

The painful rebirth of Libya's mainstream news media (guest blog)

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How are Libya's journalists coping after the end of the Gaddafi regime? Polis research fellow Fatima El-Issawi has been to find out. Here she gives a flavour of her trip.

The Head of the security team at the national Libyan television station could not contain his emotions. I did not expect to see this former rebel moved to tears. He spoke candidly about routine killings that took place while he was part of a special operations unit fighting against Gaddafi's police.

Do you have regrets, I asked him? Yes, he said, as he continued to weep, although he insisted that his role in the revolution was inevitable.

The first days of my trip to Libya to conduct a field investigation on how mainstream national media is developing in the post-Gaddafi era revealed an unexpected challenge for me: adapting to the most unlikely situations and most surreal stories.



Libya al-Hurra TV studios (all photos by Fatima El Issawi)

The Libyan national media industry is being reborn but it's a painful process. Yes, journalists are now, in theory, free. They can write what they want instead of suffering under strict control in favour of naïve discourse in praise of the Leader.

However, professional skills are extremely poor, the media regulatory vacuum is creating a chaotic situation and the definition of a journalist is lost in the struggle between traditional and citizen journalists.

How can you operate as professional and free media producer when you can be frequently intimidated and sometimes attacked by armed groups for whom open debate and free media is a novel concept and one that isn't entirely welcome.



Fatima El Issawi at the Libyan News Agency newsroom

The Libyan journalist works in a volatile security environment where the new political groups are still using the old regime tactics in dealing with media. They also have extremely uncertain working conditions.

So although they are finally able to operate as journalists, they can little to help ameliorate the problems of the very complex political transition in their country.

During my two weeks of field research in Tripoli and Benghazi, I could share with journalists I interviewed both their enthusiasm and their frustration. I will always remember the anger expressed by a young female journalist who is struggling to find her place in this new media environment amid what she described as lack of structure:

"I was always a journalist and don't know to do any other job. I don't know what to do. No one can help me. No one can listen to me"

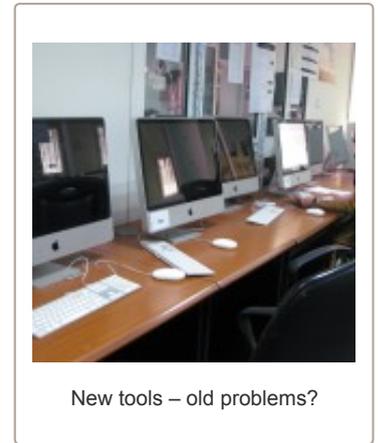
The Libyan media industry is witnessing huge challenges and requires much more substantial and better-tailored intervention by international agencies working on media development. Only then perhaps will the journalists' tears and hard work be rewarded.

This article by Fatima El-Issawi who is the lead researcher on the Polis Middle East Media research project. It is examining the state of mainstream media in the Arab world in the wake of the recent political changes.

Contact us at Polis@lse.ac.uk for more details

You can access Fatima's report on [Tunisian media here](#)

You can [find out more about her research here](#)



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