

Monica Curca founded “The Real Women of Syria,” a digital storytelling project that uses mobile technology and social media to share and amplify the stories of Syrian women. The project highlights the importance of owning and producing your own story, and how technology is helping to counter the portrayal of Syrian women as victims of the Syrian Revolution.



he Real Women of Syria is a digital storytelling project that uses mobile technology and social media to share and amplify the real stories of Syrian women. This transmedia project features stories created by Syrian women who were active in the Syrian Revolution. The following is excerpted from an interview conducted by IGNITE Producer Michaela Leslie-Rule with Real Women of Syria’s Founder Monica Curca.



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WHY ME?

I am the daughter of refugees and a refugee myself. In 1982 I arrived from communist Romania with my parents and 11 brothers and sisters to the USA. As political refugees, we left behind our family, our home, our community and even our family treasures — we could not take anything with us. The only thing we could take with us was our own stories. These stories shaped who I am today and provide a moral compass during the most pressing of times. They were a guiding post in times of poverty, discrimination, loneliness and voicelessness. They are the fuel that lights my passion and vocation as a peacebuilder and storyteller. They rooted me and helped establish my identity and sense of home. It’s truly amazing the role that storytelling and stories play in our lives. I know each has the power to change lives and change the world. And this is why I do what I do.

WHY NOW?

The media often sensationalizes stories about Syria. You know, “Women With Guns in Syria,” “Women Soldiers in Syria,” “Women that are Raped in Syria,” “Maps of Women that are Raped in Syria.” But when I

was working there, I heard stories about women who were revolutionaries. Women who were protesting, leading non-violent resistance, and holding political salons in their hair salons. Women who were doing dangerous work to advance peacebuilding. But these stories were never told.

I don't mean to attack the mainstream media entirely. I think it's good that there is some coverage of women's experiences in Syria. However it always seems like the same story. That our [women's] agency is weak, that women need saving, that women are incapable. We don't say the same stories about men.

I wanted to find a way for women's stories to be heard in a different way. For women to be seen as leaders and teachers and revolutionaries and for those stories to be available and accessible to a new generation of Syrian citizens. Our goal is to produce a series of five graphic novels based on these women's lives, and then share and distribute a physical version of this to youth in refugee camps and others in the diaspora.

WHY TRANSMEDIA?

In a digital space we could keep the women secure, more so than we could if we had a video crew in Syrian taking pictures. Women [who participated] can send a picture without impacting their security. We had to take a lot of precautions. They never posted their face, they never said their real names and they never included their exact location.

The women manage a Facebook page where they can upload their pictures. We have four women now: they have contributed their own pictures, contributed their own video, their own stories through audio.

Our project enables women to produce and distribute their own stories—to be a creator and producer of information. I think that is where a lot of power lies. When you can create and own your own story, that's powerful. That just changes everything—including the dominant narrative. Whatever story the project tells, in the end we know that a woman created it, and in that creation she built her own power and the power of those around her.

For more information about Real Women of Syria and to see examples of the women's stories, please visit our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Monica Curca is a communications strategist and social entrepreneur leveraging new media and digital technology for social change. She is the founder of PAX Manifesto and Transmedia for Good: SoCal group in Los Angeles. Monica works as a strategic communications and media consultant for international peacebuilding and development agencies and focuses on designing innovative communications, media and digital technology projects that change behavior of those involved in direct conflict or structural violence and shift dominant narrative towards peace. Currently she is the Communications Manager and Restorative Justice Community Organizer at a community based organization in Orange County, CA.

Some of the organizations she has worked with are: United Methodist Charity on Relief, The Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at University of California Irvine, and the Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria, and the Golden West College Peace Studies Program. Monica masters degrees in Sustainable International Development and Conflict and Coexistence from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy in Management.