



Universiteit Utrecht

**Recovering the Truth for Syria's
Missing and Forcibly Disappeared:
Assessing Opportunity Structures and Guiding
Principles for International Stakeholders**

By: Leo Hochberg
Student number: 0245690
Utrecht University
August 3, 2021

A Thesis submitted to
The Board of Examiners
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Relevant Program Information:

Supervisor: Gijs Verbossen

Date of Submission: August 3, 2021

Trajectory: Internship (15 ECTS) and Thesis Writing (15 ECTS)

Word count: 14,998

Abstract

Syria is today home to at least 150,000 cases of missing persons (Sarkin, “Humans Not Numbers” 6), many of whom were forcibly disappeared by conflict actors, leaving their family members and loved ones behind in a state of ambiguous loss and insecurity. The vast scope and extent of this issue, combined with its grave impacts upon the wellbeing of both the missing and their loved ones, constitute a humanitarian crisis of the utmost urgency. Given that finding missing persons is a complex task that requires forensic expertise and significant resources, support from international stakeholders will certainly be necessary. Thus, this thesis applies the framework of ‘truth recovery’ put forth by Iosif Kovras to examine the role of international stakeholders in the search for Syria’s missing. To give a coherent and in-depth understanding of the obstacles and opportunities which stakeholders face as they select truth recovery efforts to fund and pursue, the political opportunity structures surrounding efforts to find the missing are assessed for each of Syria’s three major autonomous or semiautonomous zones. Then, given existing conditions and barriers to the recovery of truth, this thesis offers three general principles which international stakeholders should abide by as they engage in efforts to uncover the fate of the missing. Those are: (1) prioritize forensic truth in the short term over the naming, shaming, and punishment of perpetrators, (2) begin the process of forensic truth recovery immediately, and (3) respect the sensitivities of victims and families and include them in truth recovery efforts.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	5
I. Introduction	6
The case of the missing and forcibly disappeared in Syria	6
The impacts of disappearance upon Syrian families	8
Research design	10
II. Theoretical context – what is ‘truth’ for the missing?	12
III. Methodology	15
Research ethics	17
IV. Assessing Opportunity Structure in Syria’s three major regions	18
Regime-controlled territory	18
Idlib and Turkish-controlled regions	20
Northeast Syria	21
V. Identifying Guiding Principles for International Stakeholders	23
Principle 1: Focus now on forensic truth, and then approach broader truth after more conducive conditions manifest in Syria.....	23
Principle 2: The recovery of forensic truth should begin immediately.	25
Principle 3: Respect the wishes and sensitivities of the families and include them in truth recovery efforts.....	27
VI. Conclusion	29
Annex A: Map of autonomous or semiautonomous regions in Syria	31
Annex B: Sample interview questions for Syrian family members of missing persons	32
Works Cited	33

Acknowledgments

The author¹ dedicates this thesis to the brave Syrians who work every day to advance freedom, justice, and the search for the missing, both in Syria and around the world. Their efforts, advocacy, and strength in the face of immense adversity remain a powerful source of hope despite a decade of suffering for so many Syrians. The author notes Syrian families' inalienable rights to truth and justice and expresses his gratitude to the Syrian interlocutors who kindly shared their experiences, stories, and perspectives on the issue of Syria's missing.

Furthermore, this thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. First, the author extends an immense thank you to Dr. Gijs Verbossen for his supervision and advisement throughout the research and writing process – this work would have been impossible without his support and oversight. The author also thanks his previous colleagues at the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, who enriched the author's academic and professional experience and provided helpful advisement and insight regarding many topics discussed in this paper. The author also recognizes the contributions of the other students in this master's program, particularly those who share Dr. Verbossen as a supervisor, for their gracious feedback and emotional support. Finally, the author thanks his mom and dad, as well as Gracie and Rachit, for being a constant source of support in all the author's personal and scholastic ventures.

¹ The author of this thesis, Leo Hochberg, is a master's candidate in Conflict Studies and Human Rights at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. He is previously a graduate of Oberlin College with bachelor's degrees in politics and Middle Eastern & North African studies. This thesis is written in partial fulfillment of his master's degree.

I. Introduction

As the Syrian conflict continues through its 10th year since the outbreak of mass protests in 2011, the amount of missing people in the country has skyrocketed, with at least 150,000 people's whereabouts and status currently unknown (Sarkin, "Humans Not Numbers" 6). While Syria is home to numerous humanitarian emergencies, including famine, economic collapse, frequent violence, and chemical warfare, the issue of the missing also constitutes a pressing crisis that warrants attention and action from the international community. Beginning in 2018, family members of the missing have begun to coalesce into families' organizations to advocate for their rights to both know the fate of their loved ones, and to seek justice against those who are responsible for their disappearance (Helmi et al., "Justice Landscape").

However, efforts to find the missing and manifest Syrian families' rights to truth and justice face substantial barriers. For one, violence is ongoing in many parts of Syria, which prevents crucial efforts such as the exhumation of mass graves from being conducted safely. Investigators also face a critical lack of supplies, expertise, and knowledge on best practices to uncover and identify the remains of those found to be deceased (Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Mass Graves"). Finally, critical among existing barriers is the political dominance of perpetrators of human rights abuses, many of whom bear criminal responsibility for the issue of the missing under international law (Sarkin, "Why the Prohibition"). Because these perpetrators retain military and political dominance, they have the power to thwart, delay, and damage investigative efforts, through means such as denying access to international organizations, harming personnel on the ground, refusing to share crucial information regarding the whereabouts of detainees, and passing laws and amnesties which prevent families from seeking legal accountability against their abusers. The motivation of perpetrators to interfere with search efforts is mainly that the recovery of truth about the missing could ultimately result in criminal accountability for those responsible.

Despite these obstacles, there are still options to uncover the fate of the missing in Syria, although doing so will take time and require resources and support from international stakeholders. Thus, this thesis aims to investigate ways by which stakeholders in the international community can help to manifest truth and justice for Syrian families. It further argues, as will be discussed in chapter V, that the international community has an important role to play in the search for the missing, and that by focusing on achievable and realistic efforts, progress can be made in manifesting the rights of victims and families. First, however, it is necessary to further discuss the issue of the missing in the Syrian context, as an accurate understanding of the nature and extent of the problem provides important context for an effective and appropriate response.

The case of the missing and forcibly disappeared in Syria

People can go missing in conflict in a variety of ways, including accidents, unaccounted-for deaths on and off the battlefield, death or separation during migration, kidnapping, and other causes. While it is true that some cases constitute accidents for which there is no responsible party, there are many cases in which an individual, group, or larger organization is criminally responsible for an individual's absence. Given that conflict in Syria has been ongoing for over a decade and millions of Syrians have fled internally and to destinations abroad,² it is likely that the issue of the

² The UNHCR has thus far registered 6.6 million Syrian refugees living abroad, among whom over 5 million are hosted by countries near Syria. This is on top of 6.7 million internally displaced Syrians (UNHCR).

missing has many different contributing factors. At present, there is no definitive record that accounts for all missing persons who have disappeared for all reasons.

However, one human rights violation stands out as an especially large contributor to the issue of the missing by virtue of its scale. This is the issue of *enforced disappearance*; a crime by which a perpetrating actor intentionally removes an individual from society and then conceals their fate and whereabouts. A more detailed definition is put forward by the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), which articulates three main characteristics (Committee on Enforced Disappearances, “International Convention” 1):

- There is an arrest, detention, or abduction of a person or persons, resulting in a deprivation of their liberty.
- The removal of the victim(s) is carried out by the state, or by persons affiliated or with authorization or acquiescence of the state.
- The victim(s)' removal and the deprivation of their liberty are denied by the perpetrating actor and their whereabouts and fate are concealed, which places the victim outside of the protection of the law.

The ICPPED, as well as some human rights groups, distinguish enforced disappearance as a crime in which state officials are involved, whereas abductions by non-state actors are classified as crimes of abduction and/or crimes against humanity. However, in the Syrian context, crimes of this nature are so widespread across conflict lines that some common parlance is needed. Therefore, the verb ‘to disappear’ will be used throughout this paper to describe the crime of clandestine abduction and detention committed by both state and non-state actors.

A recent study commissioned by a group of Syrian families’ associations noted that there are currently at least 150,000 cases of enforced disappearance in Syria today (Sarkin, “Humans Not Numbers” 6). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights commented in March of 2021, “it is difficult to establish with any precision the number of missing men, women, and children, but the figure is estimated to be in the tens of thousands” (Bachelet, “Truth and Justice”). However, Syrian organizations tracking this issue have noted that the true number is likely higher than existing documentation efforts can account for. This is because the clandestine nature of enforced disappearances makes them difficult to track and verify. There is typically little of a paper trail, disappearances frequently lack witnesses,³ and they are denied by the very authorities who have the power to verify them.

Existing data indicate that the Syrian party responsible for the most disappearances is the Syrian regime and regime-allied militias. In one study conducted by a Syrian families’ association, the Association for Detainees and Missing Persons at Sednaya Prison (AMDSP), among 508 interviewed family members, 93% noted that the disappeared person in their life was taken by the Syrian regime (ADMSP 37). Likewise, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), a UK-based monitoring group, noted that the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 85% of the cases of disappearance which they have tracked (SNHR 2). While there exists a notable discrepancy of 8%, possibly due to methodological differences between studies, both sources make clear that the Syrian regime maintains the largest share of criminal responsibility. The regime is,

³ In a study published in December 2020, among a sample size of 508 interviews with family members of missing persons, 67% of interviewees noted that there was a witness present at the time and location of disappearance. This means that approximately a third of disappearances lack any witnesses at all, leaving their family members with no starting point to begin searching. (ADMSP 9).

however, not the only perpetrator. A variety of other actors in Syria's conflict are responsible for clandestine murders and abductions. Existing data indicates that the Islamic State (ISIS) is the second-largest perpetrator. While the full number of disappearances committed by ISIS may never be known, SNHR has confirmed at least 8,648 cases (SNHR 7). Beyond the regime and ISIS, smaller numbers of disappearances have also been perpetrated by a variety of other actors, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist organization currently in control of the Idlib region in Northwest Syria (SNHR).

In Syria, victims of enforced disappearance range across virtually all sectors of society. Amnesty International has documented disappearances of human rights and political activists, demonstrators, journalists, doctors, media personalities, humanitarian workers, defectors of perpetrating organizations, and even family members of wanted individuals to “dissuade these wanted individuals from continuing their political activism or military activities.” (Amnesty, “Between Prison and the Grave” 7). As to why perpetrators employ this tactic at a scale, Aguilar and Kovras note that enforced disappearances present three key benefits to the perpetrators. First, it allows the perpetrator to silence and/or eliminate a real or perceived threat. Second, they seek to demobilize the targets' families and communities by trapping them in a state of devastating ambiguous loss about the fate of their loved ones. Third, by hiding and denying that the victim remains or has been in their custody, perpetrators hope to avoid accountability and legal repercussions (437-8). Effectively, enforced disappearance is a mechanism of repression that can silence individuals deemed troublesome and their communities at a relatively low cost, and seemingly with less potential exposure to accountability and legal consequences.

Furthermore, multiple Syrian interlocutors noted that financial gain is another key motivator behind the frequent perpetration of enforced disappearances in Syria. This is mainly because payment to knowledgeable officials is a common search mechanism for Syrian families (ADMSP 9). One Syrian interlocutor recounted the story of her family's search for her disappeared father, saying, “We paid some [regime officials]. But we didn't get any information, mostly the information that we received was very generic -- anyone in the village could know this information, even if they didn't pay.”⁴ Despite its unreliability, this practice sustains a massive economy of profiteering, which allows powerful officials and so-called 'brokers' (i.e., individuals with connections to powerful officials) to exploit families for financial gain. A 2020 study of families of the missing estimated that over \$900 million USD has been spent by families in Syria either for information, a promise of visit, or a promise of release for missing individuals (ADMSP 9).

