (MacGinty, 2011), of what is civil and what is not, all of which conflict, co-exist and cooperate across the civil society, market and state spheres. Hybrid governance in the Syrian case is assessed in terms of the ability to provide: 1. Security on the ground, 2. Effectiveness in the delivery of services, and 3. Legitimate governance.

Figure 1: The Hybridity Model of Governance During Conflict



Source: Adapted from (Mac Ginty, 2011)

## Part 2. Governance in Syria as a Hybrid of the Old and New Imbalances

A key shortcoming in international policy work aimed at providing alternatives to the violence in Syria is the tendency to treat conflict in ignorance of its historical context. This, for instance, is evident in the failure of Geneva I, II peace talks. The following, illustrate the structural implications of governance pre-conflict, on the Syrian conflict.

### 2A. Governance Pre-Conflict: From State Manipulation to Market Manipulation

Prior to the conflict in Syria, regime reforms were aimed at preserving authoritarian governance. The paradox is that changes produced by internal economic and political reforms to civil society and the market threatened power elements sustaining the regime; however, not implementing them threatened regime security amidst external pressures (Khalaf, 2009). Thus, reforms were carried out, but in an unbalanced manner.

#### 2A.1 Pre-2005: State Manipulation

Syria was heavily controlled by a state described as bureaucratic, inefficient, unproductive, corrupt and overstaffed by unskilled redundant labor. In 1999 - 2003, over 50% of the budget was spent on military, subsidies, price transfers and

public sector wages (Bruck, et al., 2007, p. 12; Khalaf, 2009). An estimated half of the Syrian population lived on fixed government incomes (Abu-Ismaïl & El Laithy, 2005). These issues are highly relevant for the regime's legitimacy and effectiveness in its governance during the post-Uprising conflict: following the critical humanitarian situation owing to the conflict, formal state institutions became weak and fragmented in providing social protection. Meanwhile, fashioned to serve an authoritarian regime, they have been used as war tools (Khalaf, 2013). Humanitarian aid, key public services (electricity, water, sewage control, fuel, etc.), infrastructure and sources of livelihood have been controlled, manipulated and destroyed by the regime as means to repress the uprising (ReliefWeb, 2013; Khalaf, 2013). One of the most critical issues regarding the governance-ability of the regime is wages. As a main employer, the regime -via the state that it manipulates- still controls locals' livelihoods with wages it continues to pay, even in areas out of its control. These government wages are especially important to people given the otherwise limited private sector opportunities available to them.

Controlled by a Baathist state that portrayed it as "evil", the Syrian market was distorted with a strictly limited private sector. The latter was dominated by an alliance between the Alawi praetorian guards, security agents, the military (who politicised the market by controlling resources and legislations) and the Damascene Sunni merchant class (who had the business knowledge and experience). This military-mercantilist complex benefited from favouritism while ensuring regime stabilisation (Hinnebusch, 2008; Haddad, 2002). The result was thus a distorted market based on networks of privilege and corruption (Haddad, 2002). During the conflict, this implied that many high level businessmen became defenders of the regime. However, only as long as domestic capital made profits would it support whoever was in power (Howell & Pearce, 2001). One example is the several businessmen backing the anti-regime National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces - which is also claimed by activists to be based on networks of privileges and corruption. This context laid the foundations for a predatory war economy, during the Syrian conflict. It comes at the expense of an embryonic civil society.

Civil Society in Syria is deemed "embryonic" as it has been sharply constrained under the regime's Ba'athist discourse that sought to shape its role, needs and even aims. Since the assumption of the power of the Ba'ath party in Syria in 1963, the government sought to be the sole responsible and controller of civil society (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). It established its own associations for all groupings- youth, women, youth, farmers, etc. and stopped the establishment or registration of other forms of civil society arguing that there was no need for parallel structures (ibid). This ensured the previously existent pluralism was replaced by a unified, strongly ideological understanding of society (ibid). After year 2000, the situation changed. Some civil society organisations were given the permission to operate, nonetheless, under the leadership of certain businessmen, the Syrian government or Asmaa Al-Asad - the president's wife, and these flourished. However, civil society was prohibited from any involvement in collective action for justice, equality or accountability via for instance advocacy, lobbying or politics (Ruiz De Elvira, 2013). It was confined to charity work that is "ahli" i.e. apolitical and often driven by religious /ethnic identities (e.g. religious charities) rather than "madani" i.e. civil and driven by collective national interests (ibid). Meanwhile, as the state had no dependence on an otherwise oppressed and de-politicized civil society, the



latter's power was limited (Schmidt, 2007). This weakness in Syrian civil society's experience of organising itself and planning strategically for civil work affected its capability for governance during conflict.

### 2A.2 2005 - 2011: Market Manipulation

The reforms that followed year 2005 heavily relied on economic rather than political liberalisations in the name of a distorted form of "Social Market Economy". The regime ensured the state kept its interventionist role but collaborated with the market to improve opportunities for the private sector (Khalaf, 2009). The market economy was allowed to exist in parallel to the state's central planning and not in replacement of it (Abboud, 2009). As for civil society, the state continued to block it except when operating under its own façade of first lady NGOs, government NGOs or business NGOs. At the same time, reform to the state's institutions remained slow to prevent opposition by potentially disadvantaged civil servants, whose positions would be threatened (Bruck, et al., 2007). Economic reforms benefitted only the business bourgeoisie and the powerful elites connected to the regime, while the civil society suffered from cuts to welfare under a more privatised liberal market (Selvik, 2009; Khalaf, 2009). The effectiveness, legitimacy and security attributes maintaining the regime's governance were falling apart. Increased market liberalisations contradicted the Ba'athist ideology and its socialist discourse as much of the regime's legitimacy rested amongst peasants, public sector workers and the industrial working class (Raphaeli, 2007). Furthermore, with civil society and particularly trade unions' voices muted, the military-mercantilist network continued to exploit the market, keeping wages low and monopolising opportunities (Sottimano, 2009). Workers became more vulnerable as the government surrendered its ultimate provision of social services and welfare. (Selvik, 2009). Although the state promised social protection mechanisms such as safety nets, these were hindered by institutional bottlenecks, weak ministerial coordination, lack of accountability, weak capacities, poor management, lack of transparent public policies and weak control of corruption (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This served to increase inequality and exposed the state's lack of accountability, limited effectiveness and deficient legitimacy (ibid).

As such, with an the unbalanced governance that moved from state to market manipulation in Syria before the conflict, two of the strong regime governance factors – legitimacy and effectiveness – were already shaken while only the third factor- security-was maintained, though unsustainably. In this context, the popular uprisings in the rest of the Middle East inspired the Syrian uprising where governance reform was a key demand. Demonstrators chanted "down with the governor of Daraa", "down with the governor of Homs" before resorting to call for the "fall of the regime" that was then escalated to an on-going armed conflict.

### **2B. Governance during Conflict: State Failure, War Economy, Conflict Society**

Fed by old structural weaknesses and governance imbalances in the State, civil society and market sectors, this conflict moved to a new governance imbalance represented by state failure, war economy and conflict society as illustrated below.

## 2B.1 State Failure and the Rise of Alternative Structures

Following state failure during the conflict, citizens in many areas have lost trust in state institutions and moved towards informal traditional institutions such as family, clan, region, or ethnic and religious affiliations for protection and support (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This has given rise to multiple governance structures amongst which some have been formed to fill the void created by the absent state. Shaky and full of tensions, the most outstanding of these structures are Local Councils and Sharia Courts. Their work ranges from providing key public services such as humanitarian aid and garbage collection to resolving local conflicts and performing legal duties, reestablishing order (Baczko, et al., 2013; Al-Jumhuriya Newspaper, 2013) and, beyond this, to enforcing their own policies and legislations.