The impacts of disappearance upon Syrian families

While disappeared individuals are the primary victims of enforced disappearance, international law also notes the existence of secondary victims; namely the families of the primary victims, and “any individual who has suffered harm as the direct result of an enforced disappearance” (Committee on Enforced Disappearances, “International Convention” 9). Family members are ascribed specific rights under international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention notes the rights of families to receive information about their loved ones and clarifies that it is the obligation of authorities, be they either state or non-state actors, to account for the fate of the missing and

⁴ Interview with Omama Abdulhadi; 3 May 2021.

establish contact between missing individuals and their relatives (Fourth Geneva Convention). Additionally, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the American Convention on Human Rights clarify that arbitrary, unlawful, or abusive interference with one's family life are violations of the law, which extends to enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions (ICRC, "Rule 105"). Finally, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has previously clarified in court proceedings that an effective and legally acceptable remedy for enforced disappearance must ensure "that 'among other things, those responsible for human rights violations will be tried,'" (Andreu-Guzmán 72). This decision notes the right of families to an effective and fair process of justice and accountability against perpetrators of enforced disappearance.

Manifesting the rights of the families of the missing is crucial because the disappearance of a relative can have grave quality-of-life impacts upon the family members who are left behind. For example, families frequently face legal hurdles that result from the ambiguous status of the missing person, such as being unable to collect necessary documents, claim inheritance, or access the property or insurance payments that would normally have come if the missing person were known to be deceased (ICRC, "Families of the Missing" 4). In Syria specifically, thousands of families face complex legal hurdles because Syrian domestic law makes it difficult to collect death certificates for missing individuals, forcing many families to pursue informal or illegal mechanisms such as bribing officials to obtain necessary documentation (Amnesty, "Between Prison and the Grave" 24).

The burden of disappearance combined with problematic domestic legal structures also casts disproportionately suffering onto Syrian women. For example, under domestic law, men are allowed to obtain legal guardianship of their children, but women are not guaranteed that right, even if they are the mother and only remaining caretaker of their child (Amnesty, "Between Prison and the Grave" 25). This means that in the instance of an absent father, guardianship is handed over to the next male of kin, such as an uncle or grandfather, thus "subjugating the mother's authority over her children to the will of her male relatives." (SJAC, "The Women Left Behind"). Meanwhile, in the absence of a male relative, women's claims to property in Syria are precarious, once again frequently resulting in the defaulting of property ownership to male relatives or the government rather than to wives, mothers, and daughters (SJAC, "The Women Left Behind"). Issues facing female family members of the missing are compounded by the fact that an overwhelming majority of missing persons in Syria are male (ADMSP 27), thus leaving a disproportionately high number of women in a precarious legal and social position.

If the immediate victim of disappearance was a breadwinner, their absence all too often casts the family into financial insecurity, forcing remaining family members to juggle putting food on the table, childcare, and the financial burden of the search for the missing individual. A 2018 study conducted among a survey pool of over fifty female relatives of the missing found that 89% had a least 1 child and 58% had 4 or more children, yet over 65% were unemployed (Dawlaty & WND 26). The same study concluded,

"Losing a relative to enforced disappearance does not necessarily result in economic insecurity. However, this seems to be the case in a patriarchal society such as Syria where men make crucial economic contributions, and in most cases, are the main breadwinners for their families. Combined with gender-specific injustices (including girls dropping out of school, early marriage, gender norms around what constitutes suitable work for women,

and the traditional opposition to women's participation in the public and economic spheres) and other conflict-induced injustices (such as siege and forced displacement, which lead to less overall economic activity), means that enforced disappearance becomes a major factor in condemning families to poverty." (Women Now & Dawlaty 32).

Finally, multiple Syrian interlocutors spoke of the severe emotional and psychological burden that is placed upon the families as they struggle to live their daily lives without any confirmation of the whereabouts, health, or status of their missing relative. As the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) has noted, "There is a range of clinical signs shown by family members after the disappearance of their relative (for example, difficulties of concentration, permanent sadness, loneliness, psychological exhaustion). They are consequential to the state of uncertainty in which they are forced to stay. The fact of not knowing about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relative(s) creates an important and constant anxiety that can deeply affect their emotional equilibrium as well as their daily life," (ICRC, "Families of the Missing" 6). Likewise, some have likened this psychological suffering to a form of "mental torture", which implicates the criminal responsibility of perpetrators in the psychological pain suffered by families (McManus 109). In interviews, multiple interlocutors expressed strong emotion when discussing this topic, as doing so necessarily recalls the deep emotional burden faced by individuals who endure ambiguous loss. One interlocutor shared,

"At the very beginning, I was almost paralyzed. But bit by bit I met other people who lost their beloved ones and I started to feel that I'm not by myself and our voice might be loud and clear, and maybe we can do something together that can impact the cause of disappeared. So personally speaking, I had two choices in my life. First, to spend my whole life at home paralyzed, crying day and night about the absence of my dad, remembering him and our past memories. Or, to demand the reveal of his destiny and to be in the cause of the detainees to reach anything, like any conclusion that will relieve us as families of the disappeared."⁵

The present section does not constitute an exhaustive list of all ways in which Syrian families suffer because of enforced disappearance, and each Syrian family likely feels the impact of ambiguous loss in different and unique ways. However, the impacts presented here clearly show that families are themselves victims of the crime of enforced disappearance. Therefore, they are entitled to sufficient recourse and the complete fulfillment of their rights to truth and justice.

Research design

At present, Syrian families and families' organizations have begun to investigate mechanisms by which they can uncover the truth about their missing loved ones (SJAC, "New Justice Charter"). Simultaneously, given that finding missing persons requires advanced forensic expertise and significant resources, support from the international community will ultimately be necessary. To achieve success in uncovering the fate of the missing, this thesis investigates the best path forward to align the efforts of international stakeholders⁶ with those of Syrian victims and families. To

⁵ Interview with Omama Abdulhadi; 3 May 2021.

⁶ International stakeholders include any actors in the international community that have an interest in revealing the fate of Syria's missing and forcibly disappeared. This includes governments and states, international NGOs, actors under or affiliated with the United Nations, and any other individuals or organizations who employ or are involved in efforts to find the missing.

achieve this goal, the analytical framework of *truth recovery* is applied, which refers to the investigation of human rights violations and the aggregation of an accurate historical record which is accessible to victims. This analytical framework will be explained in greater detail in Chapter II. The following primary research question is thus presented:

How can a framework of truth recovery assist international stakeholders to align their efforts to effectively meet the needs of Syrian families and victims, beginning in 2021, and continuing until Syrian families' rights to truth and justice are fully realized?

This research question is centered on how international actors can responsibly align their efforts to meet the needs of victims of human rights violations. Using the approaches enumerated by Mason, this research question relies on an actor-network epistemology, whereby the researcher “looks for the ‘agency’ of actors which can be people, things and non-humans” (Mason 8). In doing so, the researcher aims to identify the role which these actors can play in producing solutions to problems, despite and through existing conditions and structures. However, this research further incorporates elements of an ethnographic approach, as it also aims to generate knowledge by assessing the lived experiences of victims, who are themselves both subjects of observation and agents in the search for the missing. These approaches align with the ontological position of this paper, which is an actor/agent approach, whereby humans and non-human actors act and maneuver within the structures which surround them. Social life thus derives from the acts of agent individuals and non-human actors, who interact with each other and their structural environment.

To answer the above research question, the author pursued sub-questions that guided the research process and provided points around which to aggregate data. These questions include:

1. What rights does international law ascribe to the victims of enforced disappearance, including both immediate victims (the missing and disappeared) and secondary victims (their family members and loved ones)?
 - a. How does international law define ‘truth’, and what ‘truths’ are victims entitled to?
2. What are the current conditions for the recovery of truth in Syria today?
 - a. How do conditions for truth recovery differ across existing political and territorial boundaries in Syria?
 - b. How do variant opportunity structures surrounding the search for the missing impact the likelihood of successfully recovering truth about their fate?
3. What principles should the international community abide by to best align its efforts with the needs of Syrian victims and families?
 - a. What forms of support do Syrian victims and families need to realize their desires and manifest their rights to truth and justice?
 - b. What resources can the international community contribute to productively assist and further the search for the missing?

The following chapters constitute a thorough explanation of the above research questions. The present chapter has thus far given background on the issue of the missing and disappeared in Syria and explaining the author’s general research design. Chapter II provides further theoretical context on what it means to recover truth for missing. It also introduces the analytical framework of *truth recovery* in greater detail. Chapter III details the research methodology employed by the author and discusses ethical implications. Chapter IV investigates the political opportunity structures which surround efforts to find the missing in Syria’s three major autonomous or

semiautonomous regions. Chapter V then details principles which the international community should abide by to best align its efforts with the needs and demands of Syrian victims and families. Finally, Chapter VI offers brief concluding remarks.

II. Theoretical context – what is ‘truth’ for the missing?

This thesis investigates a particular search process [for the missing] in a particular context [Syria], involving specific stakeholders and methods. Simply put, it is a case study. But as Christian Lund remarked, “Case studies are often presented as self-evident. However, of *what* the material is a case is actually less evident” (224). This begs the question, what is the search for the missing in Syria a case of? This thesis maintains that the search for the missing is fundamentally a search for truth. Because at the core of the demands of families and various other stakeholders is a desire to have answered the question, *what happened [to the missing]*? This can entail several further questions, each of which elaborates and expands the truth. How exactly did the person go missing, and where are they now? Was an individual or entity responsible for their disappearance? If so, who, and what was their motivation? Did the responsible party commit a crime in making this person go missing, and can they be held accountable for doing so?

The concept of ‘truth’ has long been contemplated by philosophers, theologians, scholars, academics, politicians, and many others. And thus, interpretations on the character and nature of what it means for something to be ‘true’ are prevalent and worth discussing in this thesis to develop a greater understanding of what it means to search for truth. Aristotle wrote, “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is that that it is not, is true,” (Metaphysics 1011b25). This Aristotelian maxim is a suitable explanation of what some scholars term the “correspondence theory” of truth, which effectively argues that “truth is correspondence to, or with, a fact” (David 1). In effect, this means that the truth is not a negotiable or debatable phenomenon -- if two people perceive a phenomenon (or a historical moment) differently, then at least one of them must be wrong. In the correspondence view of truth, any contestation over the character or content of the truth effectively constitutes its perversion.

A detractor from this position is Michel Foucault, who presents the truth as permanently intertwined with power. As he argued in a 1980 lecture, “Truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” (qtd. in Taylor 175). In the Foucauldian framework, truth is not strictly ‘sought’, in the sense of arriving at a final, incontestable position. Rather, it is forged by those who have the power to say, “this is true”, and then have the society or community to which they preach accept it. Truth, then, is subjective, and to argue it is to make it, rather than pervert it. Proponents of this perspective (van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis”; Thobani “Politics of Truth-Making”; Goswami “Structures of Truth”) have argued that truth-making thus ultimately favors the socially powerful, and often subsequently the political elite.

It seems self-evident that in a world where states vie for power, and elites within states vie for power, the prize of making one's truth dominant in society is highly sought after. The order of power politics thus wields truth-making to "silence those on the other side of truth, rationality, normality, universality and scientificity," (Goswami 15). The moldability and contestability of the Foucauldian conception of the truth are precisely what makes it so useful in the political world. This can help to explain the findings of Wijenayake, who concludes that, "where society is fragmented, it may give rise to multiple truth regimes" (32), as different and potentially oppositional communities endeavor to supplant their foundational narrative(s) and legitimate claims to resources, land, victimhood, existence, cultural identity, etc.

However, there is evidence to indicate that international law, as opposed to the states which create and enforce it, views the truth in a manner more consistent with correspondence theory. This concept is manifested in a variety of international legal sources that tell of a 'right to truth', which refers to "the obligation of the state to provide information to victims or to their families or even society as a whole about the circumstances surrounding serious violations of human rights," (Naqvi 245). One practical example is that at least thirty countries have implemented truth commissions, which are established to research and report on human rights violations in a specific location and time so that historical records can be established, victims and their communities can learn about the circumstances and causes of the violations they suffered, and in some cases, perpetrators can be identified and held to account (USIP, "Truth Commission"). Some international conventions have also adopted a right to truth, including the Treaty on Enforced Disappearances, which establishes a "right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of the enforced disappearance, the progress and results of the investigation and the fate of the disappeared person," (Committee on Enforced Disappearances, "International Convention"). Truth as presented under international law evidently treats human rights violations as facts that exist above political narratives, thus implicating *every* human rights violator, regardless of their creed or motivations. This appears to speak to an Aristotelian truth; a fact which is not established at the whim of any elites, but which is uncovered through investigation, enforced by evidence, and distinct from regimes of truth established by those who have vested interest in what is uncovered.

What, then, does it mean to search for truth for the missing in the context of international law? As international law perceives truth to be in correspondence with facts, it can be inferred that the manifestation of victims' right to truth thus constitutes a process by which facts are uncovered related to the circumstances and causes of the human rights violations which they have suffered. The truth is revealed when victims, their families, and potentially their communities are made aware of information that answers their lingering questions, such as the fate, status, and whereabouts of missing loved ones, as well as the identity of individuals, actors, and parties which bear responsibility. Additionally, Wijenayake has noted that "the purpose of such truth is to ensure the non-recurrence of systematic violations of human rights. This legal value judgment placed on the factual reality is cohesive with such purpose as it creates an environment which does not accommodate justifications for commission of such crimes." (48). The revelation of truth is thus also deterrent in nature, as by revealing the truth of a human rights violation, responsible actors are at the least exposed as reprehensible and law-violating individuals, and at most, held to account in some form of justice process deemed legitimate by the society of the victims and perpetrators.

At present, existing literature has investigated the role of international law and the international community in the search for the missing (Londoño & Signoret, "Implementing International Law"; Cordner & McKelvie, "Developing Standards"; Wagner, "To Know Where

He Lies”; Blau, “Missing Persons”; Keough et al., “Kosovo Family Support Project”). However, given that the Syrian conflict is still ongoing and families’ organizations in this context are relatively young, academic literature on the missing in Syria is sparse. Thus, this thesis offers an important contribution to the academic record, as the author is currently unaware of any other research project which has thoroughly investigated the obstacles and opportunities surrounding truth recovery for the missing specifically in Syria. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to amplify and bring to the fore the voices of Syrian victims and families who have suffered because of disappearance, therefore aiming to explore and reify the value of victim-centricity in research on human rights violations. The author rejects problematic tendencies in research to perceive communities of victims as “helpless, powerless, unable to make choices for themselves, and forced to endure forms of pain and suffering” (qtd. in Shwarz and Geng 103). This research is thus important because it recognizes and elaborates upon the role which victims play in responding to human rights violations.

Hence, this thesis turns to the academic framework of “truth recovery” put forth by Iosif Kovras in his book, *Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared*. In this text, Kovras tackles a complex question; why is it that in some countries is, activism on the part of families and their allies is successful in revealing the fate of the disappeared, whereas in other countries, the right to truth is never realized. Kovras outlines three levels of truth recovery, each of which marks one potential outcome of efforts to find the missing (Kovras, “Grassroots Activism” 1-9). The first level is *institutionalized silence*, in which societies respond to the issue of the missing with total amnesty for perpetrators and no investigation. The second level is *forensic truth*, a narrow form of truth in which graves are exhumed from the ground and efforts are made to avail families of their right to be reunited with their lost loved ones or that person’s bodily remains. The third and final level is *broader truth*, in which relatives have access to knowledge of their loved ones’ fate as well as the identities of perpetrators and the ability to hold them accountable for their criminal behavior. Broader truth can also include additional transitional justice mechanisms such as memorialization for the victims, reparations paid to the families, and broader societal reckoning on the legacies, impacts, and causes of enforced disappearance.

To explain why truth recovery efforts arrive at such divergent outcomes between contexts, Kovras argues that, like any social movement, success in finding the missing is heavily dependent on *political opportunity structures*. Political opportunity structures are “exogenous factors [that] enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised, and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy” (Meyer & Minkoff 1457-8). For example, if families’ associations have strong access to elite allies, broad and well-funded international support, and interests that align with those of the existing government, their efforts to recover truth are more likely to bear fruit. However, if families are isolated in their efforts, disconnected or at odds with rulings elites, lacking resources, and/or situated in a context of ongoing violence and physical insecurity, institutionalized silence is more likely. Kovras notes that just as political conditions can transform over time, immediate post-conflict conditions of institutionalized silence can later give way to truth recovery (Kovras, “Grassroots Activism” 40-43).

His focus on political opportunity structures, however, does not mean that Kovras flaunts or disregards the agency of victims. On the contrary, he argues that “Mainstream literature has a narrow scope, often treating widely divergent victims’ groups as a single homogeneous group with

uniform transitional justice preferences and needs. Yet different groups have different or even conflicting transitional justice preferences,” (Kovras, “Grassroots Activism” 5). In doing so, Kovras upholds the importance of victim agency and argues throughout the book that the outcome of transitional justice efforts is dependent upon and transformed by the victims’ actions. Since publication, Kovras’ book appears to have been received quite positively among his scholarly contemporaries, with numerous reviews recognizing its well-researched composition and convincing argumentation (Dempster 532; Demir, “Review”; Christodoulou, “Review”).

Despite the overall positive reception, gaps in his argument have been identified. Grewal notes that while Kovras adequately assesses how access to international legal support can strengthen efforts to find the missing, he does not fully address that “in this engagement, there are inevitably filtering and disciplining processes that will shape which sorts of victims are recognized and how,” (Grewal 11). Indeed, while international law is often conceptualized as a tool which can be wielded by grassroots groups, thus empowering them, others such as Robins have noted the risk of international legal regimes and norms empowering elite-led civil society at the expense of outside-the-system, grassroots, and indigenous social movements (Robins, “Elite Discourse”). Thus, international law is not necessarily a holistic remedy and may be more useful to some than others; a dynamic that is not considered in-depth by Kovras and may warrant further investigation.

Nevertheless, Kovras’ framework presents a powerful tool when assessing the role of international law and international stakeholders in the search for the missing. Because even while international legal regimes are multifaceted, complex, and have non-uniform impacts upon social movements, the right to truth as enshrined in international law still presents a tool for families’ associations to establish their legitimacy and situate their emotional needs within some form of a legal framework. Thus, the rest of this thesis will use the framework of truth recovery set forth by Kovras to investigate the role of the international community in the search for the missing and provide concrete conclusions on how international stakeholders can effectively align themselves with families, so as to ensure that victims of human rights violations receive remedy which effectively responds to their expressed needs.

III. Methodology

The author began researching the topic of Syria’s missing and forcibly disappeared in March of 2021, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master’s degree in Conflict Studies and Human Rights at Utrecht University. Having previously learned about the issue of missing persons in Syria through news reports and discussions with friends and colleagues, the author sought to investigate this topic further and produce a useful academic intervention related to the search for Syria’s missing. However, investigating this topic quickly ran up against substantial barriers which shaped the research process in important ways. First and foremost, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented strict limitations on data-gathering strategies. The author had hoped to travel to Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan to network among communities of Syrians and Syrian support organizations, but this ultimately proved too high of a COVID-19 risk for the author and potential interviewees, and impossible given travel restrictions during the investigation period. Thus, the author remained in the Netherlands and conducted most research interviews remotely. Second, the author reckoned with language barriers. While many interviewees spoke English, some only spoke Arabic; a language which is spoken at a conversational level by the author, but not to the extent

where a full research interview is possible. The author relied on ad hoc, live translation services when necessary.

Largely due to limitations brought on by the pandemic, the author employed a mixed-methods research process which was completed mostly without in-person interaction or travel.⁷ First, the author engaged in substantial secondary literature analysis, drawing from academic articles, books, news reports, NGO reports, international legal sources, and surveys related to issues of the missing. The author used this information both to provide background information and to inform select instances of comparative analysis between Syria and other contexts. Given that the missing and disappeared are a global issue, present virtually wherever there is violent conflict or dictatorship, comparing circumstances in Syria to those found elsewhere can illuminate valuable patterns and offer new hypotheses. To clarify, this thesis, being a small-N, case-driven study, does not seek to arrive at conclusions by identifying cross-cutting variables in a very wide body of cases. Rather, it employs a *causal narrative* approach which aims to “[break apart] variables into constituent sequences... and [compare] these disaggregated sequences across cases,” (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer 365). Basically, this means that the case of Syria is compared, generally one at a time, with other historical cases to identify relevant patterns and similarities, with the overall aim of producing meaningful analytical conclusions about causal factors.

To augment pre-existing data, the author also sought to identify interlocutors who are either themselves family members of the missing, or experts in the humanitarian field who could offer qualified analysis. The types of data provided in interviews varied depending on the background and lived experience of interlocutors. In interviews with family members of missing persons, interlocutors were asked about their personal experiences searching for missing loved ones and living with the impacts of enforced disappearance. Their responses helped the author to better understand the specific needs and demands of the families. A sample interview guide for an interview with a female family member of a missing person can be found in appendix B. For interviews with experts and academics, the author asked varying questions depending on the background and expertise of the interlocutor, although most touched upon the role of the international community and steps by which sustainable progress can be made in uncovering the fate of the missing.

In total, the author was able to conduct a total of **13 interviews** with **14 interlocutors** between March and July 2021. **6 interlocutors** were either Syrian detention survivors or family members of missing persons. Among these 6, **5 were regularly involved in activism on behalf of the missing or detainees in Syria**. Among all interviewees, **8 were female and 6 were male**. **2 were academics**, and **8 were employees of NGOs or humanitarian organizations that are not families’ associations**. Given that the topic of the missing is emotional and sensitive, interlocutors have been given pseudonyms in this paper, except for cases in which the interlocutor confirmed their preference to be listed by name and/or professional affiliation.

The author then drew upon information provided by interlocutors and secondary sources to investigate the political opportunity structures surrounding ongoing and future truth recovery initiatives. The goal of this investigative process was to take a detailed stock of existing obstacles and opportunities to forecast where truth stands the likeliest chance of being recovered. Doing so matters because an understanding of existing opportunity structures can provide a map of sorts to

⁷ Among 13 total research interviews, the author was able to complete 2 in-person in the Netherlands.

guide international stakeholders towards more opportunistic lines of effort. This process relies upon the analytical framework put forth by Iosif Kovras to enumerate potential outcomes for truth recovery efforts, namely by forecasting whether existing opportunity structures portend institutionalized silence or some form of successful truth recovery. The analysis of opportunity structures (presented in chapter IV) also includes the perspectives of family members and expert interlocutors.

Finally, the author addressed how the international community can best align its efforts to respond to the needs of the missing and their families in Syria. Findings are expressed through three guiding principles which the international community should abide by while addressing the issue of the missing in Syria. These three principles draw upon Kovras' framework of truth recovery while considering broader strategies and lines of effort, while also including specific asks and requests put forward by Syrian victims, survivors, and experts during the research process.

Research ethics

This study would be incomplete without discussion and reflection upon its ethical implications. The author notes that, first and foremost, this topic is highly sensitive and often invoked emotional responses from interlocutors who suffer the continuous impacts of ambiguous loss. To ask individuals about their traumatic personal experiences can threaten to revivify trauma, as it may require the interlocutor to recall painful memories. On the other hand, to ignore or sidestep the emotional impacts of ambiguous loss could constitute a form of whitewashing of the suffering of victims and families.

The author retained an awareness of this thin line throughout the research process and made certain decisions to prevent undue and further trauma for interlocutors, although these decisions likely resulted in sampling biases. For example, to lessen the emotional burden of discussing difficult experiences, the author focused primarily on interviewing individuals who are already involved in some form of activism on behalf of the missing, and thus have previous experience engaging with this topic, and potentially with sharing their personal story of loss. However, this likely resulted in sampling bias because those involved in families' and survivors' activism may approach the topic of the missing through the lens of their coalition of activists, whereas family members without prior activism experience may have a different perspective and lived experience. Furthermore, all families' organizations with whom the author was able to establish contact are based outside of Syria. As a result, no interviews were conducted with interlocutors currently living in Syria, thus presenting another bias that amplifies diaspora voices while leaving Syrians in their home country unheard. However, given that the author is not a trauma-trained researcher, and lacked the means to safely establish contact with Syrians in Syria, focusing on the voices of families' organizations appeared to be the option that was most feasible and presented the lowest psychological risk to interlocutors.