**Local Councils:** The first Local Council was created in Zabadani as early as 2011 with the primary aim of coordinating between civilians and armed groups. This then developed into a prototype of local governance imitated across the non-government-controlled parts of Syria. Local Councils were initiated by young leaders, mostly from the once powerful local coordination committees that gradually lost their power in the uprising with the increase of armed resistance. Many of the Local Council's first generation leaders have since been detained or killed or have fled the country and other leaders, often of lower technical or entrepreneurial capability, have replaced them. But technical limitations are not the councils' only issue; just as important are their financial limitations. Together, these impede their ability to plan strategically beyond the ad-hoc provision of services and to be effective and independent in their work from military, clan, family or foreign control. Councils are far from well-established and are at different stages of development, depending on their security situation, access routes to border areas, length of time since their establishment and existence of other competing structures or spoilers (Khalaf, 2013). Despite this, they have managed to restore a minimum level of social services in their areas. This, together with their local nature and revolutionary history during the uprising, has ensured they are widely embraced by local communities and enjoy high legitimacy.

**Sharia Courts:** Sharia Courts were first established to manage conflicts between armed groups before many of them –often lead by Al-Qaeda or jihadi groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra –extended their interference into every aspect of citizens' affairs. Currently, Sharia Courts represent the most important issue of contention in the struggle over governance in the various non-government-controlled areas in Syria. While it is mainly Islamist groups that run them, courts are heterogeneous and no single actor controls them. Furthermore, actors may change overnight in line with changes of power dynamics on the ground. By May 2014, leaders of Sharia Courts varied, ranging from ISIS Jihadist group as in Al-Raqqa; to local armed groups like Jaish Al Mujahedeen that enjoys high legitimacy on the ground in Aleppo; to a representation of a coalition of interests of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front, tribal elderly leaders, revolutionaries, youth and sheikhs as in Deir Ez-zor. Sharia Courts follow a mix of Islam and tradition in their laws when power is shared among various groups. Elsewhere, when run by extremist groups like ISIS or Al-Nusra, they impose radical interpretations of Islam. The role of Sharia Courts diverges across areas from solving disputes and maintaining order to

overtaking Local Councils in providing humanitarian aid and services and controlling every aspect of citizens' daily lives. Vulnerable to the control of warlords and extremists, Sharia Courts are sometimes a tool of authoritarian state-like oppression -one that citizens turned to due to the integrity they first showed in the absence of better alternatives but that was later violently imposed on them. Once they have gained local legitimacy and had more power concentrated in their hands as a result of their effectiveness in the provision of social services, Sharia courts decreed civil society illegal, supplemented customary laws with rigid applications of the Sharia law and tried to marginalise traditional elders, civic leaders, and some businesspeople. This ensured that no system of checks and balances would hold them accountable.

This said, it is important to highlight that both Local Councils and Sharia Courts operate in specific areas/villages and not across them. As in Somalia, the governance that has emerged in Syria resembles a loose constellation of city-states and villages separated by pastoral statelessness across which a dense network of communication and relationships are negotiated and/or fought over for resources and power. This geographically fragmented governance –often under political-military groups with nodes tied to international interveners- will complicate any efforts to build unified modern, efficient, transparent, and accountable state institutions (Khalaf, 2013).

## 2B.2 War Economy and the Increased Power for Spoilers

The conflict's violence, insecurity and the breakdown of the formal economy in Syria have resulted in a massive loss of jobs and an unemployment rate exceeding 50% (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013). This is coupled with a sharp decline in purchasing power of fixed salaries with over 300% depreciation of the Syrian pound (Ibid) and over 100% food price inflation rate (Yazigi, 2014). The livelihoods of the majority of the population have been lost, with half of it living below the poverty line (Ibid). Factories and industries have been damaged, looted or closed; trade has been hampered; agricultural harvest has been limited, forcing farmers, pastoralists and petty traders to seek new sources of livelihoods (ACAPS, 2013). While some resorted to minor traditional jobs like repairing kerosene ovens and wooden heaters; others started selling humanitarian aid and many others turn to fighting as a paid job. Meanwhile, informal and illicit activity has become widespread (Khalaf, 2013). This includes bribery and extortion of ransom; human trafficking; growing and selling drugs; looting; and engagement in arms and illegal oil trade (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2013; ACAPS, 2013).

As the central laws regulating business operations have fallen apart with the state's failure, a vicious war economy has entrenched itself in Syria. New informal interests and centres of power, mostly illicit, have emerged totally out of the state's control and at the expense of the traditional business class. Feeding off the violence and reaping significant material benefit and power, these actors have no interest in any reconstruction of central governance over Syria (Yazigi, 2014). For instance, in Tel Abyad, cannabis are cultivated to be smuggled to Turkey and Iraq (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012; ReliefWeb, 2013; ACAPS, 2013). In the north-eastern region, an entire economic cycle has been created from the illicit oil trade. This informal war economy has enriched a new class of tribal, rebel and extremist groups that engage in bloody fighting over access to resources

as a means for increased control. Amongst the most important resources, due to its massive revenues, are oil fields, but so are sources of key services like gas, electricity and water and sources of essential foodstuffs like flour, in addition to profits from border fees and checkpoints or from looting banks, factories and industries (Yazigi, 2014).

Extremist Jihadi groups, in particular, have been the most successful in taking hold of these resources and exploiting them to wield more power owing to the experience they already have in making optimum use of a war economy elsewhere in for instance Iraq and Afghanistan. As Yaziji (2014) details, they started with looting billions from the bank in Al-Raqqa, which helped finance their military operations and administration of the city as they expanded to control oil fields and other resources. ISIS for instance seized flourmills that satisfy the need of one million people a day and monopolised them to generate both profits and effective humanitarian aid supplies to expand its local legitimacy. Al-Nusra, meanwhile capitalised on its control of the transit roots of oil pipelines to allow the flow of oil to government-held refineries for a fee. In other instances, these groups have reached economic deals with the regime. In Aleppo, a “water-for-electricity” deal was agreed by the Sharia court and the regime. Meanwhile, in Deir Ez-zor, the regime and Al-Nusra reached a deal to share oil profits to ensure a regular supply of oil to both sides.

Amidst a war economy and armed conflict, economic cooperation takes place but in no case is it aimed at restoring state or formal market governance. Instead, it rests on the narrow governance interests of the centres of economic and military power, which are more likely to undercut local efforts to improve law and order and reduce criminality. Extremists and armed militias tend to oppress revived civil society efforts that would hold them into accountability. Many seek to perpetuate violence and obstruct any peace deals to maintain economic and political gains they have amassed as a result of state failure and the consequent chaos. Yet again, the equation is not black and white. While they may not be interested in reviving central governance that has been predatory at their expense, new businessmen may be interested in balanced governance that provides a more stable, safe and predictable environment.

### 2B.3 Conflict Society - between the Civil and the Uncivil

Conflict polarises society and destroys social cohesion; it destroys trust, hope and identity, and fosters radical transformations in the political cultures and codes of conduct for those who have experienced mass violence (Pouligny, 2005). More importantly, it puts societies in a state of shock in which they are prepared to accept makeshift governance recipes that would otherwise not have been acceptable (Klein, 2010). But conflict also gives rise to a revived civil society as a reaction to those fundamental limitations posed by war (Kaldor, 2003). It generates activism and gives birth to leaders; it also triggers the reconsideration of traditional sources of authority.

With the eruption of the popular uprising in Syria, there was a revival of civil society represented by youth groups, grassroots civil society movements, local coordination committees, leaders, activists, religious groups, civil courts, religious courts, Local Councils, humanitarian support groups, media groups, etc. Invested

in surviving a dire humanitarian crisis with relief work, service provision, awareness creation and to a lesser extent, human rights promotion, their aims and activities stretch across many areas. These include: health; education; medical aid, civil disobedience; political, social & economic empowerment; citizenship, elections' monitoring, service provision, law enforcement, conflict resolution, peace-building, human development, psychosocial support, state and institutional building (Khalaf, et. al, 2014).

As such, during the Syrian conflict, civil society exists. However, it is important to note that the nature and role of civil society during conflict is in continuous change and depends on the context in which it exists (Marchettia & Tocci, 2009). The wide definition this study adopts of civil society as the space between the market and the state spheres ensures it is not limited to its western understanding in peaceful states as merely non-governmental organisations. Rather, it encompasses the public, less structured grassroots movements on the ground whose incentives to mobilise public action and whose political significance is far more prominent during conflict. Nevertheless, while the lines between the civil society, market economy and state become increasingly blurred, as they intertwine with war economy and state failure, what might be called "uncivil" forces coexist with what is civil as components of a "conflict society". This renders it difficult to pinpoint who exactly are the components of civil society in the Syria conflict. Thus, function is the criterion this article uses to distinguish civil society -so long as actors are not taking on the role of the state's monopoly of violence or of warlords' war economy, they are considered components of civil society, even if they might be said to be "uncivil".

Three groups that seem to be at times playing the civil society role in the Syrian conflict and at other times taking up the role against it are armed groups, state-like structures and traditional groups. In a study mapping civil society groups in Syria's non-government controlled parts, Khalaf, et. al (2014) indicate that the growth rate of these groups coincides with the movement of the relevant groups' areas out of the government's control. This growth was only possible with the support of armed groups who resisted an authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, the very decline of civil society groups' growth rate is also attributed to the increased control of armed groups running state-like structures ranging from less extremist groups who seem to be more or less publicly accepted as legitimate, like Jaish Al-Mujahedeen militias, to ISIS, which is still trying to gain increased legitimacy on the ground. Meanwhile, in the case of traditional groups, tribal, ethnic and religious groupings were the most powerful in opposing ISIS and the best structured in carrying out a lot of the humanitarian relief and other civil society functions during the Syrian conflict. This, for instance, is the case of some tribes in Deir Ez-zor who managed to resist the control of ISIS on its territory and of some of the Islamic charities that managed to provide food and shelter support to the internally displaced in Aleppo. On the other hand, the Al-Baryedje was the key tribe supporting ISIS with its human resources and many religious institutions were the platforms used to foster hatred, increased divisions and criminality.

Thus, again, the question of who is a member of civil society and who is not, is very ambiguous in Syria. This depends not only on the function and power of the actor in question but indeed on its identity, be it inclusive or exclusive. In a field study mapping civil society in non-government areas in Syria by Khalaf et al.

(2014), that questioned civil society organisations about their identity, ambiguity was the one clear finding. Whereas many of the groups highlighted that they are apolitical, their work was in many ways political. In addition, while the vast majority suggested they were with democracy, equality and freedoms, they seemed to have their own understanding of these notions that range from the international conventions to the Islamic concept of “shura” (consultation). Furthermore, while most agreed to the statement “religion should be separated from politics”, many also agreed to the contradictory statement “moderate Islam is the solution”. One explanation for this is that the control of extremist groups over public life makes any expression that is more secular, risky for civil society. Nonetheless, even those opposing the extremists, such as wholeheartedly progressive groups expressing notions of citizenship, participation, individual and minority rights, do not appear to distance themselves from the broader Islamist discourse that permeates the non-government-controlled areas’ political life in Syria. Controversially, Gellner and Kaldor, consider this problematic as the Islamic discourse is still collectivist and has not “generated the kind of protestant individualism that provided the beginnings of civil society in Christianity” (Kaldor, 2003, p. 43). While a lot of positive discussions are taking place on the ground in Syria over the different forms of Islam and how it/they should evolve, vested political interests have moved faster to use Islam as a political project to their advantage. For instance, the Islamic concept of “Moubayaa”, which is a form of social contract in which the ruled express loyalty to the ruler (Kaldor, 2003), has been used by the ISIS leader Al-Baghdadi to create blind followers of his rule in Syria, thus expanding the legitimacy and control of ISIS across the country against civil society organizations.

Many such extremist ‘uncivil’ forces have expanded their power against civil society in parallel with the war economy and shadow state structures, but civil society continues to exist outside their boundaries and as a counterweight to them. With its most basic form of monitoring and lobbying through demonstrations, deals and negotiations, civil society has been able to gain some leverage in pushing state-like structures to fulfil their duties and to be held accountable. While structurally weak, lacking support and technical and financial capacities to counter the power of money represented by the war economy and the power of violence of a shadow state, civil society has the power of the people.

In other words, while the control of state and market goods could represent the effectiveness and security factors of governance, civil society has the legitimacy. This was the case prior to conflict and is the case during conflict. Yet again, as old and new governance imbalances hybridize, the key question is whether civil society in Syria can produce civility in spite of its uncivil version and of state failure and war economy during the conflict. Nonetheless, tied to international nodes, governance during the Syrian conflict is not only a hybrid of the civil and uncivil, the old and the new local governance imbalances. It is, as importantly, a hybrid of international and local governance.

### **Part 3. Governance in Syria as a Hybrid between the International and the Local**

Treating international actors as undifferentiated is problematic. They encompass NGOs, rival governments, the private sector, multilateral institutions, humanitarian institutions, the media, human rights groups, international networks, think tanks, governmental subcontracted private companies, the diaspora, etc. They compose a diverse set of actors and interests that may collaborate and/or compete with each other and with the Syrian local actors. Taking account of all of these is beyond the scope of this study, but general trends will be identified.

In Syria, the key governance trend of main international interveners seems to revolve around both state-building and civil society. More often than not, these follow Paris' notion of "institutionalisation prior to liberalisation" where the priority is building the necessary political and economic institutions as foundations for neoliberal peace.

#### **3A. International Governance**

##### **3A.1 State Building**

The top-down creation and promotion of the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (the Coalition) and the increased support for the creation and promotion of Local Councils in Syria are two examples of this:

**The National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (The Coalition):** The Coalition was created to be a recognisable interface of the Syrian opposition that external actors could deal with. Nonetheless, its local legitimacy remains debated. Locals perceive it as having minimal representation of home-grown interests and as being very dependent on international funds from which it derives its power and to which it is accountable. Many also deem it an abusive authority serving merely as a tool for domination and as a catchment for foreign aid easily diverted to the pockets of its representatives who are powerful and well connected.<sup>2</sup> These are criticized as serving the competition between two main powers - Saudi Arabia and Qatar- over authority in Syria. Al-Jarba, the president of the Coalition in 2013, was the man of Saudi Arabia with tribal origins linked to the Saudi royal dynasty (The Economist, 2013). The Secretary General, Sabagh, was the man of Qatar and enjoyed support from the Muslim Brotherhood (Reuters, 2013). This ensured the Coalition's limited local legitimacy.

To overcome its legitimacy deficit, the Coalition has resorted to providing Local Councils with technical and financial support via both its Assistance Coordinating Unit (ACU) and Local Assistance Coordination Unit (LACU). Of the ACU's main aims was delivering aid to local councils.<sup>3</sup> That of the LACU was to build state institutions by providing local councils with consultancy and with the basics of the electoral process.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, given their politicisation and their backing by competing powers, the work of both units overlapped on the ground. Also albeit beneficial to the councils, the Coalition's support did not come without its imposition of plans and even area representatives on Local Councils. These dynamics have ensured that many Local Councils viewed their relationship with the Coalition as just financial. This knowledge is not new to international

interveners, but seemingly the creation of a minimal form of state remains a priority when compared to advancing the common interests of the Syrian society.

**Local Councils:** When not funnelled to the Coalition, foreign funds often directly target Local Councils via foreign governments' subcontracted private agencies referred to as "implementers". Operating from Gaziantep in Turkey, implementers have proved to be the most efficient in delivering the institution-building project of the neoliberal peace. As private institutions, these are accountable mainly to their funders. Access to funding through an improved ability to bid for and win more projects is the criterion through which they seem to measure success. Complaints have been shared that cooperation between them or sharing of information and lessons learnt about Local Councils, hardly takes place. Furthermore, implementers are not necessarily concerned with the impact of donor agendas on Local Councils. Elsewhere, cases of political exploitation via private state-funded agencies have been reported; they are cited as potentially able to manipulate changes to a political order in their donors' zones of interest (Fischer, 2006). Otherwise, when implementers raise concerns of potentially harmful impacts, by the time their voice reaches decision-makers in Western capitals, agendas would have already been established.