Furthermore, the author notes his own institutional experience and affiliation. Before beginning the research process for this thesis, the author completed an internship with the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), a Washington D.C.-based non-profit which focuses on transitional justice causes in Syria. The author was impressed by the work of SJAC's Missing Persons Program; an opinion bias which shows in this paper in the form of recommendations that international stakeholders support forensic efforts in which SJAC is already involved. Ultimately,

the author is grateful for the support which SJAC provided in this research, while still recognizing that proximity and prior affiliation to one specific organization influences the author's opinions about transitional justice best practices.

Finally, the author is aware of the limitations of his positionality. As a non-Syrian, it is beyond his ability to understand the intricacies of culturally and religiously sensitive topics such as handling the remains of the dead, and thus while this paper discusses the importance of cultural sensitivity, it refrains from offering any specific advisement on ensuring that forensic efforts are culturally responsive and appropriate in the Syrian context. He is also not a forensic anthropologist and lacks the knowledge background to identify specific best practices when conducting archaeological work. Thus, this paper primarily examines the issue of the missing first and foremost from the perspective of international law, while drawing upon and amplifying voices and testimonials from Syrian interlocutors. The author has tried to remain aware of the limitations of his positionality and is hopeful that this paper can nevertheless contribute to ongoing efforts to uncover the truth for Syria's missing.

IV. Assessing Opportunity Structure in Syria's three major regions

Before discussing guiding principles for truth recovery efforts, it is important to understand what conditions for truth recovery are like on the ground in Syria today. This chapter thus presents an investigation of the opportunity structures which surround and contextualize efforts to uncover the fate of the missing. This method is valuable because it contextualizes ongoing efforts and presents a better understanding of the obstacles and opportunities which currently exist in Syria regarding truth recovery. This in turn can help to point stakeholders in the direction of more promising and opportunistic lines of effort in the near and far future.

It is important to note that Syria is a complex space for truth recovery because the country is politically and territorially fragmented, with multiple administrative and military bodies exercising territorial control over different regions. This reality is not necessarily unique -- in Cyprus, for example, efforts to find the missing had to contend with a *de facto* partition of the island into two separate ethnic enclaves, although this was later overcome with a bi-ethnic cooperation agreement (Hadjigeorgiou, "Missing Persons"). However, in Syria today, conditions are such that little cooperation across political boundaries is possible in the foreseeable future, and thus opportunity structures will be enumerated separately for the each of three main autonomous or semiautonomous regions. A more detailed map displaying the territorial fragmentation of Syria is available in Annex A.

Regime-controlled territory

Conditions in regime-controlled territory indicate that any form of forensic or broader truth recovery is unlikely for the time being. This is primarily because the people who are responsible for a massive share of enforced disappearances – namely government security branches and pro-

government militias – remain politically dominant to this day.⁸ As one Syrian interlocutor who is the initiative manager of a families' organization that advocates for current and former detainees remarked,

“In an ideal world, we would say that accountability should happen now and any work on revealing the fate and whereabouts of the forcibly disappeared, detainees, and missing should be related to accountability, and every perpetrator should be held accountable. But we're not in an ideal world. Through our research from different conflicts around the world, we saw that as long as the perpetrators are still in power, nothing could happen in relation to accountability.”⁹

Indeed, the continuous control of perpetrators over legal and political developments in regime-controlled parts of Syria presents major obstacles for truth recovery operations. Regarding broader truth, the regime has already passed several amnesty laws to exempt criminals from prosecution, such as Legislative Decree No. 13 of 2021, which grants general amnesty for a variety of crimes, including kidnapping under certain circumstances. Meanwhile, prisoners of conscience (including many who are imprisoned for opposing the regime) are already permanently exempted from amnesty (The Day After, “Analysis”). While the regime has sought to present amnesty laws as humane and helpful to future peacebuilding, human rights groups have described the various regime-sponsored amnesty laws as political stunts which are “unlikely to address the thousands of Syrians who are wrongfully detained or fearful to return.” (SJAC, “Syria’s Newest Decree”). The regime’s steps to implement certain amnesties which do not result in the release of political prisoners belies its disinterest in pursuing meaningful accountability or generating substantive solutions to the problems face by missing persons and their families.

International efforts to account for the fate of the missing are also very limited in regime-controlled territory. Since the early stages of the conflict, the Syrian regime has obtained protection from international allies, namely Russia and China, who have sought to deny international efforts to act in Syria. To date, Russia and China have collectively vetoed fourteen resolutions at the UN Security Council on a variety of topics, including humanitarian and fact-finding mechanisms (Nichols, “U.N. Security Council”). Russia and China have also aimed to limit the provision of cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria by pushing for the closure of border crossings (Ford et al., Special Briefing”), which indicates that a humanitarian mission to uncover the fate of the missing would be at substantial risk of veto at the UN Security Council.

NGOs have also struggled thus far to act on this issue – for example, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) has a Restoring Family Links program that aims to find missing people, including in prisons. But despite being a long-serving humanitarian organization with a decades-long history of contact with Syrian state authorities and offices in Damascus, even the ICRC has only been able to visit 15 prisons in the whole of Syria in 2020, and among those only central government-run prisons and prisons run by Kurdish authorities in the Northeast (ICRC, “2020 Annual Report” 496). The ICRC is reportedly unable to visit military prisons or detention centers run by branches of state security services, let alone secret or makeshift detention

⁸ For an overview of human rights violations perpetrated by regime security forces and allied armed groups, a useful overview is presented in the Syria section of Amnesty International’s 2020/21 World Report. See: *Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World's Human Rights*. Amnesty International, London, UK, 2021: 345-349.

⁹ Interview with Ahmad Helmi, initiative manager at Ta’afi, a Syrian survivors-led initiative that aims to support and protect victims of detention, torture, and enforced disappearance; 20 April, 2021.

centers (Megally 25). The ICRC's position is emblematic of the wider problem of the regime's unwillingness thus far to willingly collaborate with humanitarian or forensic actors. Given that the regime and its security personnel are the holders of by far the largest amount of information about the missing, any efforts that do not include their participation or the revelation of information in their custody cannot fully account for the missing.

These conditions indicate that in the short term, neither forensic truth nor broader truth is forthcoming in regime-controlled areas of Syria, and institutionalized silence is the likeliest outcome for the immediate future. Unless and until the regime demonstrates any willingness to share information about those it has disappeared, recovery efforts will face nigh insurmountable barriers. However, it is important to note that change in this regard can still come with time. In the case of Cyprus, after the island was violently divided into two ethnic enclaves, it was decades of family activism that ultimately resulted in the acquiescence of both governments to create a bi-ethnic mechanism to find the missing; a project which has since recovered remains of almost half of all known cases (Hadjigeorgiou, "Missing Persons"). Thus, even if the Syrian regime retains a total political monopoly over its current territory, obtaining information from the regime in some fashion will ultimately be necessary. Therefore, international stakeholders should exert substantial pressure on the Syrian regime to pressure it to release information on the file of detainees and missing persons to a civil society or UN-affiliated organization, such as the ICRC or another suitably equipped mechanism. Options to bring this about will be discussed in Chapter V.

Idlib and Turkish-controlled regions

In Idlib (Northwest Syria), conditions are also overall not ripe for significant efforts to find the missing. Idlib is currently under the control of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS),¹⁰ an organization that is descended from Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, but which also now contains the remnants of several other opposition groups. HTS is itself a perpetrator of enforced disappearances – SNHR has thus far documented 2,125 cases, and thus fact-finding efforts in this region are certainly necessary (SNHR 7). However, Idlib also remains among the most politically unstable areas in Syria, as invasion by the regime is currently kept at bay only by a fragile ceasefire agreement between Russia and Turkey (Mace, "Mapping Ceasefire Violations").

HTS has recently sought to appear friendlier and more legitimate to international stakeholders, including a recent PBS interview with its leader, Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani (Boghani, "Syrian Militant"). However, this does not mean that conditions are becoming riper for the truth recovery in this area. The lack of overall security in Idlib means that little can be done to safely investigate the status of the missing, and likewise, the fact that HTS remains the local administrative powerhouse means that efforts to identify perpetrators among its ranks and hold them accountable are unlikely to achieve success in the foreseeable future. Idlib is also still home to a massive humanitarian crisis, with the population of the region having swelled to three million during the war as civilians and armed groups fled other strongholds throughout the country (Atrache, "A Crisis"). Until political and humanitarian conditions in Idlib become more secure,

¹⁰ For an overview of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, see the Center for Strategic and International Studies' backgrounder: Newlee, Danika. Backgrounder: Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2018. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/181018_Backgrounder.pdf?twUzerrr8ID9TDIjIP3oMZ8yla_1Ez32

there are few to no opportunities for truth recovery in this area. However, if and once the political status of Idlib is resolved and more stable conditions prevail, forensic actors should revisit this region and engage in truth recovery efforts.

Finally, several regions in Syria are currently under the control of Turkish security forces or Turkish-backed militias. Turkey and its allies in Syria are known to have committed serious human rights abuses, including unlawful military attacks in residential areas and unlawful seizures of land and property (Amnesty, “Syria: Damning Evidence”). Turkish-backed forces are also known to have abducted at least a small number of people (Amnesty, “Syria: Damning Evidence”), although the full extent of Turkish and Turkish-backed forces’ perpetration of enforced disappearance is unclear at this time. Truth recovery efforts are thus necessary for Turkish-controlled regions of Syria, although given similar conditions of ongoing instability and dominance of perpetrating militias and security forces, conditions for truth recovery remain similar to Idlib. Truth recovery efforts for the missing in Turkish-controlled regions should begin once security conditions in these areas improve.

Northeast Syria

The Kurdish-controlled Northeast region of Syria currently presents the best available opportunity to make progress in uncovering the fates of missing persons, and indeed, some forensic investigation is already underway in this area. The most important event which has allowed for limited forensic truth is the territorial defeat of the Islamic State (ISIS). During its period of territorial control from 2014-2019, ISIS committed a wide range of atrocities, including mass executions, widespread sexual violence, torture, slavery, and the genocide and persecution of religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities (OHCHR, “Report”). However, less widely discussed has been ISIS’s widespread perpetration of enforced disappearance, a tactic which was used by the organization to “spread fear and confusion, remove... vocal opponents, and set an example for those who thought to resist” (Kayyali 1). While the true extent of disappearances by ISIS may never be known, SNHR has thus far documented 8,648 cases (SNHR 7). At present, most of ISIS’s fighters in Iraq and Syria are held in detention centers and camps run by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish militia that was crucial in international efforts to defeat ISIS.

The autonomous government in Northeast Syria, run mainly by Kurdish political parties, has begun to put former ISIS members and fighters on trial for crimes of terrorism (Bell, “Foreign ISIS Captives”). While their efforts to do so are admirable, seemingly well-intentioned, and tacitly backed by some European governments, they rely mainly on anti-terrorism laws which convict individuals for their membership and role in ISIS, not for the broader extent of specific crimes which they committed (Haid 3). Thus, while this may initially appear as a promising path to some form of broader truth for the missing, this venue in its current form is not a space in which perpetrators can be held directly accountable for enforced disappearance, as the legal structure underpinning the courts does not permit this. Rather, this is more a system by which Kurdish authorities can deal with the overflow of captured ISIS fighters in their custody and does not at this time include justice for the missing. However, this does not necessarily mean that Kurdish courts have no role to play, despite their overall focus on anti-terrorism as opposed to transitional justice. For example, judges can and should contribute to the fact-finding process by asking defendants about the missing and the locations of ISIS detention centers and mass graves, if they

are not doing so already. This information will help current and future forensic investigators to expeditiously exhume remains and uncover victims' fates.

Outside of the justice process for ISIS members, other efforts are ongoing to uncover the fate of the missing in Northeast Syria. Most prominent among them is the First Responders Team (FRT). Beginning in early 2018, the team was formed by the Raqqa City Council, a local governing body that oversees day-to-day administration in Raqqa (Mroue, “Watchdog”). The FRT is reportedly composed of 56 members split between Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, including a medical doctor and a team lead. At first, the group was mainly tasked with digging up bodies that were in urban areas, such as streets or under rubble, and thus presented an immediate public health risk to the local population. Shortly thereafter, the FRT's work also expanded to include the exhumation of mass graves in the area – to date, 28 mass graves have been found in the Northeast (TSC, “Truth After ISIS”). As of February 2020, the team excavated 22 mass graves containing a total of 3,700 bodies. An additional 1,900 bodies were recovered from streets, rubble, and ad hoc graves built by families during the period of ISIS control and Global Coalition airstrikes (SJAC, “Searching for Missing Persons”).

Despite the importance of their role, the FRT has faced challenges, mainly stemming from a pressing lack of training and resources which has resulted in handling processes that fall below international standards. In a site visit to observe the work of the FRT, Human Rights Watch reported that the group was recording basic information such as injuries on the body, possible cause of death, hair color and length, approximate age, and clothing, but they were not photographing the bodies and on-site identifications were subject to potential error (HRW, “Syria: Mass Graves”). Given that bodies decompose in soil, the overall lack of resources and expertise means that evidence that is crucial for identification can be lost over time; a reality which underscores the urgent need to improve the team’s capacity and ensure that it can conduct operations in line with international standards. At present, the exhumation of graves has paused until the team can receive adequate training from international experts; a task which the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre sought to undertake in collaboration with the Argentinian Forensic Anthropology Group, but which has been delayed due to the Turkish invasion of Northern Syria and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹ All interlocutors who discussed this topic agreed that greater resources and support are necessary before any efforts to exhume mass graves can commence again safely.

Lastly, in early 2020, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Council announced the creation of a committee for detainees and missing persons, entitled “Syrians for Detainees and Abductees”, crafted to investigate, in parallel with other groups, the fate of all missing persons within Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria, including but not limited to former ISIS detainees (HRW, “Syria: Focus New Working Group”). The news of the committee’s creation was welcomed by human rights groups; four of which signed a letter expressing support and offering recommendations to the committee members as they conduct operations.¹² However, several interlocutors noted that the committee has not made substantial progress since its creation. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic soon after the creation of the committee has likely affected its operations. Likewise, several interlocutors expressed concern that there may exist a lack of political will to find the

¹¹ Interview with the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 16 June 2021.

¹² The letter can be viewed on the website of Urnammu. See: <https://www.urnammu.org/letter-recommendations-to-the-committee-on-detainees-and-kidnapped-persons-in-syria-syrians-for-detainees-and-abductees-created-at-the-initiative-of-the-syrian-democratic-council/>

missing among the higher echelons of the SDC leadership, and that the committee for the missing is more for public relations purposes. While this committee is not necessarily a step in the wrong direction, stakeholders in the international community should work closely with Kurdish authorities to ensure that this committee achieves its stated goals and collaborates effectively with other on-the-ground organizations.

Given the growing prevalence of truth recovery mechanisms on the ground, the Northeast presents a promising space for forensic truth recovery, so long as forensic actors on the ground have access to adequate training and resources. While more in-depth conclusions regarding the role of the international community will be discussed at length below, this region should, for the time being, remain the focal point of forensic operations to uncover the fate of the missing.

V. Identifying Guiding Principles for International Stakeholders

To abandon the families of the missing and leave unknown the fate of the disappeared would default upon a key opportunity to support the needs and wellbeing of Syrian families, both in Syria and abroad. To this effect, many state officials in the international community have expressed interest in supporting truth and justice in Syria. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and seventeen of his European counterparts penned as much in a recent op-ed following the Brussels V Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region, arguing,

“Today, we also need to provide solutions to the tragedy of detainees and more than 100,000 disappeared. It is essential for the United Nations to dedicate all the energy required to achieve tangible results, first and foremost from the Syrian regime... Without a complete and verifiable end to human rights violations and abuses, the people of Syria cannot look forward to a bright future. Without accountability for the crimes committed, Syria will be unable to reconcile with its past.” (Le-Drian, “Joint Op-ed”).

But as the international community moves to act on this issue, it is crucial that efforts to uncover the fate of the missing actually respond to the expressed needs of those who are most impacted by this humanitarian crisis. This chapter offers three guiding principles which should form the bedrock of international efforts such that progress can be made on issues of the missing and institutionalized silence can give way to forensic, and ultimately broader forms of truth.

Principle 1: Focus now on forensic truth, and then approach broader truth after more conducive conditions manifest in Syria.

Conditions on the ground in Syria today are currently dominated by perpetrators who continue to hold power despite having committed serious human rights abuses on many sides of the conflict. Given that these conditions do not show signs of change in the short term, the international community must consider options by which to begin the truth recovery process, to the greatest possible extent, even without a political solution to the conflict. To this effect, the best path forward to finding the missing in Syria *in the short term* is to focus first on forensic truth and wait until a later date to broach the topic of broader truth. The reason for doing so is that if the fact-finding process is predicated on holding perpetrators accountable, powerful perpetrators will likely act expeditiously to stop it. If the fact-finding process is purely forensic and does not enforce criminal

justice, however, it has a better chance of succeeding without the interference of criminally responsible perpetrators.

To clarify, this paper is not arguing that any form of legally binding amnesty, even of an explicitly temporary nature, should be passed in the context of crimes of enforced disappearance in Syria. However, in the short term, international stakeholders should understand that prosecution is infeasible within Syria because security forces remain under the control of perpetrators and are so powerful that attempting to prosecute them or their political allies could undermine all fact-finding efforts. This is crucial given the amount of power that perpetrators in Syria have to prevent investigative processes. For example, if truth recovery efforts sought to bring accountability immediately, those perpetrators could derail the process wholesale by denying access and visas for staff of international organizations, physically harming humanitarian and forensic personnel, or even forcibly disappearing those involved in truth recovery operations.¹³ Therefore, rather than aggressively pursue punitive justice in the short term, international stakeholders should direct their resources towards forensic, non-accountability-focused efforts in Syria, with the primary goal of alleviating the humanitarian crisis of ambiguous loss which afflicts Syrian families. Then, as soon as opportunities exist to bring about broader truth, criminally responsible actors should be held to account for their crimes.

In an interview with a Syrian activist who works on issues of the missing and detention, the author asked whether accountability and broader truth should be the goal of the fact-finding process, and whether stakeholders in the search for the missing should simultaneously seek to identify perpetrators and hold them accountable. He responded,

“The short-term justice provides immediate satisfaction for the family and works on stopping or ending the atrocities and enforced disappearance. While in the longer term, it focuses on guarantees of non-reoccurrence, on changing laws and practices... The perpetrators are still in power so the best way to move forward is to start a process to reveal the fate with a humanitarian mandate, which means it won’t have a relation with accountability, and that will at least encourage perpetrators to allow it to work. And that will provide short-term satisfaction for the families. And this being said, it definitely does not contradict with accountability... We still want accountability, but now the environment is not ready for accountability. The environment now is more suitable to work on revealing the fate with the humanitarian mandate, and when we see some more political will to end the conflict in Syria, then accountability is the action we need to take. But until then, we need to work on providing short-term satisfaction for the families to end the violations and reveal the fate [of the missing].”¹⁴

It is important to note that this and other interlocutors upheld the importance of accountability in the long term. However, he also noted that in the short term, the sheer difficulty of living with the ambiguous loss of family members, and the humanitarian crisis presented by the issue of the missing, is simply too urgent to wait.

¹³ It is worth noting that various military actors in Syria have an extensive record of physically harming and attacking humanitarian operations and personnel, a reality which has caused the International Rescue Committee to name Syria the deadliest place for humanitarians in the world in 2020 (Hodal, 2020). This portends substantial risks for forensic humanitarian workers as well.

¹⁴ Interview with Ahmad Helmi, initiative manager at Ta’afi; 6 July 2021.

Overall, the international community should be aware of the difference between short-term and long-term goals when it comes to the issue of the missing in Syria. While perpetrators remain in power, little can be done to hold them accountable within Syria. Until conditions which are conducive to broader truth can manifest – namely some sort of fair, non-sectarian, and comprehensive accountability process – the international community should focus the viable avenues of forensic truth which exist today, as well as the immediate physical and psychosocial needs of family members. To clarify, when there are ad hoc opportunities to enforce criminal accountability outside of Syria (such as universal jurisdiction trials), states can still act upon these justice opportunities without threatening the truth recovery process in Syria. However, lengthy accountability processes for perpetrators are no substitute for meeting the immediate emotional and psychosocial needs of families today. The right to know the fate should be addressed now, and then, as soon as there are viable opportunities to bring perpetrators to account, the right of survivors and families to hold perpetrators accountable should also be manifested. Exactly which truth recovery efforts to pursue in the short term are discussed below in Principle 2.

Principle 2: The recovery of forensic truth should begin immediately.

While broader truth may take time, the international community should immediately begin the process of forensic truth recovery. This constitutes efforts inside and outside of Syria, and it is of note that significant work can be done even now while the conflict actively continues. Early action, effective planning, and the allocation of sufficient funds can set the groundwork today for a robust and productive forensic recovery process for years and even decades to come.

First, states can begin by supporting and monitoring existing truth recovery processes, such as that of the First Responders Team. Establishing this group as a well-funded, highly trained, robust, and independent forensic group presents valuable opportunities to advance truth recovery efforts. For one, adequately training a local group of Syrians, as is SJAC’s plan for the First Responder’s Team, ensures that forensic investigation is being conducted with the participation of local communities, thus providing immediate opportunities to build trust with local stakeholders and families. Training the FRT also cultivates in-country expertise, which can help to alleviate or prevent long-term issues of dependency upon international humanitarian actors, thus ensuring that even if international support is lost, expertise remains to continue work locally. Clyde Snow, a world-renowned forensic anthropologist, has argued that the most successful international forensic teams are ‘indigenous to their own countries’, ‘properly trained’, and ‘independently working with families.’” (Rosenblatt 71). While it is true that the First Responders Team has struggled to abide by international standards of forensic technique, leading some interlocutors to criticize their efforts thus far, a future version of the FRT with appropriate training presents a promising opportunity to both build trust with local communities and successfully identify missing persons. Options to bring international experts into Syria to train local forensic groups are of course temporarily constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, but this should nevertheless remain a priority for international stakeholders.

There is another source of information that has thus far been underutilized in the search for the missing: the information gathered by intelligence and diplomatic agencies acting in Syria. An example of how this works can be found in the case of Brazil, in which a military dictatorship conducted a large-scale campaign of disappearances against suspected leftist militants during its 1964-1985 reign (Darlington, “Brazil”). In 2014, on an official state trip to Brazil, then-US Vice

President Joe Biden turned over a record of 43 US State Department cables written in 1973 which detailed the Brazilian dictatorship's extensive and sophisticated use of enforced disappearance and torture. Language in the cables not only described mechanisms of repression, but also the locations of secret government-run torture and detention facilities, which can constitute a key piece of information for forensic investigators (Kornbluh, "Declassified Documents"). The US government's decision to turn over the cables was made in contribution to the Brazilian National Truth Commission, which was at the time investigating human rights abuses by past governments, as detailed in its Final Report released in 2014 (Kehl et al., "Comissão Nacional").

Given the extensive military and intelligence presence of many countries in the Syrian conflict, one can assume that many such cables exist regarding Syria within the coffers of agencies of various governments. These reports can constitute a valuable source in the search for the missing. Even though much of this information is likely confidential given ongoing military operations, states should contribute to the search for the missing by releasing relevant pages which contain information about the fate of the missing whenever possible. Finally, for US officials specifically, when NGOs and Syrian families submit FOIA requests regarding missing persons, the US government should seek to approve these requests and grant relevant information.

States in the international community should also take seriously the importance of diplomacy and political pressure in addressing issues of the missing. Even though open state-to-state dialogue with the Syrian regime is off the table for most, if not all Western leaders, accessing prison lists, death certificates, and grave locations is still of the utmost urgency for the sake of Syrian families. Numerous interlocutors stressed that because the Syrian regime has an extensive track record of breaking internationally brokered agreements of a variety of types,¹⁵ it is untrustworthy as a partner to international efforts to find the missing. Thus, obtaining crucial information about detainees and missing persons will likely require political pressure against Syria and its international allies. States should therefore take the issue of the missing to Russia's doorstep and encourage Russian officials to wield their leverage over the Syrian regime to enforce relevant concessions, such as the release of relevant documents to a neutral humanitarian or fact-finding organization. It has been argued by civil society experts that Russia does not benefit from Syria's system of detention, as the regime's terrible human rights record is a deterrent to the reconstruction aid that Russia hopes to see enter the country (SJAC, "New Missing Persons Mechanism"). Thus, there is a possibility that Russia may be less obstinate on issues of detention and could enforce relevant concessions from the regime. States should thus include the issue of the missing on political agendas and apply pressure upon Russia to take action on this file.

Where possible, non-state actors should also be included in diplomatic efforts related to fact-finding and the search for the missing, although options to do so are admittedly limited. For example, with conditions on the ground in Idlib still highly unstable, there seems to be no immediate path towards including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in truth recovery efforts. Efforts to work directly with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham would also be significantly inhibited by the fact that some relevant governments such as the United States have designated the group as a foreign terrorist organization (Tawil, "US Maintains Designation"), which precludes the possibility of dialogue

¹⁵ The Syrian regime has indeed demonstrated repetitive disrespect for international agreements. Beyond its repeated violations of human rights-focused treaties, such as the UN Convention Against Torture (Barnard, 2019), the regime has also violated agreements made during the war regarding the use of chemical weapons (Watson, 2017). Furthermore, the Syrian regime has an extensive record of violating ceasefire and de-escalation agreements throughout Syria, a timeline of which can be found via the Atlantic Council (Itani, 2018).

until such designations change or are removed. As was mentioned previously, this area should be revisited when conditions for truth recovery are more feasible. However, it remains true that dialogue with non-state actors on the issue of the missing is an important step and should be pursued whenever possible. States that are already engaging in dialogue with non-state actors in Syria should include issues of the missing on diplomatic agendas.

At present, despite being the largest perpetrators of enforced disappearance, the Syrian regime and its allies are also the largest holders of information about the missing, such as detainee rosters, grave locations, and autopsy reports from regime-run hospitals. Therefore, states must ultimately accept that a certain level of participation from perpetrators is necessary for the fact-finding process, unless and until these perpetrators are no longer politically empowered. This approach has clear complications; namely that any form of direct negotiation with the regime, even on solely humanitarian matters, risks legitimizing the regime and presenting a back-to-normal image of Syria's position in the international community. Thus, Western governments are unlikely to participate in any state-to-state dialogue. However, states should at least welcome any movement by the regime to sit with humanitarian actors and contribute information about the fate and whereabouts of the missing.

Principle 3: Respect the wishes and sensitivities of the families and include them in truth recovery efforts.

Despite the difficult conditions of life that so many Syrians suffer today, both in Syria and in host countries, groups of Syrians have gathered to advocate for their rights to know the truth about the fate of their loved ones. These voices should remain at the bedrock of international efforts to locate the missing. For one, efforts that exclude their input and participation would be hamstrung by a lack of participation from key information holders. As SJAC has noted, “When families are not well-informed regarding missing persons work and its challenges, they can have unrealistic expectations regarding identifications, which quickly leads to frustration and disillusionment. On a more practical level, without access to families and their knowledge of the missing, identification is not possible.” (SJAC, “Search for Missing Persons” 7). Indeed, efforts to find the missing often utilize information that derives from the testimonials of families, such as the clothes the missing individual was wearing on the day of their disappearance, keepsakes they might have on their person, birthmarks, last known location, their political or military affiliation, etc. Without input from families, identification efforts will face a deficit of crucial data.

Furthermore, as the people who are most impacted by enforced disappearance, survivors and families are best equipped to guide a humanitarian response that effectively meets their own needs. Numerous interlocutors expressed a sense that they know their problems best and expect efforts regarding the missing to include and center their voices. As one Syrian interlocutor remarked,

“Any mechanism or any work toward justice should be victim-centered, and that's not only because it's right, but also because it's practical. Because victims know the context and the details about their own issue. They know what provides them satisfaction and what doesn't. The main essence of justice is to provide satisfaction for victims and for the community.

Any justice that is not victim-centered will not provide this satisfaction and therefore it will be useless.”¹⁶

Indeed, to exclude the voices of those impacted by human rights violations risks mistargeting efforts and failing to provide forms of redress which respond effectively to victims’ needs. Furthermore, it has been argued that the inclusion of the voices of victims benefits transitional justice processes as a whole because doing so “conveys a message that the emerging transitional society is worthy of such an engagement as it provides roads out of silence, absence and passivity,” (Karstedt 27). Thus, by recognizing and uplifting the voices of victims, international stakeholders can improve the legitimacy of transitional justice efforts by demonstrating that victims have meaningful platforms where they can share their stories and advocate for their right to redress for the harms they have suffered. In practical terms, this means including families and survivors of detention in events about the missing, consulting them closely when deciding upon processes and practices for truth recovery efforts, and including representatives of families and survivors’ associations in boards, leadership teams, and working groups that are acting in this space. It also means inviting and ensuring the participation of women in all aspects and recognizing the disproportionate burden which they carry due to the frequent enforced disappearance of male family members.

Finally, respecting the rights of families also means attending to the cultural needs and sensitivities of Syrians within and outside of Syria, a dynamic that is especially crucial when dealing with the uncovered remains of the dead. While majority Sunni Muslim, Syria is also home to various sects of Christianity, Ismailis, Druze, Alawites, Shi’ites, Yezidis, and other religions,¹⁷ each of which may have different, and internally diverse variations of practices to mourn, honor, bury and remember the deceased. Furthermore, forensic workers should note that conditions of conflict have likely transformed communal and cultural practices of dealing with death. As one Syrian journalist wrote, “Before the civil war, graveyards were often located at the edges of cities. Now, cities themselves have become graveyards for their inhabitants... Bodies are buried without prayers and without sanctity, due to the continuous bombing,” (Al-Habbal, “The Art of Burial”). Forensic efforts should therefore seek from the start to carefully adhere to both international standards of identification and local standards of culturally suitable handling, as failing to properly handle remains could be seen as insulting or disrespectful to the dead in the eyes of the living, and risks generating distrust between local communities and forensic teams. In 2004, the International Committee of the Red Cross printed an operational guide for best practice regarding the management of human remains, which offers a useful starting point when negotiating the complex cultural and religious needs of mourners. As this guide notes, “To show respect for the dead and for funerals held according to the local culture is to demonstrate respect for the mourning process, which is essential for peace and social order... To prevent funerals and other mourning practices is to make the dead and the living incur a risk.” (ICRC, “Operational Best Practices” 16).

¹⁶ Interview with Ahmad Helmi; 6 July 2021.

¹⁷ This list of religious communities in Syria is provided by Minority Rights Group and is intended to give a broad overview of the wide panoply of religious traditions in Syria today. It is, however, not exhaustive and does not capture to full the full spectrum of religious diversity in the country.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis concludes by noting that despite existing difficulties and constraints on truth recovery efforts, institutionalized silence about the fate of the missing is not inevitable in Syria. By implementing truth recovery efforts, international stakeholders can still help to overcome existing barriers, such as the political dominance of perpetrators, and manifest forms of truth which help to remedy the suffering experienced by Syrian victims and families.

To that effect, this thesis has established several primary conclusions. First, there are substantial barriers to the recovery of truth for the missing in Syria. With violence continuing in many areas, different perpetrators politically and militarily empowered, and many concurrent humanitarian crises ongoing, options to recover truth in the short term are limited and institutionalized silence appears a likely outcome in some areas of Syria. However, there still exist pockets of opportunity which present promising avenues for truth recovery. By prioritizing forensic efforts in the short term, investing in ongoing forensic efforts particularly in the Northeast, and including the issue of the missing in diplomatic and political agendas, international stakeholders can set the groundwork for a sustained and effective truth recovery process in the coming decades. While finding the missing and meeting the immediate psychosocial and humanitarian needs of the families is indeed paramount, this does not mean the long-term goal of broader truth should be forsaken. As one Syrian interlocutor remarked, “I am with the exhumation and the analysis of the DNA to reveal the destiny of my dad. But I am certain that it's not enough. We need accountability, and accountability means everyone in the pyramid or in the chain of torture... This is part of what we call the reparations process in Syria, with includes accountability, justice, and the reveal of the destiny of the disappeared.”¹⁸

This thesis has also argued that the needs, demands, and sensitivities of the victims and their families should guide international stakeholders in their efforts to find the missing. By aligning their goals and efforts with those of existing families’ organizations, international stakeholders can ensure that remedies provide satisfaction to those who have been most immediately impacted by disappearance. To leave the needs of victims completely unaddressed forgoes a crucial opportunity to legitimate future peacebuilding processes by providing an adequate platform for victims to share their lived experiences.

The investigation conducted herein is only part of a longer process of research and investment to ensure the highest possible standards of truth and justice for Syria’s families. Researchers should continue to investigate the psychosocial needs of family members of missing persons. As Anderson et al. note, “Clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons is one of the primary needs of the relatives left behind. However, during the often lengthy and complex process of clarification, the relatives’ multi-faceted needs brought on by the disappearance can and should be addressed.” (13). There already exists a body of preexisting literature on this topic. Dawlaty and Women Now published one study on the needs of Syrian women whose family members have been forcibly disappeared (Dawlaty & WND, “Shadows of the Disappeared”). There is also existing literature that is not specific to Syria, such as the ICRC’s operational guide on accompanying families of the missing (ICRC, “Guidelines on Mental Health”), as well as case

¹⁸ Interview with Omama Abdulhadi; 3 May 2021.

studies regarding psychosocial support in other conflicts, such as Kosovo and Sri Lanka.¹⁹ However, further research could help to illuminate the diverse needs of Syrian families specifically, including research on the psychosocial needs of Syrian children whose parents and other family members are missing.

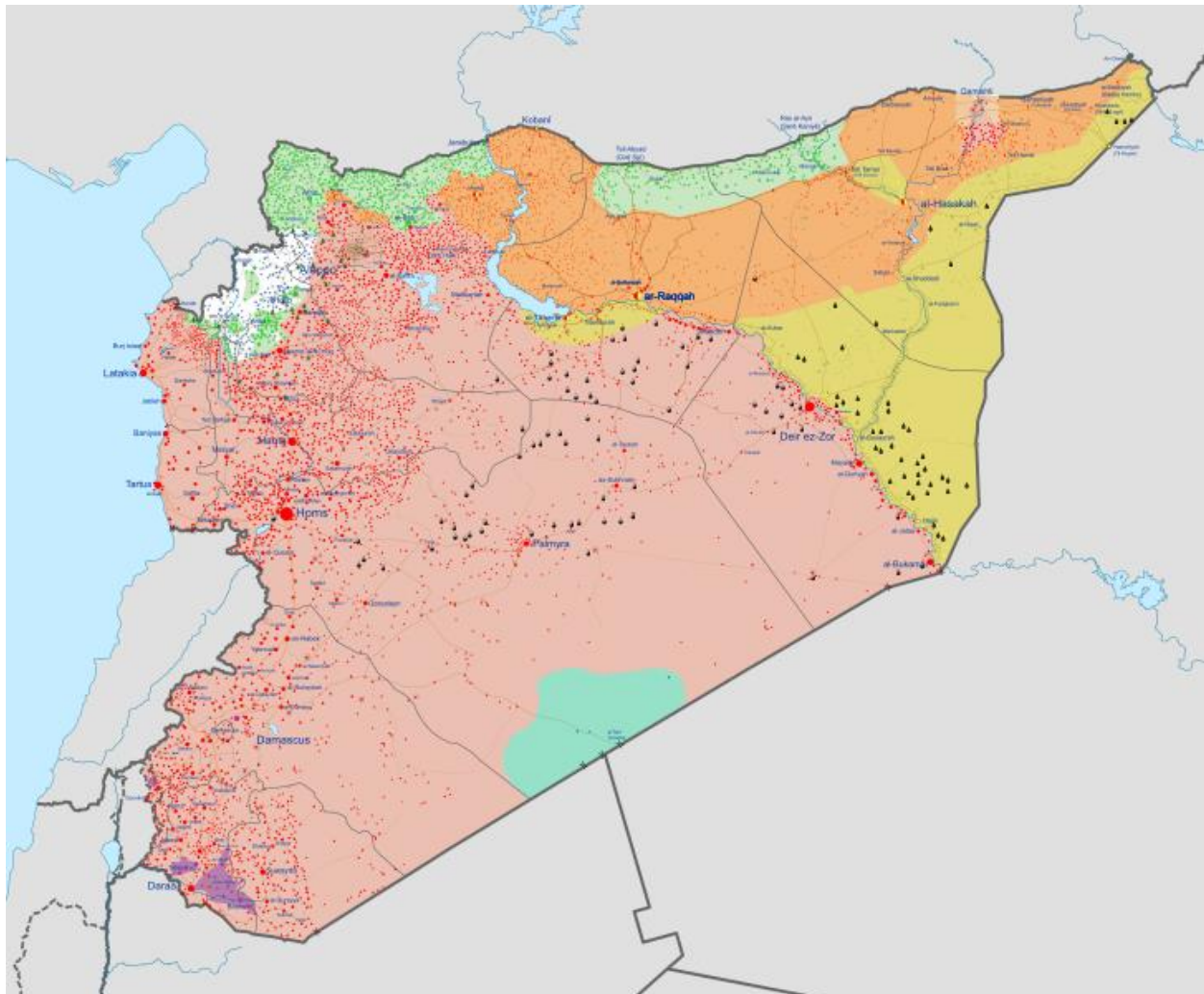
Furthermore, other scholars have argued that effective truth-telling can impact and contribute to social and political reconciliation in the wake of wide-scale human rights abuses (Gibson, “Contributions to Truth”; Lerner, “Conflict and Reconciliation”). Thus, while prospects for reconciliation are generally outside of the scope of this thesis, it is noted that recovering truth could also have important ramifications for future Syrian reconciliatory processes. Understanding the relationship between truth-telling and reconciliation could better inform future efforts to promote sustainable peace and prevent recurring cycles of violence, and thus further research should be conducted on this topic.

In conclusion, this thesis has offered a roadmap of sorts to guide international stakeholders towards effective truth recovery, even despite difficult short-term conditions. However, it is noted that conditions are not static in the long term. As one Syrian interlocutor remarked, “The regime is still strong, but after a few years that might not be true. After the regime is gone, people may forget about the missing and focus on reconstruction, but the families will never forget. This is why we will always keep doing our work.”²⁰ Indeed, it would be unrealistic to assume that the truth can be fully revealed in a year, or perhaps even a decade. Thus, international stakeholders must maintain their momentum and prepare for a long road towards truth and justice. However, with sustained effort, close collaboration with victims, and political will to finish the job, broader truth can yet be recovered for Syria’s missing and forcibly disappeared.

¹⁹ Previous research has investigated appropriate mental health responses to support families of the missing in diverse individual contexts. Keough and Samuels wrote a report on the Kosovo Families Support Project, which aimed to mobilize community-based initiatives to provide support to families in Kosovo (Samuels, “Kosovo Family Support Project”). Likewise, Andersen, et al. conducted a study on the impact of the ICRC’s accompaniment framework for families of the missing in Sri Lanka (Andersen et al., “Mental Health and Psychosocial Support”).

²⁰ Interview with Nabila; 24 June 2021.

Annex A: Map of autonomous or semiautonomous regions in Syria²¹



- Controlled by the Syrian Arab Republic (SAA and allies)
- Controlled by the Syrian Salvation Government (HTS and allies)
- Controlled by the Syrian Interim Government (SNA and allies) and Turkish Armed Forces
- Controlled by Rojava (Syrian Democratic Forces)
- Controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
- Controlled by Revolutionary Commando Army (MAT) and United States Armed Forces
- Joint control between SAA & SDF
- SAA & opposition faction stable truce area

²¹ Image source: Ermanarich. Syrian Civil War Map, vol. Digital image, Wikimedia Commons, 2021.

Annex B: Sample interview questions for Syrian family members of missing persons

Basic structure

For family members, an interview was conducted concerning their experience searching for their missing loved ones and living with ambiguous loss, and, if relevant, their experience with advocacy on behalf of the missing. Interviews were semi-structured with a list of 4-6 guiding questions, although the author allowed interviews to take their course, depending on what the interlocutor wanted to share about their experience.

Sample questions

The following questions were asked to a female Syrian interlocutor who has previous experience with activism on behalf of the missing. This interview took approximately 1 hour.

- 1) How did you first become involved with activism on behalf of the missing? Why did you choose to become involved with the families' organization that you work with?
- 2) What search mechanisms have you or other members of your family engaged in while looking for missing loved ones?
- 3) Families are also defined in international law as victims and survivors of the crime of disappearance – what does this mean to you? In what ways are families themselves the victims or survivors of disappearance?
- 4) Has the disappearance of family members impacted you in gender-specific ways? How have you as a woman experienced the impacts of disappearance upon your life?
- 5) In terms of revealing the fate of the missing, where do you think the international community should focus its efforts? Where should states and organizations in the international community direct their resources to best promote truth and justice for the disappeared?
- 6) Is there anything else you would like to share with me, either about your personal experience or more generally on the topic of the missing and disappeared?

Works Cited

- Abrahams, Fred, and Lama Fakih. *Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-Run Enclaves of Syria*. Human Rights Watch, New York, USA, 2014.
- Aguilar, Paloma. "Unwilling to Forget: Local Memory Initiatives in Post-Franco Spain." *South European Society & Politics*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2017, pp. 405-426.
CrossRef, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13608746.2017.1395078>, doi:10.1080/13608746.2017.1395078.
- Aguilar, Paloma, and Iosif Kovras. "Explaining Disappearances as a Tool of Political Terror." *International Political Science Review*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2019, pp. 437-452.
- Al-Ghazi, Suhail. *Kurdish-Kurdish Negotiations in Syria*. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2021.
- Al-Habbal, Hikmat. *The Art of Burial during War*. Atlantic Council, 2016,
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/the-art-of-burial-during-war/>.
- Amnesty International. *Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World's Human Rights*. Amnesty International, London, UK, 2021.
- Amnesty International. *Damning Evidence of War Crimes by Turkish Forces and Allies in Syria*. Amnesty International, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/syria-damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-and-other-violations-by-turkish-forces-and-their-allies/>
- Amnesty International. *'It Breaks the Human': Torture, Disease, and Death in Syria's Prisons*. Amnesty International, London, 2016.
- Amnesty International. *Between Prison and the Grave: Enforced Disappearances in Syria*. Amnesty International, London, 2013.
- Amnesty International. *No Impunity for Enforced Disappearances Checklist for Effective Implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance*. Amnesty International, London, 2011.
- Analysis of Amnesty Law Enacted by Legislative Decree no. 13 of 2021*. The Day After, 2021.
- Andersen, Ida, et al. "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka: A Retrospective Cohort Study." *Conflict and Health*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2020a, pp. 16.
PubMed, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/32280367>, doi:10.1186/s13031-020-00266-0.
- Andreu-Guzman, Federico. *Enforced Disappearance and Extrajudicial Execution: The Rights of Family Members, A Practitioners' Guide*. International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2016.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- ADMSP. *Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Detention Centers: Research about the Details of the Process of Forced Disappearance and the Fate of the Victims*. Association of the Detainees and Missing in Sednaya Prison, Gaziantep, Turkey, 2020.
- Atrache, Sahar. *A Crisis on Top of a Crisis: COVID-19 Looms Over War-Ravaged Idlib*. Refugees International, 2020.
- Bachelet, Michelle. *Syria: Truth and Justice Needed More than Ever After 10 Years of Conflict*. OCHCR, 2021.
- Bachelet, Michelle. *Syria: Violations and Abuses Rife in Areas Under Turkish-Affiliated Armed Groups*. OCHCR, 2020.
- Barnard, Anne. "Inside Syria's Secret Torture Prisons: How Bashar Al-Assad Crushed Dissent." *The New York Times*, 11 May, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/middleeast/syria-torture-prisons.html>.
- BBC News Staff. "Russia and China Veto UN Move to Refer Syria to ICC." *BBC News*, 22 May, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27514256>.
- Bell, Stewart. "Foreign ISIS Captives to be Prosecuted in Syria, Kurdish Forces Announce." *Global News*, 6 February, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6514685/foreign-isis-captives-prosecuted-in-syria/>.
- Bernard, Anne. "Inside Syria's Secret Torture Prisons: How Bashar Al-Assad Crushed Dissent." *The New York Times*, 11 May, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/middleeast/syria-torture-prisons.html>.
- Blau, Soren. "Missing Persons Investigations and Identification: Issues of Scale, Infrastructure, and Political Will." *The Missing Persons Handbook*. Edited by Stephen Morewitz, and Caroline Sturdy Colls. Springer, 2016.
- Boghani, Priyanka. "Syrian Militant and Former Al Qaeda Leader Seeks Wider Acceptance in First Interview with U.S. Journalist." 2 April, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/abu-mohammad-al-jolani-interview-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-syria-al-qaeda/>.

- Christodoulou, Eleni. *Book Review: Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared*. Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability at Columbia University, 2019.
- Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 1949.
- Cordner, Stephen, and Helen McKelvie. "Developing Standards in International Forensic Work to Identify Missing Persons." *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 84, 2002, pp. 867-884, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1560775500104213>, doi:10.1017/S1560775500104213.
- Crossland, Zoë. "Evidential Regimes of Forensic Archaeology." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2013a, pp. 121-137. *CrossRef*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155513>, doi:10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155513.
- Cutcher, Nicola. "Please Don'T Forget Us': The Hellish Search for Syria's Lost Prisoners." *The Guardian*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/mar/21/syrias-disappeared-the-case-against-assad-channel-4>.
- Darlington, Shasta. "Brazil to Shed Light on 'Dirty War' Abuse." *CNN*, 3 August, 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/08/02/world/americas/brazil-truth-commission/index.html>
- David, Marian. "The Correspondence Theory of Truth." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. Winter 2020 Edition, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/truth-correspondence/>.
- Dawlaty, and WND. *Shadows of the Disappeared: Testimonies of Syrian Female Relatives Left with Loss and Ambiguity*. Dawlaty & Women Now for Development, 2018.
- Demir, Ebru. *Book Review: Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared by Iosif Kovras*. London School of Economics, 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/12/05/book-review-grassroots-activism-and-the-evolution-of-transitional-justice-the-families-of-the-disappeared-iosif-kovras/>.
- Dempster, Lauren. "Book Review: Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared. Cambridge." *Social and Legal Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2018, pp. 532-534.
- Eighteen European Foreign Ministers. *Joint Op-Ed by Jean-Yves Le Drian and 17 of His European Counterparts on the Fight Against Impunity for Crimes Committed in Syria*. French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2021, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/syria/news/article/syria-joint-op-ed-by-jean-yves-le-drian-and-17-of-his-european-counterparts-on>.
- Ermanarich. *Syrian Civil War Map*, vol. Digital image, Wikimedia Commons, 2021.
- Ferrandiz, Francisco. "Exhuming the Defeated: Civil War Mass Graves in 21st-Century Spain." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2013, pp. 38-54. *CrossRef*, <https://api.istex.fr/ark:/67375/WNG-S8QV68D0-6/fulltext.pdf>
- Five Syrian Families' Associations. *Truth and Justice Charter: A Common Vision on the Question of Enforced Disappearance and Arbitrary Detention in Syria by Syrian Victims' and Family Members' Organizations*. 2021.
- Ford, Robert S., Karen E. Young, and Yesar Al-Maleki. "Special Briefing: Russia Considers Stopping Cross-Border Aid into Syria.", 6 July, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/blog/special-briefing-russia-considers-stopping-cross-border-aid-syria>.
- Four Signatory Human Rights Organizations. "Letter & Recommendations to the Committee on Detainees and Kidnapped Persons in Syria "Syrians for Detainees and Abductees" Created at the Initiative of the Syrian Democratic Council.", 20 May, 2020, <https://www.urnammu.org/letter-recommendations-to-the-committee-on-detainees-and-kidnapped-persons-in-syria-syrians-for-detainees-and-abductees-created-at-the-initiative-of-the-syrian-democratic-council/>.
- Gibson, James L. "The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 50, no. 6, 2006, pp. 409-432.
- Goswami, Sribas. "Michel Foucault: Structures of Truth and Power." *European Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 8-20. *CrossRef*, doi:10.13187/ejpr.2014.1.8.
- Grewal, Kiran. "The Role of Victims in Transitional Justice: Agency, Cooption and Exclusion." *Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2019, pp. 608-619, <https://academic-oup-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/ijtj/article/13/3/608/5529665>.
- Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support*. International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020.
- Hadjigeorgiou, Nasia. *The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus: A Humanitarian Or Reconciliation-Promoting Institution?* *Opinio Juris*, 2020.
- Haid, Haid. *Breaking the Cycle of Violence Transitional Justice for the Victims of ISIS in Syria*. Chatham House, London, 2020.

- Helmi, Ahmad, Brigitte Herremans, and Veronica Bellintani. *Syrian Victims Alter the Justice Landscape*. *Opinio Juris*, 2021.
- Hodal, Kate. "Syria Deadliest Place to be an Aid Worker, Amid Global 30% Rise in Attacks – Report." *The Guardian*, 19 August, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/19/syria-is-deadliest-place-to-be-an-aid-worker-amid-global-30-rise-in-attacks>.
- HRW. "Syria: Focus New Working Group's Efforts on ISIS Kidnappings." Human Rights Watch, 21 April 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/21/syria-focus-new-working-groups-efforts-isis-kidnappings>.
- HRW. *Syria: Mass Graves in Former ISIS Areas*. Human Rights Watch, 2018.
- ICMP Press Office. *Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic Accused of Genocide Following the Take-Over of Srebrenica*. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1995.
- ICMP. *Accounting for Missing Persons is an Investment in Peace: Policy Process with Syrian Civil Society Organizations and Families of the Missing*. International Commission for Missing Persons. The Hague, Netherlands, 2020.
- ICRC. "Customary IHL: Rule 105. Respect for Family Life."
- ICRC. *Families of the Missing: Responding to their Needs: A Report by the International Committee of the Red Cross Based on an Assessment Carried Out in the Northern Caucasus*. International Committee of the Red Cross, 2009.
- ICRC. *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support*. The International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020b.
- ICRC. *ICRC Annual Report 2020 (Near and Middle East)*. International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020c.
- ICRC. *Operational Best Practices regarding the Management of Human Remains and Information on the Dead by Non-Specialists*. International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004.
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances. *International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance*. 2010.
- Itani, Faisal. *A Trail of Broken Ceasefires in Syria*. Atlantic Council, 2018a, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-trail-of-broken-ceasefires-in-syria/>.
- Jaquemet, Iolanda. "Fighting Amnesia: Ways to Uncover the Truth about Lebanon's Missing." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009b, pp. 69-90. *CrossRef*, doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijn019.
- Karstedt, Susanne. "From Absence to Presence, from Silence to Voice: Victims in International and Transitional Justice since the Nuremberg Trials." *International Review of Victimology*, vol. 17, 2010, pp. 9-30.
- Kayyali, Sara, Priyanka Motaparthy, and Nadim Houry. *Kidnapped by ISIS: Failure to Uncover the Fate of the Missing in Syria*. Human Rights Watch, 2020.
- Kehl et al. *Comissão Nacional Da Verdade*. Brazilian National Truth Commission, Brazil, 2014.
- Keough, Mary E., and Margaret F. Samuels. "The Kosovo Family Support Project: Offering Psychosocial Support for Families with Missing Persons." *Social Work (New York)*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2004, pp. 587-594. *MEDLINE*, <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/nasw/sw/2004/00000049/00000004/art00006>, doi:10.1093/sw/49.4.587.
- Kornbluh, Peter. *Declassified Documents Given by Biden to Rouseff Detail Secret Dictatorship-Era Executions, "Psychophysical" Torture in Brazil*. National Security Archive, 2014, <https://unredacted.com/2014/07/03/declassified-documents-given-by-biden-to-rousseff-detail-secret-dictatorship-era-executions-psycho-physical-torture-in-brazil/>.
- Kovras, Iosif. *Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2017.
- Lederer, Edith. "Russia and China Veto Cross-Border Aid to Syria's Northwest." *AP NEWS*, 8 July, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-united-nations-virus-outbreak-us-news-turkey-68c1dab6733b6fb55abf8a0a830da868>.
- Lerner, Rosemary R. P. "Between Conflict and Reconciliation: The Hard Truth." *Human Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, pp. 115-130. *CrossRef*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27642786>, doi:10.1007/s10746-007-9048-7.
- Londoño, Ximena, and Alexandra Ortiz Signoret. "Implementing International Law: An Avenue for Preventing Disappearances, Resolving Cases of Missing Persons and Addressing the Needs of their Families." *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 99, no. 905, 2017, pp. 547-567. *CrossRef*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1816383118000528>, doi:10.1017/S1816383118000528.
- Lund, Christian. "Of what is this a Case?: Analytical Movements in Qualitative Social Science Research." *Human Organization*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2014, pp. 224-234.
- Mace, Trevor. *Mapping Ceasefire Violations in Idlib*. Atlantic Council, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/mapping-ceasefire-violations-in-idlib/>.

- Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. "Comparative historical analysis." *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences* (2003): 3-38.
- McManus, Shea. "The Right to Know: Suffering, Human Rights, and Perplexities of Politics in Lebanon." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2017, pp. 104–117.
- Megally, Hanny, and Elena Naughton. *Gone without a Trace: Syria's Detained, Abducted, and Forcibly Disappeared*. International Center for Transitional Justice, 2020.
- Merry, Sally Engle. "Introduction: Conditions of vulnerability." *The practice of human rights: Tracking law between the global and the local*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. 195-203.
- Meyer, David S., and Debra C. Minkoff. "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity." *Social Forces*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2004, pp. 1457-1492, <https://api.istex.fr/ark:/67375/HXZ-6X3SSFZJ-B/fulltext.pdf>, doi:10.1353/sof.2004.0082.
- Morewitz, Stephen J., and Caroline Sturdy Colls. *Handbook of Missing Persons*. Springer International Publishing AG, Cham, 2016.
- Motaparthy, Priyanka. *If the Dead could Speak: Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria's Detention Facilities*. Human Rights Watch, New York, USA, 2015.
- Mroue, Bassem. "Watchdog: Syrian Group Uncovering IS Mass Graves Needs Help." *AP NEWS*, 3 July, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-syria-ap-top-news-middle-east-international-news-c0b104a75e8a4f18a16ab7c101ba8449>.
- Naqvi, Yasmin. "The Right to the Truth in International Law: Fact Or Fiction?" *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 88, no. 862, 2006, pp. 245-273. *CrossRef*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1816383106000518>, doi:10.1017/S1816383106000518.
- Newlee, Danika. *Backgrounder: Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2018.
- Nichols, Michelle. "U.N. Security Council to Vote Friday on Syria Aid Access." *Reuters*, 8 July, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-security-council-vote-friday-syria-aid-access-2021-07-08/>.
- OHCHR. *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Iraq in the Light of Abuses Committed by the so-Called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Associated Groups*. United Nations Human Rights Council, 2015.
- Panepinto, Alice M. "The Right to the Truth in International Law: The Significance of Strasbourg's Contributions." *Legal Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2017, pp. 739-764. *CrossRef*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lest.12172>, doi:10.1111/lest.12172.
- Rights Group Records Increase in Arrests & Enforced Disappearances by PYD Militias*. Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2019, <https://en.etilaf.org/all-news/local-news/rights-group-records-increase-in-arrests-enforced-disappearances-by-pyd-militias>.
- Robins, Simon. "Transitional Justice as an Elite Discourse: Human Rights Practice between the Global and the Local in Post-Conflict Nepal." *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2012, pp. 3-30. *CrossRef*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14672715.2012.644885>, doi:10.1080/14672715.2012.644885.
- Rosenblatt, Adam. *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science After Atrocity*. Stanford University Press, Redwood City, California, 2015.
- Roth, Andrew. "Russia and Turkey Agree Ceasefire in Syria's Idlib Province.", 5 March, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/russia-and-turkey-agree-ceasefire-in-syrias-idlib-province>.
- Samuels, Margaret F., and Mary E. Keough. "The Kosovo Family Support Project: Offering Psychosocial Support for Families with Missing Persons." *Social Work*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2004, pp. 587-594.
- Sarkin, Jeremy. *Humans Not Numbers: The Case for an International Mechanism to Address Detainees and Disappeared Crisis in Syria*. Ta'afi, Massar, Caesar Families Association, Families for Freedom, Association for Detainees and Missing of Sednaya Prison, 2021.
- Sarkin, Jeremy. "Why the Prohibition of Enforced Disappearance has Attained Jus Cogens Status in International Law." *Nordic Journal of International Law*, vol. 81, 2012, pp. 537-583.
- Schwarz, Katarina, and Jing Geng. "Reasserting Agency: Procedural Justice, Victim-Centricity, and the Right to Remedy for Survivors of Slavery and Related Exploitation." *Journal of Modern Slavery* 4.2 (2018).
- Selimovic, Johanna M. "Perpetrators and Victims: Local Responses to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia." *Focaal - Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, vol. 2010, no. 57, 2010, pp. 50-61. *ProQuest Central Student*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2010.570104>, doi:10.3167/fcl.2010.570104.

- Sider, Rachel. *A Decade of Destruction: Attacks on Health Care in Syria*. International Rescue Committee, New York, USA, 2021.
- Simons, Marlise, and Marc Santora. "Ratko Mladic Loses Final Appeal in Genocide Conviction" *The New York Times*, 8 June, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/world/europe/ratko-mladic-trial.html>.
- SJAC, and Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense. *Searching for Missing Persons in Northeast Syria: Assessment and Recommendations for the First Responders' Team*. SJAC, Washington, D.C., 2020.
- SJAC. *Does Syria Need a UN Missing Persons Mechanism?* Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2021.
- SJAC. *New Justice Charter Gives Voice to Victims' Demands*. Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2021.
- SJAC. *Syria's Newest Decree: Amnesty or a Political Stunt?* Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2019.
- SJAC. *The Women Left Behind*. Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2020, <http://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2020/06/11/the-women-left-behind/>.
- SNHR. *The Ninth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearances in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; there is no Political Solution without the Disappeared*. Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2020. https://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/The_Ninth_Annual_Report_on_Enforced_Disappearance_in_Syria_on_the_International_Day_of_the_Victims_of_Enforced_Disappearances_en.pdf
- SOHR. *Disappearances in HTS-Held Areas | Children and Women among nearly 90 People Go Missing in Two Months*. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2021, <https://www.syriahr.com/en/217162/>.
- Stover, Eric, and Rachel Shigekane. "The Missing in the Aftermath of War: When do the Needs of Victims' Families and International War Crimes Tribunals Clash." *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 84, 2002, pp. 845-865.
- "Syria | World Directory of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples.", <https://minorityrights.org/country/syria/>.
- Tawil, Camille. "US Maintains Designation of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham as Terrorist Organization." *Alsharq Al-Awsat*, 3 July, 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3060026/us-maintains-designation-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-terrorist-organization>
- Taylor, Charles. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth." *Political Theory*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1984, pp. 152-183, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/191359>.
- The Syria Campaign, and The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre. "Search for Truth After ISIS.", 2020, <https://truthafterisis.org/en/the-search-for-truth/>.
- Thobani, Sunera. "War and the Politics of Truth-Making in Canada." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2003, pp. 399-414. *CrossRef*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0951839032000086754>, doi:10.1080/0951839032000086754.
- UNHCR. "Syria Emergency.", 15 March, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.
- UNHRC. *Without A Trace: Enforced Disappearances in Syria*. United Nations, 2013, <http://server15795.contentdm.oclc.org/u?p15795coll39,2702>.
- USIP. "Truth Commission Digital Collection.", 16 March, 2011, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/03/truth-commission-digital-collection>.
- van Dijk, Teun A. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse and Society*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1993, pp. 249-283.
- Villa-Vicencio, Charles. "Why Perpetrators Should Not Always Be Prosecuted: Where the International Criminal Court and Truth Commissions Meet." *Emory Law Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2000, pp. 205-222.
- Wagner, Sarah. *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing*. University of California Press, 2008.
- Watson, Kathryn. "What Happened to Russia's Agreement to Eradicate Syria's Chemical Weapons?" *CBS News*, 10 April, 2017a, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-happened-to-russias-agreement-to-eliminate-syrias-chemical-weapons/>.
- Wijenayake, Vishakha. "The Plurality of Truth in Post-Conflict Societies and the Right to Truth in International Law." *Sri Lanka Journal of International Law*, 26, 2018, p. 31-52.