Meanwhile, foreign governments continue to compete for control through their project-driven funding and training for Local Councils. A vivid illustration of this is both the content of the training itself and the manner in which it is delivered. A recipe for the neoliberal peace, "good governance" has become a key training course offered to Local Councils via the Coalition and many implementers. Following such an apolitical and technical governance approach, social power relations may be undermined, structural political issues may be ignored, and democracy may risk its reduction to elite-focussed, one-off events such as elections rather than a people-centric and relationship-orientated process. This may empower state institutions at the expense of society. Implementers' agendas are a critical issue. For instance, according to a Syrian intellectual, one of the NGOs offered to the five Local Councils it supports totally different training courses on institutional management (Khalaf, et al., 2014); having been trained for autonomous rather than coordinated action, these councils will support decentralised governance (ibid) at the expense of cooperation across jurisdictions. While decentralization in itself is not problematic, its application in the lack of a robust system is. Such procedures seem to pave the way for the promotion of interveners' interest and, in Syria, as in Yemen and Libya post the "Arab spring", in the balkanisation of these states in the name of decentralisation.

### 3A.2 Civil Society Engineering

Another form of institutionalisation is that related to civil society. In the liberal peace literature, post-conflict, efforts have been focussed on either the urban, metropolitan and English-speaking elite groups (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009) or on taming the grassroots social movements –i.e. their NGOisation to become part of a global governance network of institutionalised and professional NGOs (Kaldor, 2003). The risk of the first involves the limited access to the actual local civil society on the ground. The latter meanwhile, risks advancing the agendas of northern donors at the expense of the locals given the donor-dependency cycle they may fall in (Kaldor, 2003; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). In both cases, the Syrian case is no exception.



According to criticism by Syrian activists, intellectuals and development workers, the large amounts of money spent on supporting Syrian civil society do not seem to bear the desired impact of “civilising” the conflict. This is argued to stem from several issues, the first of which is outreach. Much of the funds and time is lost as funding goes first to international NGOs and implementers, which then filter it down to Syrian NGOs that are big, English speaking and institutionalised. Based outside Syria in Gaziantep or Lebanon, these NGOs are not necessarily linked to the ground. When they are, only a small percentage of funds reaches a segment of the local society. The second issue is with the “projectisation” of civil society. To receive financial support and to attract foreign technical support, many local social movements have been forced to be registered as NGOs. While this renders them more bureaucratic speaking the language of their donors and at times taking up donor priorities, local social movements are becoming a “civil society project”, driven by financial motives. This is serving to distance them from their agency as an autonomous process based on strong societal values and relationships, seeking to hold power perpetrators to account. It is thus not strange that many locals perceive the terms NGO, civil society and activist as a co-optation of their revolutionary social movements. From this derives society’s resistance to universalist importations including that of democracy while accommodating other forms with which locals may better identify.

### **3B. Local – International Hybrid Governance**

Centred on the above-mentioned top-down technocratic “institutionalisation” process, governance of most international interveners in Syria seems to be increasing state and civil society fragility, thus paving the way for extremists groups to take over. In many ways, even the best-intentioned international interventions are not able to positively contribute to this fragility. The main problem is that governance is perceived differently from where they are. Governance factors explain this:

#### **3B.1 Effectiveness**

To many international interveners, effectiveness is mainly related to the success indicators in implementing their own agendas and thus projects via their own institutions or institutionalised bodies. Designed and implemented following foreign policies shaped far away in interveners’ capitals (Edwards, 2010), international aid often fails to serve the quick and continuously changing dynamics on the ground. Furthermore, as each donor has different interests, donor coordination is often limited, resulting in the fluctuation and ineffectiveness of aid. For instance, some donors have opted to work with the Coalition, others cross it to work directly with their network of Local Councils and civil society groups as per their interests and preferences. Added to this, it is perceived by local activists and also by the interviewed beneficiaries from refugee populations, that donors insist on working in the ways they know best, regardless if they end up spending more at a slower pace and with less impact. It seems ensuring formal project completion is more important to them than outreach and impact.

Khalaf et. al., (2014) suggest that this inconsistent, inefficient and limited outreach and impact of aid, be it due to lack of local knowledge or to an ideological warfare, has affected not only the provision of aid but also institutions delivering it. The

imbalanced support from international NGOs to civil society groups have served to deepen mistrust among them. Furthermore, as relief aid has been the more central focus of the international donors, this seems to have served to supplant the political role of civil society as efforts are diverted towards it. For instance, given the money available for relief aid, currently many civil society groups in the non-government controlled areas have moved their political work focus to partial or full concentration on provision of aid. (Khalaf, et al., 2014). Alternatively, the politicisation of aid as per donor agendas has put less resourced local civil society groups that are focused on inclusive governance processes, at a disadvantage (ibid). A point in case are the religious ideological agendas of the heavily resourced donors from the Gulf States that are anything but progressive and democratic.

On the other end, international interventions pursuing less politicised agendas away from self-interested foreign government and private economic interests seem to be more beneficial. It is crucial to highlight that it is thanks to organisations and movements like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for instance that under-represented issues – like the outbreak of measles– have been put to focus.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, it is the presence of international organisations that is pushing decision-making processes in Local Councils, in the Coalition and internationally to be more transparent and inclusive. Had it not been for some global civil society and humanitarian organisations, the humanitarian needs and voices of Syrians, would have been less heard globally than they have been.

### 3B.2 Security

Security for international powers is mainly that of their own. In their focus on protecting themselves from terrorism and internal armed conflict abroad, they seek to reinforce stability on the ground in a failed state via building state institutions. Their focus seems to revolve around the ‘core five’ institutions they use as the solution for all failed states. These are: the military, police, civil service, justice system and leadership (Call, 2008). However, in their emphasis on creating states that are strong security providers, little attention is paid to the kind and role of these institutions, i.e. whether they are predatory, corrupt and/or authoritarian; whether they serve the context-specific needs of a conflict-torn state and whether their security provision is just and thus sustainable (Call, 2008).

This situation is partly reflected in the Syrian case. In backing the Coalition, the international community has, in fact, promoted another regime-like institution that is not only corrupt and lacks local legitimacy, but that is, more importantly, driven by a mixture of competing local elite and international governance interests. In terms of security, to date, the Coalition seems more interested in fuelling the conflict rather than reaching settlements that would enhance security on the ground for the locals. Even in terms of its involvement in supporting militarisation to protect the locals, the Coalition is seen to be creating more insecurity. In Aleppo, the Coalition’s military group is claimed to be the most involved in looting and thus remains one of the most widely unaccepted military groups there. Meanwhile, in Al-Raqa earlier in the uprising, before its fall under Al-Nusra and then ISIS, local plans have been forwarded to international donors to establish a police force there. However, as claimed by local activists, the project has been stopped, as donors who were seeking the approval of the Coalition on this, never received it.

The Coalition is said to have been more interested in advancing its Muslim Brotherhood-driven police project under the Al-Doraa armed groups that are deemed by local activists as affiliated with it.

By-passing the coalition, with the support of private implementers and governments, various projects are currently on-going to establish a police force in several areas in Syria like Idlib and Aleppo. However, the low transparency from the international interveners is raising concerns regarding ownership and success. Meanwhile, despite the regime's random shelling and the consequent spread of ISIS as the most important security threat for locals, there seems to be no positive intervention in this regard. Many locals have been advocating for the creation of a non-fly zone, for efforts to diminish the flow of terrorists from other countries via especially Turkey, and for the control of the oil financial gains of ISIS by limiting its sale in international markets. Nevertheless, the increased focus of all states seem to be on protecting their borders from the migration of Syrians, rather than improving Syrians' security in their homeland to enable their stay there. This leaves Syrians trapped in a cycle of violence that would only make the security that ISIS provides all the more attractive and legitimate.

### 3B. 3 Legitimacy

In fragile states, international interveners replace legitimacy based on local values, beliefs and relationships by a focus on international legitimacy centred on their agendas or on institutional sources of rational-legal types of legitimacy related to the security of the state, provision of public goods, etc. (Roberts, 2011, Edwards, 2010). But this type of legitimacy, found in Western states, is only one type of legitimacy in states in conflict. As suggested earlier, local legitimacy is derived from complex patterns of power, responsibility and obligation as it also relies on local values (tribal, communal, religious, or traditional) that enable groups of people to satisfy their needs and survive. A lack of understanding of these dynamics leads to high competition between internal and external sources of legitimacy and may undermine the legitimacy of existing local institutions and consequently contribute to increased fragility (Edwards, 2010). The following case studies illustrate that different areas in Syria exhibit different internal sources of legitimacy, both civil and uncivil. The tribal area of Deir Ez-zor, which still embodies a mix of systems based on kinship and patronage derived from a war economy, is unlikely to resemble a purely rational-legal system of a Weberian state any time soon. As important as was effectiveness in the delivery of services in elections in Deir Ez-zor's Local Council, were relationships based on kinship, patronage and/or on common history and interests. Should international donors solely focus on the legal-rational type of legitimacy and ignore the relationship factor and alternative forms of charismatic or traditional authority derived from them, the council is unlikely to cooperate with them.

This is not to mention that in conflict situations some elites may remain more interested in gaining international legitimacy rather than local legitimacy to ensure their stay in power and their continued access to resources (MacGinty, 2011). Two cases are the institutionalised state-like structures like the Coalition and several other civil society groups that have forged privileged connections to donors. Local civil society members see these as taking their resources and imposing priorities and notions via project-driven funding that they do not necessarily identify with

(Khalaf, et al., 2014). This has served to increase the legitimacy gap in local areas, thus paving the way for Jihadist groups. The latter are increasingly gaining legitimacy with a religious discourse that mobilises entire communities. This is added to a massive financial capability to build legitimacy in the their provision of social goods and security.

## **Part 4. Local Modes of Governance**

The following case studies illustrate the complex governance dynamics of both civil and uncivil local actors on the ground during conflict. They focus on three non-government-controlled areas in Syria starting with their move out of the government's control until May 2014. These are: Al-Raqqa (the city), Deir Ez-zor (the city and Al-Mayadeen rural area), and Aleppo (the city).

### **4A. Al-Raqqa – The Hegemony of a Shadow State**

#### 4A.1 Pre-conflict

Located at a distance from main city centres, with hardly any resources or previous geopolitical importance, Al-Raqqa has been long treated by the regime as a poor periphery. According to the UNDP 2005 poverty study, Al-Raqqa ranks as the first governorate in Syria in terms of poverty with seven of the poorest 100 villages in Syria and of the eight villages with over 99% poverty. (Abu-Ismaïl & El Laithy, 2005; UNDP, 2009). Al-Raqqa also ranks first in terms of illiteracy rate with 29.1%; illiteracy scores as high as 98% in the two poorest areas of Al-Raqqa (ibid). Partly urbanized, it is a relatively new semi-urban stretch of rural land lacking any significant industrial and/or private sector development except for the hydraulic projects associated with the Euphrates Dam. Its inhabitants belong to either its indigenous local tribes (whose authority and relations are social rather than political) or to internal migrants (who form a heterogeneous group not necessarily well integrated with the indigenous tribes). A large segment of the population – especially those from the indigenous tribes – remain employed either in the government or in the agricultural sector. Others are involved in small trade work in the informal sector or tend to commute to neighbouring areas for better livelihood and educational opportunities. The locals retell no history of enmity between Al-Raqqa inhabitants and the Syrian regime -apart from a few cases.

#### 4A.2 The “Liberation” of Al-Raqqa

In parallel to the uprising across the country, a few local anti-regime armed groups were formed in Al-Raqqa. These include Ahrar Al Sham, Al-Nusra, Ahfad Al-Rasool, Thuwwar Al Raqqa, Jabhat Al Wahda Wal Tahreer, Al-Mountaser Billah, AlNaser Salah Al-Deen, and Ouweis Al-Qurani. Although this armed resistance is cited by local activists as relatively fragmented and weak, Al-Raqqa moved out of the regime's control in no more than six days in March 2012. To them, this event, coupled with the escape of the regime's intelligence services from the city before the fall of its military services, is “mysterious”. Al-Akhbar confirms this stating “Mystery has shrouded the manner in which Raqqa fell, as there have been no indications the city fell militarily. While there was no formidable Syrian army deployment in the city, which had been surrounded on four sides by checkpoints, it is not logical that the city fell in a matter of hours” (Al-Akhbar English, 2013)

Accordingly, Al-Raqqa is seen by the locals to have been “given away” by the regime for strategic reasons.

#### 4A.3 The first few months of “Liberation”

The three months that followed Al-Raqqa’s “liberation” saw the mushrooming of civil society groups. Over 35 groups were established. From these, a more democratically elected Local Council relative to other governorates was formed (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). In addition to humanitarian relief, the work of these civil society groups sought to create awareness on and promote elections, human rights, citizenship, democracy, women’s political participation, etc.. In a field study, Khalaf, et. al (2014) highlight Al-Raqqa’s civil society as seemingly more progressive, peaceful and secular with much better focused strategies and plans, than many civil society groups elsewhere in Syria; however due to structural challenges and limitations, their evolution was slow. Concurrently, in the first few months, plans to establish a police force by a group of community intellectuals under “Liwaa Oumanaa Al-Raqqa” were also proposed. Nevertheless, due to the high politicization and lack of support from the external opposition Coalition, these plans were never translated to any viable project on the ground. Alarmingly, parallel to the rise of these civil elements and forces, was the faster strengthening of “uncivil” forces in Al-Raqqa as represented by the extremist armed groups of ISIS and Al-Nusra Front. These made optimum use of the pre-conflict vulnerability of Al-Raqqa residents, where poverty and illiteracy are rampant, along with their increased capability to control the governance factors of effectiveness, security and legitimacy, as highlighted below.

#### 4A.4 The fall of Al-Raqqa into the hands of Extremist Groups

With their massive economic gains from the war economy and control of key resources such as flour mills and oil wells, added to their grandiose cross-border funding, the military and administrative capacity of both ISIS and Al-Nusra became supreme. After a fight between the two groups, Al-Nusra was forced out of the city. Soon after its violent take-over of the Sharia Court, ISIS became the shadow state in Al-Raqqa. It started providing public goods and security and extended this to imposing its own rules on the locals. As its oppression increased, it was met with a wave of civil society demonstrations. Yet local armed groups soon persuaded the demonstrating activists into a peace agreement with it. At the time, many of the newly founded local civil society groups had already been weakening due to their structurally weak capabilities and limited financial and technical support (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). This was compounded by the extreme violence ISIS imposed on them, including kidnapping, detainment, torture and targeted killings that forced many to flee the city (ibid). ISIS also managed to monopolize violence after having forced all local brigades/armed groups either out of the city or to surrender and join its ranks via a “moubayaa”. This monopoly of violence enabled ISIS’s unchallenged expansion as it continued to impose its rules and reap war economy benefits as a shadow state in Al-Raqqa.

#### 4A.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

In the meantime, the main governance actors in Al-Raqqa are: ISIS armed group and its Sharia Court, the Local Council, tribal networks, local humanitarian organisations and a handful of civil society groups. Governance factors are assessed to locate their power on the ground:

**Effectiveness:** The main actors involved in the provision of public goods in Al Raqqa are local humanitarian organizations, eight civil society groups (Khalaf, et. al, 2014), tribal networks, the Local Council and the Sharia Court. Due to reasons mentioned earlier, the best-structured and funded humanitarian organizations in Al Raqqa are those aligned along an Islamic religious ideology. Meanwhile, forced to work in secret, the eight surviving civil society groups are much challenged. While their focus is on awareness creation and to a lesser extent on developmental or rights-based work, half of them provide humanitarian aid to gain legitimacy on the ground. This has ensured that given their already limited capabilities and resources, their efforts are scattered and weak, especially when faced with high violence by ISIS (ibid). As for tribal networks, these have provided strong social solidarity and a means of conflict mediation many locals have been depending on long before the conflict; yet their authority remains more social than political. Unlike the Sharia Court of ISIS, they have no implementing arm on the ground and no local armed groups.

Controlled by a brutal ISIS force that is backed by massive cross-border human, financial and technical resources in addition to the war economy it manipulates, the Sharia Court is the most effective and efficient provider of the main shadow state functions to the locals. The ISIS Sharia Court undertakes regular provision of public goods and big supplies of humanitarian aid. It also enforces its own rules and justice systems through its implementing arm, the Islamic police. The only other side working with some effectiveness, but lacking the capacity to make a genuine impact is the Local Council. The latter serves several functions via its offices, which stretch across: 1-services [water and waste collection], 2-civil defence, 3-child and family, 4-education, 5-media, 6-finance, 7-secretaria, 8-presidency. The Sharia Court, threatened to close the Local Council but continued to permit its operation; its strategy seemed to be similar to that of the regime, which is seen to outsource its obligations to humanitarian organizations, in order to focus its human and financial resources on sustaining its survival and expansion.

**Security:** Supported by a strong and highly trained military force largely based on foreign jihadi fighters, ISIS succeeded in abolishing other local armed groups in Al-Raqqa. With no local military factions left and with hardly any shelling by the regime on the city, ISIS managed to monopolize violence there and is the only actor providing security and order on the ground for the locals. With its rigid form of Sharia laws and structured institutions ranging from the Sharia Court to the Islamic police-, ISIS does not hesitate to use its brutal violence to maintain security on the ground. Nonetheless, some locals perceive it as a protection from the chaos created by state failure and conflict. One issue they retell is its ability to control looting, the reason why many started using its court and police services. Additionally, many locals have found the mere control of ISIS in their areas deters random barrel bombing by the regime. The latter rarely targeted ISIS areas, seemingly in an alliance of convenience since the expansion of ISIS rendered the regime's narrative of terrorism as a self-fulfilling prophecy that supported its maintenance in power.

However, on the other hand, ISIS is also perceived as a security threat to the locals. Not only has it killed or forced their local armed groups out of the city, but it continues to control them by brutal violence and terror. Consequently, albeit in a minor manner, ISIS continues to face both non-violent and violent local resistance.

Some civil society groups have been fostering civil disobedience against it; others have been randomly targeting its jihadi members at night when these enter their neighbourhoods. The city is said to resemble a ghost town after 7:00 pm when very few people dare to leave their houses.

**Legitimacy:** Although used as a shadow state tool to impose authority, and despite its ability to provide effectiveness and security, ISIS' Sharia Court remains illegitimate and continues to face resistance. ISIS is not blind to this fact and has been trying to build relationships with the local tribes via the "tribes' office" it runs in its Sharia Court. Their strategies stretch from recruiting young tribal members to its army to setting up war economy deals and promoting inter-marriages between them and the locals. However, at the time of writing, ISIS remained unpopular due to its brutality and insensitivity to local culture.

Legitimacy belongs to the Local Council and the civil society, which unlike it, are totally local but also a relatively democratic institution. This is the case since a group of 600 people from civil society members in Al-Raqqa gathered and elected a 50 member general commission for the Local Council. They followed three criteria in distributing seats: geographical distribution, revolutionary distribution and tribal representation. The commission in turn, elected a core team on a six-month rotation basis to run the Local Council. As for the civil society groups, beyond their local blood ties, many derive legitimacy from their humanitarian work and their revolutionary history against authoritarianism since the start of the uprising in Syria. Added to this, civil society in Al Raqqa continues to build its relationships with the locals via the work they do which has a local ownership aspect. (Khalaf, et.al, 2014). However, ISIS continues to diminish its ranks through oppression.

Another key actor that must not be omitted in these dynamics is the Syrian regime. While not present in Al-Raqqa, the Syrian regime still maintains governance via the government salaries it controls. According to testimonies by local activists, it continued to pay salaries for government staff within the electricity establishment, health and other government institutions even when those have ceased to function. Its purpose is seen to demonstrate that it remains the legitimate government of all Syria. Meanwhile, the regime has cut-off salaries to the government staff working in the communication and water management sectors. It is suggested that the regime has done so because ISIS has been taking taxes on these.

#### **4B. Aleppo – Power of the Civil in a Conflict Society**

##### **4B.1 Pre-Conflict**

Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria (Ministry of Tourism, 2006). Its critical role and geopolitical importance is next to none as the country's main industrial hub given its closeness to neighbouring Turkey (ibid). Aleppo competes with Damascus on its rank as the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. A key metropolitan city, it hosts a diversity of religions and ethnicities with a relatively conservative Sunni majority. Economically, Aleppo was divided between a niche of rich businessmen with a dwindling middle class living in its western part and a mix of middle and poor classes, many of which have come from rural Aleppo to live mostly in informal settlements in the eastern part of the city. Those not employed in the industrial, business or trade sectors, are in the majority

government employees in public institutions. The impact of the social market reforms across Syria was strongly reflected in Aleppo with the increased gap between the rich and the poor. This, together with the government's hegemony and corruption, has left many dissatisfied with the regime. Syrian intellectuals also talk of a rural/urban divide that pushed the "free Syrian army" that was recruited from the rural areas to move the conflict into Aleppo's urban centres.

#### 4B.2 The "Liberation" of Aleppo

Currently Aleppo is a highly contested and divided city. Aleppo city was never "liberated" by its own people. Rather, armed groups from neighbouring rural areas moved the conflict to Aleppo city. In November 2012, they took the western part of the city out of the government's control. The western part was then divided from the other richer government-controlled part by a bus surrounded by deadly snipers. This left only the dangerous "Maabar Boastan Al-Qasr" pathway next to it for the pedestrians to cross to the other side. Nonetheless, thousands of people crossed every day to the western part to go to their work, to pursue their livelihoods and resume their education. Shortly after, the pathway was totally blocked and the two sides fully separated.

#### 4B.3 The first few months of "Liberation"

What followed the movement of the poorer part of the Aleppo city out of the government's control was the worst forms of state failure. All the resources, infrastructure and institutions were lacking in the "liberated" part of the city. This resulted in conflicting armed factions fighting over power, a dire humanitarian crisis with a regime-imposed siege, increased insecurity, and parasitic gangs formed for the sole purpose of looting and criminality. For a short period, a local societal initiative -the revolution security police (Shortet Amn Al Thawra) tried to reconstruct security on the ground; however, without a strong reference point and support, it was soon dismantled. Parallel to this was also the rise of a civil society stronger than most other areas in Syria. This is because many revolting activists who have had to flee the regime-controlled areas due to the regime brutality moved to the second biggest city, Aleppo. However, having had to work in secret and in segregation from each other under regime control and in other areas than Aleppo, for a prolonged period, civil society in Aleppo has not had the chance to combine its efforts (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). A war of ideology between its secular and Islamic components further reinforced fragmentation and divisions within it (ibid). Added to this, the work of many activists became depoliticised as they fell into fulfilling the ad-hoc humanitarian needs of the public (ibid). Thus, beyond demonstrations meant to hold power holders accountable for their actions, civil society in Aleppo hardly forwarded any alternative plans to reconstitute governance in it.

#### 4B.4 The Rise and Fall of ISIS in Aleppo

Concurrently, ISIS started to establish increased authority over the western part of the city. It was effective in the provision of services and managed to oust parasitic gangs looting the city and its industrial hub, namely the Ghourabaa Al Sham and Al-Hayyani factions. This, coupled with the fact that the regime hardly shelled ISIS bases, enabled ISIS to reconstitute partial security that helped locals live and resume their work. This issue served to improve the legitimacy of ISIS. However, ISIS's brutality and hostility to civil society and armed groups triggered a strong resistance against it. Armed resistance, under the leadership of the Jaish Al-



Mujahideen local branch soon managed to expel ISIS from Aleppo. This raised expectations of improved civil life in the city. However, directly after the ousting of ISIS, the regime started its random bombing of civilian areas and institutions like the Local Council, field hospitals, etc. but not the Sharia Court. This resulted in massive migration out of the non-government-controlled part of Aleppo city, leaving only a small number of people who could not afford to move elsewhere. The city came to resemble a ghost town with continuous random shelling, limited resources, and violent fights over power between armed factions and a conflict society from which a strong civil side is trying to civilize the situation and improve its governance.

#### 4B.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

The main governance actors in the non-government controlled parts of Aleppo are three layers of Local Councils (the Aleppo Governorate Council founded by the Syrian National Coalition to coordinate the work of city councils; the Aleppo Local Council and 64 district councils in the rural governorate); the Sharia Court, which is managed by armed groups; and a “conflict society” comprised of actors ranging from humanitarian institutions aligned along Islamic to secular lines, which may be politicizing humanitarian aid as per their own and/or their donors’ agendas. The governance factors of these actors are assessed below to locate power on the ground:

**Effectiveness:** Run by powerful Islamist armed groups on the ground, including Jabhat al-Nusra, the Sharia court is seen as the most powerful with its strong ability to enforce its rules and laws. Its work is not limited to legal issues, but extends to cover public services like relief work and medical services, and to intervene in the everyday life of citizens. However, due to its patronage system and manipulation of the law to its advantage, it is perceived as corrupt while hiding behind its Islamist discourse. This has resulted in much resistance to it by civil society groups who seek to hold it accountable but fear that no alternative is available to replace it. The city of Aleppo Local Council seems to compete with the court in the provision of services but with limited resources and little military backing to enforce law and security on the ground. Its performance of functions spanning local administration, civil defence, social and legal work, media, public relations, education and project planning is perceived as extremely effective, especially in its provision of education and civil defence, and it is well respected unlike the Sharia Court. However, it has limited resources and continues to be targeted by the regime. It is also vulnerable to the control of the armed groups and risks being used as a tool by the National Coalition, the Aleppo Governorate council and donors’ agendas. Some activists have been highlighting it as increasingly controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood who seek to use it as a shadow state to serve their agendas of controlling the city. Nevertheless, as it does not hold power yet, the Aleppo city Local Council remains part of civil society, even though it enjoys support from one of the main armed groups, Jaish Al Mujahideen. The council meanwhile remained fragmented and unorganized in the provision of services. Civil society groups have put forward efforts to create networks, unions and syndicates like the free Syrian doctors, free Syrian lawyers, etc. but these have not been effective and continue to face divisions. For instance, the free teachers group was divided into six formations and the sides that provide medical relief (the free medical union, united medical council and the directorate of health) hardly

coordinate. Financial support from international sides seems to further enforce this fragmentation.

**Security:** With barrel bombs falling on civilians from the sky, the regime has ensured no one is secure in the non-government controlled part of Aleppo. However, various sides have tried to otherwise reconstruct security by making the situation on the ground safer from looting, criminality and conflict. These include the structures promoted by the Sharia Court, Local Council and foreign interventions. The Sharia court established by Al-Nusra is expanding in its influence as it united with other armed groups under the banner of Al Jabha Al Islamiyya. This court has been trying to enforce order but as per its own patronage system -an issue which actually triggered more insecurity on the ground for those with no weapons or connections to it. As per the local council and foreign interventions, currently, local efforts, with the support of international aid have been planning the reconstitution of a proper police force in Aleppo. These seek to rely on the old police institution itself, under the lead of a respected police officer who enjoys very high integrity amongst the locals. Negotiations have been ongoing to have the police institution run under the Local Council. With all the positive and negative implications this triggers, it has raised much hope for security reconstitution.

**Legitimacy:** All actors have been working on gaining legitimacy on the ground. The Sharia Court tries to improve its capacity-related legitimacy with the public services it offers, yet its corrupt practices are limiting its effectiveness. The Local Council, which enjoys good local legitimacy as it is elected by civil society activists, traditional and revolutionary figures, also continues to work on its capacity-related legitimacy, but remains limited in its resources. The main local army that supports it –Jaish Al Mujahideen- enjoys the highest legitimacy amongst all armed groups because it managed to expel ISIS from the city and is the only armed group capable –to a certain level- of standing up against the power of the Sharia Court. Nevertheless, legitimacy in Aleppo belongs to civil society. Although fragmented in its work, the latter’s capability is relatively strong. It has plans to hold power perpetrators to account and enjoys a diversity of well-educated and well-connected youth, some of which are from outside Aleppo (Khalaf et al, 2014). This has attracted to it international technical and financial support which served to increase its authority. Some armed groups are currently seeking to have some cooperation with civil society, as this would improve their international legitimacy (and thus funding). Even the strongest force in Aleppo, the Sharia Court that has kidnapped and killed several activists to ensure it is not held to account, has had to do this in secret, as it fears the voice of civil society. The Sharia Court has been pushed many times to submit to civil society’s demands in the several demonstrations carried against it. One of the biggest campaigns “Until Here, Stop” (La Hown Wbas), which aimed to hold the court to account for detaining activists summarized this best in its banners which stated “you are the court and we are the legitimacy” (Entoo El Hayaa w Nehna El Shariyyeh).

#### **4C. Deir Ez-zor – The Monopoly of a War Economy**

##### 4C.1 Pre-Conflict

The main source of oil fields in Syria, Deir Ez-zor is a very rich governorate. Although its resources have been monopolised by the regime, leaving it underdeveloped and not invested in, it remains relatively richer than neighbouring governorates. Livelihood sources of its inhabitants are derived from either agriculture, trade or employment in the public sector or in its private and government oil companies (though at lower labour ranks). Dair Ezzor is of a tribal nature but its tribes are divided and riven by regime-fostered patronage systems. Fragmented, their political and social authority increases as one moves to the rural areas of the governorate. The main tribes include Albagara, Alqarshan, Almaamra, Aleqaidat. Many of these tribes had been co-opted by the regime with their leaders replaced by others. To maintain regime security, this was supported by the rule of an extremely corrupt governor Jamea Jamea who had been manipulating and reaping economic benefits from even the smallest business in the city. Jamea Jamea was widely hated and at the beginning of the uprising, the top demand before calling for the fall of the regime was for his fall.

##### 4C.2 The “Liberation” of Dair Ezzor

The liberation of parts of Dair Ezzor have been very violent and costly in terms of both human and material losses. Although the uprising started as peaceful in Dair Ezzor, it was soon rendered violent with a very high level of militarisation and shelling. Because of its rich oil resources, Dair Ezzor is one of the most contested and thus destroyed areas in Syria today. Currently, the liberated area in Dair Ezzor city is trapped between small regime-controlled areas from both its eastern and western sides; by a mountain from its south and a river from its north. Across this river, only a bridge links it to the rest of the country.

##### 4C.3 The first few months of “Liberation”

Following the liberation of parts of Deir Ez-zor, the city fell under a siege imposed on it by the regime for over two years. Moreover, with continuous shelling of the city by the regime, the security situation there is one of the direst across Syria. All of this has ensured that the once booming civil society groups, established after the move of the biggest part of the city and its rural areas out of the government’s control, have been strongly limited and depoliticised. This has left the place to the control of armed groups seeking to reap maximum benefit from their authority in the city and oil resources in Deir Ez-zor’s rural areas.

##### 4C.4 The fight for oil and power

In the city, Al-Nusra being the strongest armed group, with a very big percentage of its army recruited from local tribes, established its own Sharia Court and started implementing its own rules and systems on the ground. This monopoly of authority did not satisfy the other local armed groups, each of whom alone could not face Al-Nusra, but together, posed a great threat to it. As such, power in the Sharia Court was renegotiated and ended being shared by the different local armed groups, but under the leadership of Al-Nusra. In the neighbouring rural area of Al-Mayadeen, as the armed groups were busy protecting the oil fields they have taken and are sharing with their tribes, Al-Nusra – whom again controls the biggest oil

fields-, managed to establish the strongest authority. There, its Sharia Court is extended from that of the city and is supported by its own police-like structures on the ground, the Islamic General Security (Al-Amn Al-Am al Islami). Nonetheless, the situation changes regularly every day. Rural Deir Ez-zor hosted bloody fights between Al-Nusra and ISIS over control of oil fields and authority. In the violent fights between the two, the local armed groups in the city have distanced themselves from siding with either and most of those in the rural areas are busy protecting their –and often their tribe’s- oil fields. Eventually ISIS won out over al-Nusra.

#### 4C.5 Hybrid Governance during the current conflict

The main governance actors in the non-government controlled parts of Deir Ez-zor were armed groups, tribes, ISIS, Al-Nusra, the Sharia Court, the local council and local civil society groups. The governance factors of these actors are assessed below:

**Effectiveness:** Due to the heavy militarization and the resulting warlordism where different armed groups and associated tribes took over oil fields, effectiveness seems to have been privatized by a war economy where each supports their own group. Indeed, even the Sharia Court did not provide many services beyond its rules and systems, which it had been imposing on the locals, thanks to its integrity and military power that had given it popularity at the beginning of its rule. On a lower scale, the city’s Local Council and some civil society groups were also providing public services and humanitarian aid. Despite their limited capabilities and resources, this earned them much respect by the locals. Nevertheless, overall effectiveness remained a result of the power dynamics of the armed groups in their deals with each other and with the regime. For instance, it was very common to have an armed fight over a resource, that is often settled either to the benefit of the stronger armed group or to that supported by the Sharia Court. Meanwhile, public goods like electricity and water were settled by the armed control of resources of the warring parties. An illustration of this is the “gas for electricity” deal between the regime and the local armed group where the latter controls Konaco, the country’s main gas factory and the first controls electricity (Yaziji, 2014).

**Security:** The heavy shelling Deir Ez-zor continued to face by the regime ensured the security situation was the direst, especially in the city, which is the most contested. There, as the strongest group, Al-Nusra was protected by its Sharia Court that is seen to serve mostly its own security interests and not that of the locals. As for locals’ security, this is the responsibility of each armed group that protects its own people. Indeed, even the Local Council is closely linked to an armed group that protects it. In the rural areas, the shelling is relatively less and as the armed groups are more involved in securing their own oil gains, Al-Nusra’s Islamic General Security (Al-Amn Al-Am al Islami) provided some security on the ground to the locals. However, the overall situation reflects that, due to the war economy that has benefited many tribal and armed groups and even individual warlords, many of these were more interested in perpetuating the insecurity.

**Legitimacy:** With the vicious war economy cycle across the entire governorate, especially in the city, legitimacy was lost. When Al-Nusra first established its Sharia Court, given its good records in defeating the regime, it enjoyed some

legitimacy, especially as it did not interfere much with local affairs. However, as it gained power it started setting its own rules and systems, which were becoming increasingly corrupt and based on patronage systems. It started interfering in the everyday life and rights of the locals. This did not spare their civil rights –when detaining local activists; nor their economic rights –when taking over any empty houses and shops. At the same time, Al-Nusra failed to build on its capacity-related legitimacy from the provision of services and security. It lost legitimacy in the eyes of the locals, except for those sharing its ideology like the religion-preaching “Daawi” groups. The more legitimate side seems to be the Local Council that is well respected due to its relative effectiveness in the provision of public goods despite its limited resources. However, the Local Council never played a role in holding the court accountable. As for civil society, given the heavy militarization and increased oppression by Al-Nusra, it remained very weak and forced to shy away from politics and to limit its work to humanitarian aid. Other civil society groups seemed to embrace religious-related identities; those that did not, were marginalized.

Nonetheless, when heavy violations to what is acceptable to the locals occurred, they stood up for themselves, even without civil society groups mobilizing them. A well-told story is the mass demonstration held against the Sharia Court in which a very big number of the city’s locals participated demanding the release of four of local activists from Al-Nusra’s detention. However, by then the case was not only who was detained – the activists being young community leaders with high legitimacy – but mostly how they were detained. Two of them had been taken from their wedding party during which the bride was slapped by a Tunisian fighter. To the locals, this meant a complete violation of their dignity – and by a foreigner. The demonstration did not stop until all four detainees were released.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Host to one of the most vicious conflicts in modern history, Syria is a fertile arena for diverse forms of governance, both destructive and benevolent. This stems from structurally imbalanced governance that moved from state and market manipulation in the past decade, to state-failure, war economy and conflict society, during the current conflict. This situation has given rise to new governance structures that have emerged to fill up the resulting void. These include both civil and uncivil, top-down and grassroots, local and international players. They range from civil society groups, Local Councils, Sharia Courts, Extremist Groups, warlords, armed groups, the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, to International Organizations and private implementers.

As state-building and civil society forces seek to reconstruct and/or reform governance with and without these governance structures, and as these forces are shaping and being shaped by each other, a “Hybrid Governance” is being formed. Nonetheless, given the structural weakness of the Syrian civil society, this hybridization process seems more inclined towards international state-building interests that are focused on top-down technocratic “institutionalisation” processes and that exacerbate the fragility and fragmentation of civil society groups on the ground. This in turn is paving the way for extremist groups to fill the vacuum in governance. Indeed, even the best-intentioned international interventions will not

be able to positively redress this fragility unless they understand governance on the ground in Syria, from a local perspective. The latter highlights that, during conflict, on the ground, security is equated with the protection of local Syrians and their survival and not solely with the protection of citizens of the international community from terrorist threats. In parallel, legitimacy is deemed based on local values, beliefs and relationships, and does not only focus on an international rational-legal type of legitimacy or on foreign processes and negotiations that are top-down and set behind closed doors. Additionally, effectiveness is perceived as based on the delivery of services to the locals and not on mainly implementing external agendas and/or project-driven support.

Furthermore, in order to be able to more efficiently reconstitute a balanced form of governance in conflict-torn states, this study invites us, as suggested in its first part, to rethink the contradictions and limitations in our understanding of and work on conflict, civil society and state-building. During conflict, while hybridity may alter the nature and orientation of the state, civil society and market, it also affects the relationships and dynamics between them (Mac Ginty, 2011); thus, we cannot afford to focus narrowly on governance actors across these spheres, in isolation from each other. Additionally, a proper analysis has to include historical depth and contextual understanding of local versus international interests and agency. As clarified by the Syrian case, the historical roots of conflict do matter. So do the local context and the manner in which the international actors interact with these. The case studies illustrate that both economic and human resources are critical for improved governance, but so is agency and social relationships on the ground. Continued local resistance meanwhile, suggests that there is no peace without justice, and that security is meaningless without real change – a change at the social, economic and political levels.

Nonetheless, regardless of the form of governance that might in the future be established in Syria (be it inclusive or exclusive, unified or fragmented, centralised or decentralised or somewhere in-between), generations and an entire civilisation are vanishing in Syria with implications for decades to come both nationwide and worldwide. Thus, we may need to start thinking of the state, market and civil society together; of peace and justice together; of security and change together; but of people and their rights, first of all.

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## Endnotes

1. For further reference view (Menkhaus, 2007; Edwards, 2010; Kostovicova, et al., 2013)
2. For a case study, view: <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/en/news/2789.html>
3. More detailed information is available on the ACU Website: <http://www.acu-sy.org/88/Who-we-are/Mission-And-Goals/>
4. For further reference view:  
[https://www.facebook.com/LACUsyria/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/LACUsyria/info?tab=page_info)
5. See (MSF, 2013)

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**List of Acronyms**

ACU	Assistance Coordinating Unit
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DFID	Department for International Development
ISIS	Islamic State in Syria/Levant – Also know as <i>Daesh</i> in Arabic
LACU	Local Administration Councils Unit
LC	Local Council
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontière
NGO(s)	Non-governmental Organisation(s)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme