

**Academic Study**

# **The Media Under the Palestinian National Authority**

**Dr. Farid Abu-Dheir**



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## *Introduction*\*

“There is no ceiling for this freedom in Palestine,” Dr. Salam Fayyad, former Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA), about the press in Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

Upon this slogan and 20 years after the PA’s establishment, it is important to analyze the development and reality of the press, its various milestones, and the degree of freedom it actually enjoys. In addition, it is possible to study the media’s ability to influence various aspects of political life over the last two decades, which witnessed major events in the Palestinian political system, which emerged from the Oslo Accords.

Scholars must not pause at soundbites, slogans, statements or even descriptions, whatever their source is. It is necessary to study facts and events, analyzing their various dimensions, until the most accurate assessment of the situation of the media in Palestine can be arrived at.

## *First: The Media Between The Past And The Present*

Discussing the media under the PA does not necessarily mean the enumeration of evidence on the absence of media freedoms, the PA’s abuses against journalists and media institutions, and the dependence of the Palestinian situation as a whole, including the media, on Israel. Nor does it mean talking about the high ceiling of freedoms under

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\* I’d like to thank Ms. Amal Dweikat for her efforts in gathering information and conducting interviews for this study.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Quds* newspaper, 1/5/2013.

the PA, which some like to discuss. It is inevitable that the media system is linked to political freedoms in any country, especially with regard to the media's treatment of the PA's policies and what affects the interests of the political, economic, and social elites therein. In other words, we are looking at a political system that produces a particular form of media system, consistent with the nature of that system and linked to the changes that it may experience. Thus, there is difficulty of making any change in the media system without a parallel change to the political system.

Media freedom in Palestine remained subjected to the various political stages and systems that prevailed in the Palestinian arena, in addition to the media's limitations in influencing the policies of such systems. For instance, in times of crises, the ruling authority will not tolerate criticism and direct analysis, or the disclosure of information it deems offensive and undermining of its policies.

The above situation has existed since the second half of the 19th century. In 1876, the Palestinian press was launched with the publication of *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* newspaper in Arabic and Turkish under the Ottoman rule of Palestine.<sup>4</sup> At the time, Palestine was considered the fifth Arab state in terms of the emergence of the press after Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, respectively. This evidences the long history of the Palestinian press, and the heritage it has accumulated over nearly a century and a half.

However, this was accompanied by extremely difficult and complex challenges, as the Palestinian press faced censorship and pressure from the Ottoman authorities through multiple strict methods. Indeed, newspapers were the official representatives of the government, and their issuance in Arabic and Turkish demonstrates their link to the ruling authority.

After the disaster of the British Mandate over Palestine, the press entered a new phase of intense distress, through the closure of newspapers and arrests of journalists and

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<sup>4</sup> Mohammed Suleiman, *Tarikh al-Sahafah al-Filastiniyyah 1876–1976* (The History of the Palestinian Press 1876–1976) (Cyprus: Bisan Press and Publication Institute, 1987), p. 46; and see Yusuf Khoury, *Al-Sahafah al-Arabiyyah fi Filastin 1876–1948* (The Arab Press in Palestine 1876–1948), 2nd edition (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, The General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists, 1986), where the author provides a brief overview of all press publications issued in Palestine during the mentioned period.

through the harsh restrictions on obtaining information, in addition to other repressive procedures that lasted for decades.<sup>5</sup>

The Palestinian press was not better off under the Jordanian administration, but it must be said that it developed and several newspapers and magazines were established. At the same time, the press was subjected to various forms of censorship, to the extent that it did not dare to stray away from Jordanian government policies.

From that stage onwards, the press was dominated by a political and tactical trend, with particular attention given to the cause of freedom and fighting the “Zionist” danger. This led to a decline in the interest in internal Palestinian issues.

It is natural for Palestinian newspapers to direct their attention toward the catastrophe experienced by Palestine, for two reasons: First, the extent of the disaster, which is ongoing today. Second, the reluctance of the Palestinian press to discuss internal issues related to the ruling authorities’ policies, whether British or Jordanian, as a result of various control and censorship methods, and their fear of the consequences.

The press continued to confront the successive authorities, and was subjected to more pressures than ever before under Israeli occupation after 1967. This was especially true for military censorship, which was imposed on all media material prior to publication. Nonetheless, journalists, under the occupation in Jerusalem, were able to obtain licenses for 22 new daily and weekly newspapers. Although the Palestinian press could always obtain licenses and only published what was approved by the military censors, it was regularly subjected to prosecutions and closures. Of course, the press mainly focused on national issues, as mentioned above.<sup>6</sup>

The press under occupation can be described as the press of steadfastness, but not of resistance,<sup>7</sup> as it worked on the preservation of the Palestinian people’s identity and sought to expose the practices of the Israeli occupation and enshrine Palestinian national rights in people’s conscience. However, Israel did not allow it to carry out the role of the

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Suleiman, *Al-Sahafah al-Filastiniyyah wa Qawanin al-Intidab al-Baritani* (The Palestinian Press and the Laws of British Mandate) (Cyprus: Bisan Press and Publication Institute, 1988), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Majid Tirban, *The Palestinian Press: Its Emergence and Development–The Immigrant Palestinian Press*, Ministry of Information, Palestine, 1/3/2009, <http://www.minfo.ps/arabic/index.php?page=main&id=137> (in Arabic)

<sup>7</sup> Farid Abu-Dheir, “Freedom of Press in Palestine: Present and Future Perspectives,” in Wolfgang Freund (ed.), *Palestinian Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 92.

resistance and incite a response against the occupation, by censoring the topics covered, methods of drafting, and the possibility of reading between the lines. The Palestinian press used multiple methods in its quest to bypass military censorship, namely leaking information to the Israeli press to publish, and then citing Israeli newspapers (which is allowed by censorship). Other examples include replacing deleted words with blank spaces and “we apologize,”<sup>8</sup> which stirred the curiosity of the readers and indirectly conveyed the message to the public.

### ***Second: The New Era***

The establishment of the PA in 1994 represented a dramatic development in the Palestinian Issue, as a new reality began to form in WB and GS. The major features of this development were the transition of the ruling power from direct occupation to the Palestinian side, with the maintenance of the occupation as the umbrella governing the political system, as well as the various aspects of the Palestinian people’s lives. The PA sought to exploit the new reality to work on building the nucleus of a Palestinian state and disengage the occupation through several policies and procedures. This was despite the fact that the Oslo Accords represented a heavy burden on the Palestinian people and imposed strict limits on the PA’s powers and ability to achieve national goals.

The Palestinian Press and Publications Law that was issued in 1995 was a clear indication of the PA’s interest in this matter, despite the fact that the law was a modified version of the Jordanian law. However, the PA considered that it was necessary to regulate the relationship between authority and the media on the one hand, and organize the media and its performance in the community on the other. It is worth mentioning that, despite the Press and Publications Law’s many gaps, the provisions relating to freedom of expression therein (as well as in the Basic Law) were acceptable, and even ideal. For instance, Article 27 of the Palestinian Basic Law stipulates that:

1. Establishment of newspapers and all media means is a right for all, guaranteed by this Basic Law. Their financing resources shall be subject to the scrutiny of the law.

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<sup>8</sup> Ali Ahmad Abdullah, *Waqi’ al-Sahafah al-Filastiniyyah fi al-Daffah wa al-Qita’ (1967–1987)* (The Reality of the Palestinian Press in WB and GS (1967–1987)) (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization, 1989), p. 157.

2. Freedom of audio, visual, and written media, as well as freedom to print, publish, distribute and transmit, together with the freedom of individuals working in this field, shall be guaranteed by this Basic Law and other related laws.
3. Censorship of the media shall be prohibited. No warning, suspension, confiscation, cancellation or restriction shall be imposed upon the media except by law, and pursuant to a judicial ruling.<sup>9</sup>

However, while the legal texts say one thing, reality has proved to be something else.

Among the many newspapers that have been issued over the years, some were discontinued and others are still being printed. On 10/11/1994, *al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper—which is affiliated to the PA—was first published on a weekly basis, then it became daily. The Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) issued *al-Watan* newspaper on 8/12/1994 in Gaza City, which was shut down by the PA for political reasons. There was also *al-Istiqlal* newspaper that was issued as the mouthpiece of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement ( PIJ ) in 1995. The end of 1995 also witnessed the birth of two dailies, *al-Bilad* and *al-Ayyam*, the former then becoming a weekly newspaper, with the latter still being issued daily to date. The PA's bodies also issued several newspapers and magazines, including *al-Aqsa*, *al-Sahel*, *al-Zaytuna*, *al-Ra'y*, *al-Sabah*, and other newspapers that were discontinued.

On 13/2/1997, the Islamic National Salvation Party, the political wing of Hamas, issued *al-Resalah*, a weekly newspaper published every Thursday and edited by Salah al-Bardawil. Moreover, in early 1997, the Palestine Center for Studies and Research, which is headed by Muhammad al-Hindi, issued the Palestine magazine, a non-periodic publication with Islamic affiliation.

During this period, the Palestinian press witnessed some busy times and a great renaissance, despite its limited potential when compared to many newspapers in Arab and foreign countries.<sup>10</sup> This represented dynamic media activity on par with the political forces' interaction when the Palestinian issue shifted with the signing of the Oslo Accords. Certainly, the media represented the tools of this interaction and provided the link between the political forces and the Palestinian people.

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<sup>9</sup> 2003 Amended Basic Law, site of The Palestinian Basic Law, 18/3/2003, <http://www.palestinianbasiclaw.org/basic-law/2003-amended-basic-law>

<sup>10</sup> Majid Tirban, op. cit.

The spread of the press under the PA reflected the political and intellectual diversity of the Palestinian arena. In addition to the Israeli occupation, the PA, along with the Palestinian political movements and their different visions about the conflict with Israel, were a new influence on the press. Radwan Abu ‘Ayyash, the chairman of Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), argues that the PA provided the press with an atmosphere of democracy and pluralism, contrary to what had prevailed under the occupation.<sup>11</sup> This was contradicted by many incidents occurring after the PA’s establishment, and in particular after the political split after Hamas won the 2006 election.

The ongoing publication of the three newspapers: *al-Ayyam*, *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, and *al-Quds*, in addition to the government’s media, represented by Palestine Television (TV) and Radio Station, and the Palestinian News and Information Agency (WAFA), made things clearer. These outlets were loyal to the PA and committed to its policies and objectives.<sup>12</sup>

Until mid-2011, there were 184 media outlets in WB and GS, including 145 in WB and 39 in GS. These companies were divided as follows: 66 radio stations, 27 TV stations, 16 daily newspapers, 6 periodicals, 20 news agencies, 18 audiovisual production companies. The rest were training companies, websites, and other media services. The vast majority of these companies emerged after the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA.<sup>13</sup>

According to a survey of Palestinian media outlets, most of them claimed to be independent, while in fact many of them affiliated to certain political factions, and their objectives were of course linked to those of these factions.<sup>14</sup>

After 2004, the number of media outlets rose significantly in the Palestinian territories, reflecting the Palestinian scene in general, and the media scene in particular. A study by the Ministry of Information issued in mid-2004 indicated that 155 audiovisual and print

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<sup>11</sup> Radwan Abu ‘Ayyash, *Athar al-Tatawwur al-Ijtima‘i wa al-Tahaddi al-Siyasi ‘ala Ada’ al-I‘lam al-Filastini* (The Impact of Social Development and Political Challenge on the Performance of the Palestinian Media) (n.p.: n.p., 2008), p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> Farid Abu–Dheir, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Radwan Abu ‘Ayyash also said that the Palestinian press was committed to the PA’s AND PLO’s political line, which is the peace process. See Radwan Abu ‘Ayyash, *Athar al-Tatawwur al-Ijtima‘i wa al-Tahaddi al-Siyasi ‘ala Ada’ al-I‘lam al-Filastini*, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> A few of these companies have presence in the media landscape, with huge resources.

<sup>14</sup> Near East Consulting, “Survey of Palestinian media December 2010 to April 2011,” May 2010, pp. 17–19, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/56706011/NEC-Palestine-Media-Survey-Apr11>

media outlets received licenses as follows: 32 television stations in the Palestinian territories (WB and GS), 22 radio stations, 101 publications (newspapers, and daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines). However, most of these publications ceased publishing following the second *Intifadah* in 2000, and more specifically in its second year.<sup>15</sup>

Israel did not stop targeting the Palestinian media, although it was subject to the PA, as was the case of all aspects of Palestinian life, which were subject to Israeli authority. Its restrictions—though in different forms, and at a slower pace—were still applied on the Palestinian press. Examples of such restrictions on journalists included: limited freedom of movement, attacks during live coverage of events, and sometimes arrests and killing.

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) has indicated that there were 647 Israeli violations between 2008 and 2012. The most egregious of these violations was the killing of eight journalists in the PA territories. MADA monitored 10 forms of violations by the occupation: killing, prevention from travel, bombing, raids, closing and blocking media sites, prevention of coverage, equipment confiscation, detentions, arrests, and physical abuse.<sup>16</sup> Further examples of violations include:

- On 27/1/2012, Israeli forces attacked *Al-Hayat, al-Jadida* newspaper photographer Muhib Al-Barghouthi during his coverage of the weekly march in the village of Bil'in near Ramallah, and hit his feet with rubber bullets.
- On 5/2/2012, Israeli forces arrested Radio Bethlehem 2000 correspondent Suhaib al-'Asa of Bethlehem for a month and prevented his family from visiting him. They confiscated his mobile phones and his camera memory card.
- On 16/3/2012, Israeli forces assaulted AFP photographer Musa al-Sha'ir during his coverage of the Ma'sara march near Bethlehem, and Israeli soldiers broke his camera lens.

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<sup>15</sup> Tal'at 'Abdul Hamid, "Culture and Palestinian Media Outlets," Ministry of Information, Palestine, 2004, pp. 6–7, <http://sites.birzeit.edu/cds/arabic/news/other/2004/jun-6-moi.pdf> (in Arabic)

<sup>16</sup> Palestinian Centre for Development & Media Freedoms—MADA, Annual Report: Media Freedoms Violations During 2012, pp. 3 and 9, [http://www.madacenter.org/images/text\\_editor/ar2012.pdf](http://www.madacenter.org/images/text_editor/ar2012.pdf)



- On 1/5/2012, Israeli forces assaulted six journalists from Alwaha Media Production as they were working on a news report about the bulldozing of farmers' land in the Farahin area east of Khan Yunus, and fired heavily at them. These journalists are: Jibril Abu Kamil, Murad Hasan, Nabil Abu Dayyah, Muhammad Alra'i, 'Imad al-Khreibi, and Wala' al-Bayari.<sup>17</sup>

The above are just a few examples of the many available, which are too numerous to mention here.<sup>18</sup>

Under the PA, the media became dependent on the Oslo Accords and outdated penal laws dating as far back as the British Mandate in Palestine, and PA legislation. The latter consists of provisions in the Basic Law and the Press and Publications Law of 1995.<sup>19</sup>

The Oslo Accords included provisions on fostering “mutual understanding and tolerance and shall accordingly abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda against each other and, without derogating from the principle of freedom of expression, shall take legal measures to prevent incitement by any organizations, groups or individuals within their jurisdiction.” Therefore, some believe that this would have an impact on the freedom of the press in Palestine, and make it, in the words of Hisham Abdullah, “forbidden in the West Bank to criticize the PA-Israel security coordination on the pretext that it threatens national security.”<sup>20</sup>

The red lines drawn by the PA for reporters include writing: criticism of the President or his family, about the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) and the security conditions, taking opposing views on the PA, talking about the leaders of Hamas who are persecuted by the PA or covering their non-civic activities. This has been in addition to other red lines that may appear from time to time.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 22, 24, 29 and 33.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the human rights organizations that monitored Israeli violations of media freedoms and attacks on journalists and media institutions, Nariman Ahmad 'Awwad has monitored many of these violations and documented them in her book. See Nariman Ahmad 'Awwad, *Hisar al-Kalimah: Min Waqa'i' al-I'tida'at al-Isra'iliyyah ala al-Sahafiyyin wa al-I'lamiyyin khilal Intifadat al-Aqsa* (The Siege of the Word: Facts from the Israeli Attacks on Journalists and Media Workers During the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*) (Jerusalem: PEN International, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Near East Consulting, “Survey of Palestinian media December 2010 to April 2011,” p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 14.



Journalist ‘Ala’ Saftawi was arrested because of an op-ed in *Alestiqlal* newspaper about the dire security situation, as the police considered it an offensive to the President. Ghazi Hamad was also detained for ten days, during which he was severely tortured because of an article about the relationship between the citizens with the PASF, which was published in the same newspaper. Furthermore, journalist Taher Shraiteh, a reporter for Reuters, was arrested and detained for six days because the news agency published a video of Israeli soldier Nachshon Wachsman, who had been kidnapped by Hamas.<sup>21</sup>

The press became politicized along factional lines. Thus, it failed to reflect the freedom of expression enshrined in the Palestinian Basic Law, Article 19, which states that “Freedom of opinion may not be prejudiced. Every person shall have the right to express his opinion and to circulate it orally, in writing or in any form of expression or art, with due consideration to the provisions of the law.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, the Palestinian press internationally was not considered influential and was deemed unreliable at the local level.<sup>23</sup> This was due to the fact that the press and the media (formal, partisan, or independent) worked under the umbrella of the PA, influenced by its policies, and widely disseminate these policies. Despite the presence of political forces with multiple visions, and their ensuing relationship with the media, the PA has still been able to exert a significant degree of control over their freedom.<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that many journalists who were hostile to Israel throughout the occupation period until the establishment of the PA, became affiliated with the PA. This is because some semblance of national independence was achieved with the establishment of a “Palestinian National Authority,” and any opposition was seen as seeking to abort the Palestinian national dream.<sup>25</sup> This was as a logical outcome since the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fatah were guiding the media in Palestine during occupation and before the establishment of the PA, and the vast majority of journalists had loyalty to them. These journalists played a great role in stressing the national identity and the role of

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<sup>21</sup> “Media in Palestine: Between the Authority’s Hammer and the Anvil of Self-Censorship, Red Lines and Self-Censorship: The Responsible for Them, and the Methods Used in Mapping Them,” The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, year 3, no. 14, October 1999, <http://www.phrmg.org/arabic/monitor1999/oct1999-2.htm> (in Arabic)

<sup>22</sup> 2003 Amended Basic Law, The Palestinian Basic Law, 18/3/2003.

<sup>23</sup> Near East Consulting, “Survey of Palestinian media December 2010 to April 2011,” p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Ziad ‘Uthman and Ghazi Bani ‘Odeh, *Al-I‘lam al-Ul‘ubah wa al-Khitab al-Damawi fi Filastin* (The Puppet Media and the Bloody Discourse in Palestine) (Ramallah: Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, 2008), p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Farid Abu-Dheir, *op. cit.*, p. 91

the Palestinian people in the struggle, in addition to their influence on Palestinian public opinion in promoting the PLO's political program.

### ***Third: Radio and TV***

After the PA was founded, radio and television broadcast licenses began to emerge, while they had been prohibited under the Israeli occupation before 1993.<sup>26</sup> However, the first radio station in Palestine was established in 1936. Whereas modern radio broadcast began on 1/3/1965, from a radio station in Cairo, the “Voice of Palestine, Voice of the Palestine Liberation Organization.” This effectively represented the beginning of modern Palestinian radio activity and the revival of Palestinian broadcasting that had been halted because of the onset in 1948 of the *Nakbah*, during the British Mandate in Palestine.

The “Voice of Palestine, Voice of Palestine Liberation Organization” began broadcasting its programs as part of the Voice of the Arabs, an Egyptian radio station, before being hosted by a number of radio stations in several Arab countries. The Voice of Palestine also emerged through independent radio stations as a mouthpiece of the PLO in a number of Arab countries, such as Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>27</sup>

All of this aimed to promote resistance to the occupation and revive patriotism among the Palestinians, in addition to promoting national identity and mobilizing public opinion against the occupation.

Since the early 1990s, dozens of local radio and television stations have emerged in the West Bank (WB) and the Gaza Strip (GS). Although their coverage of the occupation's practices was important, they conducted themselves in accordance with the PA's policies. These stations worked with limited capabilities. Their legal situation was unstable, because the draft Audiovisual Law was neither ratified, nor formulated in its final form, due to the Israeli control on radio frequencies after the signing of Oslo Accords in 1993. Former Palestinian Information Minister Nabil 'Amr attributes this delay to the non-convening of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90

<sup>27</sup> About the Radio and TV Corporation, see site of Wafa Info, <http://www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=5134> (in Arabic)

<sup>28</sup> Phone interview with Nabil 'Amr, former Information Minister, member of the Advisory Council of the Fatah movement, Ramallah, 4/7/2013. (in Arabic)

Among the drawbacks of the draft Audiovisual Law in force in the territory of the PA (despite the lack of approval by the PLC or by the Palestinian President), was the need to obtain a certificate of “good conduct” from the Palestinian Interior Ministry, i.e., the approval of the security services. This implied the dependence of media outlets on the PA.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, private stations were accountable to the spokesperson of Public Security, or to the Preventive Security Forces, or any other security forces. Verification may be done by phone or at the station’s headquarters.<sup>30</sup>

The Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology worked on organizing the affairs of those stations by encouraging their mergers and imposing upon them relatively high fees. It justified all this by pointing to the fact that the International Telecommunication Union was pressuring the PA to reduce the number of such stations. There were also difficulties in the development of these stations resulting from Israel’s ban on the import of high quality broadcast equipment, which leads to interference among different station waves.<sup>31</sup>

A field survey of the Palestinian media up to 2011 states that “to a certain extent, the problem of the fees constituted an obstacle. However, the main dilemma is in the contradiction created by one security department that grants the approval and the opposition of another department on grounds that has nothing to do with the law.”<sup>32</sup>

#### ***Fourth: State-Owned Media After the PA Establishment***

##### **1. Radio and Television**

The PA established the Palestine Radio and TV Corporation on 13/9/1993, which launched its maiden broadcast on 2/7/1994 with the speech of President Yasir ‘Arafat.

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<sup>29</sup> Umar Nazzal, “Audiovisual Bill... The Perspective and Core,” *Mada al-E‘lam* magazine, MADA, no. 2, August 2011, p. 7, [http://www.madacenter.org/upload\\_files/mag/1\\_omarnazal2pdf.pdf](http://www.madacenter.org/upload_files/mag/1_omarnazal2pdf.pdf) (in Arabic)

<sup>30</sup> “Media in Palestine: Between the Authority’s Hammer and the Anvil of Self-Censorship, Red Lines and Self-Censorship: The Responsible for Them, and the Methods Used in Mapping Them,” The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group. (in Arabic)

<sup>31</sup> Nasir al-Lahham, *Shadat Hawl al-I‘lam al-Filastini fi Dhil Hukm Hamas* (Testimonies About the Palestinian Media Under Hamas Rule) (Bethlehem: Ma‘an, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Near East Consulting, “Survey of Palestinian media December 2010 to April 2011,” p. 16

The official radio broadcast started in early October 1994 with news bulletins and programs produced in the radio's studios in Jericho, ultimately moving to Ramallah on 24/12/1995.

A second radio station belonging to the Palestine Radio and TV Corporation, "The Voice of Palestine/Second Program," was established in the GS. It began its official broadcast on 30/3/2000 on Land Day, with 17 daily broadcast hours.<sup>33</sup>

The official Palestinian media did not differ much from the official Arab media, which is essentially a propaganda tool for government policies and a means to perpetuate the system of governance and the authority's political will. Thus, the editing policy is selective regarding the news, topics, and guests featured on the programs, with little space afforded to alternative opinions.

Regarding the state-owned media experience after the establishment of the PA, former Information Minister Nabil 'Amr said that the state-owned media was weak, both in terms of content or reliability. He added that people did not like to follow the state-owned media, and that this factor led to the success of private media outlets.<sup>34</sup>

## **2. Palestinian News and Information Agency (Wafa)**

Wafa News Agency was established pursuant to the decision of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in 1972 as an independent body linked structurally, politically and administratively to the chair of the Executive Committee of the PLO.

The agency conveys Palestinian news and military communiqués issued by the General Command of the forces of the Palestinian revolution at the time. It then developed to include news related to the Palestinian Issue both at home and in the Diaspora. The agency began broadcasting via the internet in 1999.<sup>35</sup>

In general, Wafa did not change its PA-centered approach. Though it achieved great progress in the size and quality of its news coverage, its association with the PA made it a means for PA policies, rather than an outlet for pluralism, diversity, and balance in its coverage.

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<sup>33</sup> About the Palestine Radio and TV Corporation, see Wafa Info, <http://www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=5134> (in Arabic)

<sup>34</sup> A phone interview the researcher conducted with Nabil 'Amr, 4/7/2013. (in Arabic)

<sup>35</sup> Site of Wafa, [http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=receive\\_page&id=16](http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=receive_page&id=16) (in Arabic)

According to Ziad ‘Uthman and Ghazi Bani ‘Awda, Palestine TV and Wafa changed from being state-owned media to partisan tools of the Fatah movement, and it increased as intra-Palestinian confrontations developed. The authors indicated that neither the PA nor Fatah protested at such a role being played. In an opposing role to that of Wafa and Palestine TV and radio, Hamas media played a similar partisan role, the difference being that they were not state owned.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Fifth: Online News Sites***

The first Palestinian online news site was that of *Al-Ayyam* newspaper in mid-1996, followed by the site of *Alquds* newspaper in 1997. Then other newspapers followed suit, in addition to online radio and television stations.<sup>37</sup> At first, newspaper websites merely published copies of their printed editions.<sup>38</sup>

Later on, online news sites became more widespread, especially after the second Palestinian *Intifadah* known as the *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in 2000. Among the most prominent websites that emerged were: Palestinian Information Center (affiliated with Hamas), al-Dura, and al-Buraq. They mostly focused on Palestinian news and reactions to Israeli policies and practices against the Palestinian people. Moreover, new news sites were in the form of virtual news agencies and played an important role by competing in the dissemination of information. Among the most prominent of those was Ma‘an News Agency, which is now prominent in modern Palestinian media. The agency, which has European funding, claims it is independent and enjoys an unparalleled level of boldness in tackling certain topics. However, it has repeatedly been accused of siding with Fatah and the PA, through addressing certain topics and ignoring others, in addition to its editorial line that shows clear bias for these two parties.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ziad ‘Uthman and Ghazi Bani ‘Odeh, *op. cit.*, p. 99–101.

<sup>37</sup> Khalid Ma‘ali, *The Impact of Electronic Media on the Palestinian Political Development in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip) from 1996 to 2007*, Master’s Thesis, An-Najah National University, 2008, p. 2. (in Arabic)

<sup>38</sup> Jawad al-Dalou, *Electronic Journalism and its Potential Impact on Printed Newspapers*, Islamic University of Gaza, 2002, p. 2. (in Arabic)

<sup>39</sup> Many websites, particularly pro-Hamas sites, accused Ma‘an News Agency of bias, and cited evidence of this. These allegations require a separate research. To view these claims, see site of Alresalah, 13/1/2001, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=26906> (in Arabic); also see site of Palestine.net, 13/11/2008, <https://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=321062> (in Arabic)

Even if they are said to originate from pro-Hamas sides, such accusations of bias put a question mark on independent online news sites and support the idea that it may be difficult to establish independent sites in the Palestinian arena considering the ongoing prevailing political polarization.

During that period, Wafa also established one of the most prominent Palestinian official websites. Inevitably, the site has also been subject to the agency's policies and role as a state-owned media.

The first partisan news site was the aforementioned Palestinian Information Center, which was launched in December 1997 to provide news services in seven languages. This site has been considered the unofficial media outlet of Hamas, where the party can express its policies and positions on various issues.

Most of the privately owned sites began to emerge in 2004, with the first license being issued to the Palestine News Network, the first private Palestinian news agency, followed by the Ma'an News Agency, Palestinian Press Agency (Safa), and other sites that represent the different political movements.<sup>40</sup>

The phenomenon of websites in Palestine, in addition to e-mail and social media sites, represents a profound transformation in the circulation of news and information, ideas and opinions. It has signified for the Palestinian people, especially the youth, a gateway for breaking the barriers set up by the occupation, as well as those the PA and the various political forces sought to impose on the media. Electronic journalism and social media sites became open arenas for political debate and the dissemination of information, as well as each category's confrontation of the other with respect to political differences, especially the issue of division.

Palestinian factions, in addition to political activists and the PA, have used the internet to confront opponents and to mobilize politically. Several studies have pointed out that the internet was used to deepen the division and incite each party against the other, after all the attention had been focused on confronting the occupation and raising issues concerning its policies in Palestine.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Khalid Ma'ali, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Amin Abu Wardeh, *Athar al-Mawaqi' al-Iliktruniyyah al-Ikhbariyyah al-Filastiniyyah 'ala al-Tawajjuh wa al-Intima' al-Siyasi* (The Impact of Palestinian News Websites on the Political Affiliation and Attitude) (Amman: Dar al-Fateh, 2008), pp. 128–129.

However, the internet also put an end to the monopoly of information and media control and restrictions. This allowed public opinion to be updated and to follow events as they happened on the ground, such as: the division and consequent political arrests and repercussions within Palestinian society; the war on GS; developments in the settlement and prisoner issues, among others. In these instances, information was widely circulated on the internet, more so than in traditional media, where public interaction culminated, especially in the 2008/2009 war on GS.

The coming of the age of the internet ended the decades-long monopoly of traditional media on information, and thus its monopoly of public opinion. If we add to this the historical alliance between the media and the political system, especially authoritarian regimes, the mechanism to which the masses were subjected to government policies for decades becomes clearer.

However, at the same time, we have witnessed in the Palestinian arena a re-attempt to control public opinion, but with different means and methods. Palestinian political forces are guiding, controlling, and funding popular websites, in addition to fabricating information and spreading lies. There is also site hacking and spying on individuals and groups, which means a shift, not an end, in methods of control.

In addition, the internet, whether through websites or social media, exposed the clear division between Palestinian citizens and a wide range of prevalent political differences. Of course, this was healthy, as it moved the political debate to the public, after it had been the preserve of an educated elite in the traditional media. It established a long-term democratic process and popular impact on events.

The internet's offer to ordinary citizens to send and receive information, as well as have immediate and effective communication with others, will lead to radical changes on the political, social and intellectual levels. The internet represents a real threat to traditional media, which has dealt with the public over the past years in a superior manner, as if the guardian of public opinion, able to orient the direction of events. This will have repercussions on the nature of the conflict with the occupation, and the methods of public participation in this conflict. Indeed, there will no longer be a monopoly of information.



### ***Sixth: The Media Freedoms***

The detention of George Kanawati, the General Manager of Radio Bethlehem 2000, by the PASF on 3/6/2013, was not the last act perpetrated against the press.

Kanawati was arrested on the backdrop of a statement published on behalf of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the military wing of Fatah, asking the PASF for the release of Bethlehem municipality member, Maher Kanawati, following a complaint made by Bethlehem Mayor, Vera Baboun, against him. The prosecutor charged Kanawati with three counts: sectarian sedition, slanderous speech against a legal person, and impersonation and theft of the name and signature of a military and political faction. Journalist George Kanawati was released on bail thereafter.<sup>42</sup>

According to several press sources, Radio Bethlehem 2000 denied the authenticity of the statement shortly after its publication, as soon as it was revealed that it did not come from said source. This led to the journalist's arrest and detention for 48 hours.<sup>43</sup>

This scene from 2013 brings us back to earlier periods when the Palestinian press went through different stages at its inception regarding press freedoms, which are part of public freedoms, in the midst of political developments. The condition of the press anywhere in the world reflects the nature of the political system and the freedoms there.<sup>44</sup> The problem of the Palestinian press and media is the occupation and its agreements with the PA, in addition to the low ceiling of freedoms because of multiple Israeli interventions, even in the media field. Israel has repeatedly entered the Palestinian territories, shut down several radio and television stations and confiscated equipment, as well as videos and information, such as the case of Afaq TV in Nablus.

The harassment suffered by the Palestinian press since its inception has taken different forms under Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, or Jordanian rule, as explained above. In light of the Israeli occupation in 1967 until the creation of the PA in 1994, there was a

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<sup>42</sup> Ma'an, 4/6/2013, <http://maannews.net/arb/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=601761>

<sup>43</sup> Site of Radio Bethlehem 2000, 4/6/2013, <http://www.rb2000.ps/ar/news/81633.html>

<sup>44</sup> Jamal Nazzal mentions that the PA targeted radio and television stations that broadcast issues opposing the government's policy, in order not to give a pretext for the US and Israel to accuse the PA of allowing incitement. Jamal Nazzal, *Al-I'lam al-Mar'i wa al-Masmu' fi Filastin ma Ba'd Oslo: Nadhrah 'ala Tatawwur al-'Amal al-Itha'i wa al-Telefizyuni Bayna 1994–2002* (Audio-Visual Media in Palestine After Oslo: A Look at the Development of the Work of Radio and Television Stations Between 1994–2002) (Ramallah: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.Middle East Office, 2008), p. 105.

cracking down on the media and journalists, newspapers and magazines, in the form of temporary and permanent closures and restrictions on distribution. This was in addition to attacks on journalists, and military censoring.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the Palestinian media suffered from Israeli violations when Palestinians were under direct occupation, and there was no sovereign Palestinian entity. After the establishment of the PA, and particularly since the beginning of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the Palestinian media underwent—in addition to the occupation’s violations—the restrictions imposed by the PA’s policies and limitations, which were affected by many events, the most important being the Palestinian political division. It was also subjected to the boundaries set by the Oslo Accords, which limited freedom of publication, and were inconsistent with the media’s traditional role as a mobilizer against the occupation.

A number of researchers argue that there is a high degree of media freedom in Palestine and cite international reports, field studies, and testimonies of experts. They compare Palestinian press freedom to that of Arab countries that were already lacking the most basic degrees of freedom of expression (until the beginning of the Arab Spring in early 2011),<sup>46</sup> or to that of the press before the establishment of the PA, i.e., under the occupation. This approach has been criticized by other researchers, on the basis that there can be no comparison between an occupation authority and a national one.<sup>47</sup>

What should be more concerning is that the facts on the ground, as well as reports of human rights organizations and many studies have documented serious violations of freedom of expression in Palestine. A poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) on 13–15/6/2013 has shown, quite clearly, that a small percentage of the Palestinians (21.5%) believed that there is press freedom in WB, while more than double that number (44.6%) considered that there was to some extent press freedom in WB, and 30% considered that there was no press freedom in WB.<sup>48</sup> This result

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<sup>45</sup> Majid Tirban, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Jamal Nazzal’s study included several references to some level of media freedom in Palestine, in spite of its clear explanation that the PA needed to curb this freedom and ensure its compatibility with the political line it follows, i.e., the peace process. Jamal Nazzal, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>47</sup> Samih Mohsen, *Hurriyyat al-Sahafah wa al-Ta’bir ‘an al-Rai’y fi Dhill al-Sultah al-Filastiniyyah* (Freedom of Press and Expression Under the Palestinian Authority) (Jerusalem: The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW), 1999), p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), Survey Research Unit, Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (48), 13–15/6/2013, <http://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/p48e.pdf>

is consistent with the result of a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) in May 2012, where only 27.9% of the respondents said that freedom of expression is available to a large or very large extent.<sup>49</sup>

In his study of the press and democratic transition, Hafez Abu Ayyash indicated that the Gaza-Jericho Agreement included a clear restriction on the media. Article 12 of the agreement stated that:

Israel and the Palestinian Authority shall seek to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and shall accordingly abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda, against each other and, without derogating from the principle of freedom of expression, shall take legal measures to prevent such incitement by any organizations, groups or individuals within their jurisdiction.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, the presidential decree stipulated the prevention of incitement, giving the PASF the right to censor the media, thus committing violations against the media and journalists, which were monitored by human rights organizations. Such violations included detention, interrogation, and arrest of journalists; the closure of media outlets, including local newspapers, for varying periods of time; the annulment of some licenses and the confiscation of publications; and the beating and torture of journalists, preventing them from covering certain events.<sup>51</sup>

In his study, Abu Ayyash said that journalists practiced self-censorship under the PA. He said that when the PA was established, Palestinian journalists had high expectations, bidding farewell to Israeli control and its restrictions. But, he added, these hopes were quickly dashed, as the PA continued with the censorship, albeit not as openly as Israel. It monitored publications after they were issued, leading journalists to practice self-censorship. He

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<sup>49</sup> Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC) Public Opinion Poll no. 76 on Political Leadership, Corruption and Freedom of Speech, May 2012, site of JMCC, 1/6/2012, p. 3, <http://www.jmcc.org/Documentsandmaps.aspx?id=855>

<sup>50</sup> Agreement on Gaza Strip and Jericho Area, site of Shahid Palestine Organization, [http://www.shahidpalestine.org/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=448%25](http://www.shahidpalestine.org/?option=com_content&view=article&id=448%25) (in Arabic); and Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, site of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4/5/1994, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/agreement%20on%20gaza%20strip%20and%20jericho%20area.aspx>

<sup>51</sup> Hafez Abu Ayyash, *The Role of Locally Printed Press in the Democratic Transformation in the West-Bank (Al-Quds Newspaper as a Model: 2004–2007)*, Master's Thesis, An-Najah National University, Nablus, 2008, pp. 92–93. (in Arabic)

commented that this was among the most dangerous types of censorship because it limits thinking, creativity, and professionalism, and is restricted to simply conveying general subjects, away from any analysis and criticism.<sup>52</sup>

Former Palestinian Information Minister, Nabil ‘Amr, stressed that the deeper restrictions concerned the areas that were deemed taboo to some of the forces or parties. These were the considerations that did not allow journalists to go as far as they wanted to.<sup>53</sup>

On the future of the media in light of the PA, Nabil Amr indicates that the Palestinian society, the authority, and the institutions do not enable a journalist to enjoy all the necessary political and professional media standards thus hindering the Palestinian media’s development.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Seventh: Violations***

Palestinian division made conditions ripe for many serious violations of freedom of expression in Palestine. It could be argued that the Palestinian media in general failed the professional media test, as media polarization reached an unprecedented level, and most journalists were involved in it. They became part of the division and part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. Most journalists did not work professionally, and the media played a negative role, whether through incitement, transmitting information without verification, or by concealing information that might be important in conveying the truth to the public. This was in addition to the articles filled with accusations, insults, and selective or false information.

Consequently, the PA and the conflicting forces, especially Fatah and Hamas, were behind a number of practices that represented a flagrant violation of the freedom of the media. Jawad al-Dalo indicates in his study “Violations of the Freedom of Press Under the Palestinian National Authority,” in the 2006–2010 period, approximately 499 violations were monitored against the media and journalists.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> Aref Hijjawi, *Shahid ‘ala al-Mustaqbal: Al-Halaqat al-Khamsun Kama Uthi‘at fi al-Radio* (An Eyewitness to Future: The Fifty Episodes as Aired on the Radio) (Birzeit: Birzeit University, Media Development Center, 2004), p. 96.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

According to the study, three quarters of these violations “were carried out by government officials in both Ramallah and Gaza.” The study showed that:

There was a systematic policy of detaining journalists, with the two governments in Ramallah and Gaza practicing the same violation techniques. However, the two governments dealt differently with each type of violations. The study concluded that most of the violations in the Gaza Strip took place in 2006, but they decreased considerably, while the violations in the West Bank were fluctuating due to the prevailing political and security conditions.<sup>55</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, according to the annual report of MADA center, there were 444 violations from both sides: the Israeli and the Palestinian side. The report indicated that between 2008 and 2012, the proportion of violations by the Israel was equivalent to 60% of the total violations throughout these years.<sup>56</sup>

Seven years in to the political divide, MADA center monitored more than 500 violations of media freedoms by both parties in the WB and GS.

Among the examples of violations that occurred on the Palestinian side against the freedom of the media during 2012 were:

- On 31/1/2012, PASF arrested Wafa News Agency and Radio Ajial editor, Rami Samara, at the agency’s headquarters in Ramallah then released him after three and a half hours, for writing a critical commentary about a PLO executive committee meeting on his Facebook page.
- On 2/2/2012, the Amad news website was blocked in the WB, by virtue of a decision by the Palestinian Attorney General.
- On 17/2/2012, the security forces of the caretaker government in GS arrested the editor of “Asho‘la” news website Saher al-Aqra‘ and confiscated several computers and cameras. Al-Aqra‘ said that he was tortured and humiliated throughout his three-day detention period.

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<sup>55</sup> Jawad al-Dalo, Violations of the Freedom of Press Under the Palestinian National Authority (2006–2010), Descriptive Study, *IUG Journal of Humanities Research*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2010, p. 669, <http://resportal.iugaza.edu.ps/articles/%D8%AF.%20%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%84%D9%88.pdf> (in Arabic)

<sup>56</sup> MADA, Annual Report: Media Freedoms Violations During 2012; and MADA, Violations of Media Freedoms in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: The annual Report (2011), <http://www.madacenter.org/pdf.php?id=1139&typee=report&lang=1>

- On 26/3/2012, Executive Director of Jothoor website, Fu'ad Ali Abu al-Ful, was summoned to meet the inspection services of the caretaker government in the GS. He was asked about his activities and writing, and had to sign a pledge not to practice political activities. Should he breach this, he would be fined one thousand shekels (about <sup>57</sup>\$259) and imprisoned for one month.<sup>58</sup>

According to a statement by the MADA center on 16/6/2013 about violations against the media and journalists in Palestine during the period of division, there was an increase in the number of violations committed by Palestinian sides against journalists and the media. The report expressed concern over the consequent rise of self-censorship among journalists of media institutions, and the decline in the standard of the Palestinian media and its level of professionalism. The report added that some media outlets had fueled the division, ever since Hamas won the PLC elections in 2006.

The report pointed to a slight improvement in media freedoms, however continuous violations suggest that serious, imminent breakthroughs on this issue are unlikely, especially with faltering reconciliation efforts, taking into account that the main violator of media freedoms in Palestine is Israel.<sup>59</sup>

The Palestinian media finds itself trapped between the occupation on the one hand, and the PA and political parties on the other, as the report point out. This creates a unique situation for the media in Palestine, with dual authoritarian traits. Therefore, the preoccupation of the media with the role of “exposing crimes of the occupation” and “confronting its practices,” is the only way out of the embarrassment in which it finds itself when dealing with internal Palestinian issues. The Palestinian media is able to attack the occupation, as it has done for decades. However, it finds it difficult to enter in to a confrontation with the PA or even the Palestinian factions.

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<sup>57</sup> US Dollar.

<sup>58</sup> MADA, Annual Report: Media Freedoms Violations During 2012, pp. 51, 52 and 56.

The exchange rate of the dollar against the Israeli shekel in 2012 was based on the Bank of Israel data, which was 3.8559.

<sup>59</sup> MADA, “MADA: Over 500 Palestinian Violations Against Media Freedoms in Palestine Since the Fatah-Hamas Division,” [http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1314&category\\_id=6&year](http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1314&category_id=6&year)

### ***Eighth: Media Landscape in Light of Schism***

Following the participation of Hamas in PLC elections, a division between the pro-Hamas media and the pro-Fatah media began. The crisis deepened with the beginning of the division and the Hamas takeover of GS in 2007, as media freedoms became more likely to be constrained than ever before. There were now two authorities on the ground, one in WB and the other in GS, and each of them had its own media and journalists. Journalists became more embroiled in politics than in professional work, as several studies have demonstrated. The professional standards of journalists gave way to political agendas, and the press became a tool of the division, as noted above. Journalists were busy covering the division and thus became more ideological and less objective.<sup>60</sup>

For instance, the pro-Hamas media only covered news related to Hamas, while the pro-Fatah and pro-PA media only covered stories about Fatah and the PA, except for the negative and damaging news about the other party, of course. Journalists from each side were harassed by the other side.

But things did not stop at this point, as each party began targeting journalists and media organizations in the area it controlled, and the situation of the Palestinian media worsened. For instance, Journalist Mamduh Hamamrah was arrested for a picture published by one of his friends on Facebook in which the “picture portrayed ‘Abbas next to a well-known Syrian actor from the Bab al-Hara television series who plays the role of a character known for betrayal and treason during the French occupation of Syria. A comment below the picture suggested a resemblance of the two individuals in every aspect.” The Bethlehem prosecution pressed charges against him for libel and slander, according to the Jordanian Criminal Law No. 16 of 1960, applied in WB<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Near East Consulting, “Survey of Palestinian media December 2010 to April 2011,” p. 12.

The book written by Khaled Hroub and Juman Qunais documents many of the non-professional media practices and the subordination of media outlets to Palestinian political forces, which were the main reason for such practices. See Khaled Hroub and Juman Qunais, *Al-I‘lam al-Filastini wa al-Inqisam: Mararat al-Tajrubah wa Imkaniyyat al-Tahsin* (The Palestinian Media and the Schism: The Harshness of the Experience and the Possibilities of Improvements) (Ramallah: MUWATIN The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> *Assessment of Media Development in Palestine: Based on UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators* (Ramallah: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014), pp. 37–38, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227784e.pdf>

Hamamrah said that his detention revealed “a decline in the level of media freedoms in WB and GS, which reflects badly on the work of journalists.” He added that journalism has become targeted by the security forces, and that the most important consequence of this was the reluctance of many journalists to tackle thorny issues that may lead to problems or accountability. He demanded the lifting of any control over the fourth estate and its publications, allowing it to gain access to information without any restrictions. He also called for respecting the profession and for uniting journalists in the face of any violations against the freedoms they are seeking to achieve. He considered that one should not remain silent in the face of violations of media freedoms and not be contented with condemnation and denunciation. He said concrete steps must be taken to protect the freedom of the media, especially by the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS), and through the solidarity of journalists.<sup>62</sup>

The media landscape in light of the political split has a bleak outlook. Nabil ‘Amr stated that the Palestinian media landscape after the division has moved backwards, and is more libelous than enlightening. Palestinians have an aversion toward partisan media and its negative impact on various aspects of their lives. ‘Amr adds that the split has affected the media in Palestine as a whole.<sup>63</sup>

The media landscape described above reveals the gap between reality and the existence of legal provisions and political slogans promoting freedom of expression, and the fact that there is no theoretical restriction on the freedom of publication. Journalist Samer Khuwaira claims that all the rhetoric about media freedom in Palestine is nothing but talk and is belied by facts and reports by human rights organizations, which documented the violations against journalists in Palestine. He mentioned the case of Journalist Muhammad ‘Awad from Ramsat Agency. He was arrested by the Preventive Security Forces for 98 days then was released without charge. He pointed out that arrests are often made against the backdrop of political affiliation. Khuwaira added that there was harassment at work, but that what was more serious was the classification of journalists according to their political leanings. He says that pro-Hamas or even pro-opposition journalists were prevented from entering security headquarters, the District Headquarters,

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<sup>62</sup> Online interview with journalist Mamduh Hamamrah, a correspondent for Alquds Satellite Channel, Bethlehem, 4/6/2013. (in Arabic)

<sup>63</sup> A phone interview conducted by the researcher with Nabil ‘Amr, 4/7/2013. (in Arabic)



and other places in WB. Indeed, they were not invited to many important events and gatherings. According to him, security men perceive journalists as enemies rather than partners. In times of crisis and important events, the PASF forget all principles and prohibit journalists from taking pictures. Journalists are beaten and their cameras are broken. Then the PASF spokesperson utters a few well-chosen words and puts an end to the problem. Khuwaira added that the tragedy has been that the issue evolved into the prosecution of journalists for what they write on Facebook. According to him, what happened with journalists Mamduh Hamamrah and George Qanawati indicates that all the talk about freedom of media is nonsense, and is nothing but empty rhetoric.<sup>64</sup>

In assessing the situation of the press following the split, Journalist Mohammed Daraghmeh asserted that media freedoms were in bad shape in WB and GS, as there are ongoing arrests of journalists, and the reports of human rights organizations are replete with details of violations of media freedom in both WB and GS. He attributes this to the split, which helped suppress media freedoms, especially at the beginning. It also led a number of media outlets and journalists to become part of the division. Daraghmeh concluded that the Palestinian media has been far from meeting public opinion, or even influencing it, especially in light of the proliferation of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. He also says that people consider most local media to be close to the authority and its vision, thus affecting their confidence in them. But this did not mean that some local media outlets could not be trusted, he adds. However, he maintained that they are “all living in a state of self-censorship. What should they cover more? What should they ignore or overlook? In other words, they are most often superficial to some extent and do not follow up on events. Moreover, local coverage of events at the provincial level often takes the form of public relations rather than news.”<sup>65</sup>

### ***Ninth: Problematic Content***

Since Palestine is under occupation, media content always contains talk about the Palestinian issue, the resistance to occupation, and the identification of the violations and

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<sup>64</sup> Online interview with Journalist Samer Khuwaira, a correspondent for Alquds Satellite Channel, Nablus, 4/6/2013. (in Arabic)

<sup>65</sup> Online interview with Journalist Mohammed Daraghmeh, Palestinian blogger, and an expert on Israeli affairs, Ramallah, 6/6/2013. (in Arabic)

attacks on Palestinian civilians. Through the historical narrative of the origins and evolution of the media in Palestine, the reader will note that the conflict with the occupation has always been afforded the lion's share of press coverage.

In contrast, the interest in political affairs and the conflict with the occupier has had a negative impact on the degree of interest in other topics. The Palestinian media, in most of its stages, has been a tactical media, while some believe that its role is similar to that of the media in developing countries and the Arab world, which is a developmental role that submits to the state authority and policies. Of course, the media in these systems does not challenge the existing political system.

The Palestinian media has worked, for example, to preserve the achievements of the National Authority and was not allowed to take a critical approach to those accomplishments, based on its allegiance to the PA.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the Palestinian media being "resistant" to the occupation was no longer considered a valid approach after the PA's agreement to renounce violence.<sup>67</sup> After the PA adopted the peace process policy and then adopted the peaceful popular resistance, it was incumbent on the media to adapt to this policy and refrain from incitement. Rather, it had to find balance between promoting resistance (according to the PA's vision) and focusing on the issue of building the state. Accordingly, the Palestinian press has continued to carry out its militant role against the occupation, working to mobilize public opinion in support of the PA leadership in the face of the occupation, in the absence of direct Israeli monitoring for the first time in Palestine.<sup>68</sup>

Hafez Barghouti points out that media content does not differ from any media content in any other country because it covers all areas, except the regime and the extent of its democracy. He explains that this has been because the Palestinians have been suffering from years of division preceded by the *Intifadah*, and that, before that, there used to be discussions and criticism of the regime's performance and the patriarchal system. Media freedom has margins that journalists enlarge or narrow according to their abilities and

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<sup>66</sup> Farid Abu-Dheir, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup> Hussein Abu Shanab believes that the resistant press is the press that was issued by the PLO outside Palestine, not inside. Hussein Abu Shanab, *al-I'lam al-Filastini* (Palestinian Media) (Amman: Dar al- Jalil For Publishing, 1988) p. 131.

<sup>68</sup> Farid Abu-Dheir, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

boldness. He sees that freedoms are narrowed by consensus on the interests of the press and the authority, either out of fear of each other, or out of fear of repression.

Barghouti explained that there had been a wider scope of freedoms before the split with more room for maneuver and criticism, and that the late President 'Arafat had displayed a great tolerance toward the media. However, he believes that both the split and Hamas narrowed down the margin of freedom, and that this margin of freedom was restricted in WB without any apparent suppression. As a result, Barghouti believes that press freedoms are in a bleak state.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Tenth: PJS and the Protection of Freedoms***

PJS has significance in this context, for it is the professional structure to which any journalists resort when they face harassment, restrictions, or difficulties. The syndicate bears the bulk of responsibility toward anything related to any lack of press freedoms and the split in the ranks of journalists and their institutions, as well as the decline in the level of performance, among other things. The syndicate was founded to develop solutions to all of these issues, and to offer a safe haven to all journalists.

PJS is the most important professional framework governing the press in Palestine, as in most neighboring countries. It was founded in early 1979 as the Arab Journalists League in Jerusalem. At the time, the Israeli occupation prohibited any designation to Palestine. Upon the establishment of the PA in 1994, it worked under the name of Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, knowing that Palestinian journalists at home and abroad were represented in the General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists (GUPWJ) in its capacity as a trade union framework of the PLO. This lasted until two separate syndicates were established for writers and journalists, according to specialization, mission, and membership, to facilitate their duties.

Comprising all Palestinian journalists inside and outside Palestine, PJS is an independent legal framework whose headquarters are in Jerusalem, with branches in the Palestinian governorates.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Online interview with Hafez Barghouti, editor-in-chief of *al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 13/6/2013. (in Arabic)

<sup>70</sup> About the syndicate, see site of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, <http://www.pjs.ps/en>

Former Palestinian Minister of Information Nabil ‘Amr said that the PJS role is to look out for its members, protect them under the law and lift the injustices they face. He added that joining the syndicate should be mandatory for all journalists, many of whom exercise their profession without being members in the syndicate. He also said that the syndicate is not required to be fully impartial politically, provided that political affiliations do not adversely affect decisions and press work.<sup>71</sup>

The PJS has faced many problems due to the political division between Fatah and Hamas. Journalists affiliated to Hamas accused it of being exclusionary and a PA tool. Journalist Nasser al-Laham holds the PA responsible for the syndicate’s weakness, as he believes that the PA did not work on developing the syndicate’s laws and procedures sufficiently. Rather, he raises doubts that what the PA did was intentional.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, a certain chaos prevails in the press, as many people who are not eligible have joined this sector, in addition to journalists losing their rights.

Consequently, the syndicate has been divided. A group of journalists took over the syndicate’s headquarters in GS and formed a new one, in protest at the WB syndicate’s approach. The group said that the latter did not represent the journalistic consensus or a professional depoliticized framework.

In an opinion poll of a number of Palestinian journalists conducted by MADA magazine,<sup>73</sup> proposed solutions focused on the following matters:

1. PJS needs to achieve financial independence and distance itself from political pressure. It must not depend on any political party, whether it is the authority or a political faction. Hence the call for fair elections based on professionalism, not political affiliations.
2. Achieving unity among journalists, particularly those in WB and GS, and more specifically among journalists affiliated to Hamas and those affiliated to Fatah. The media division represents a serious rift in the nation, because journalists are the formers of public opinion.

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<sup>71</sup> A phone interview conducted by the researcher with Nabil ‘Amr, 4/7/2013. (in Arabic)

<sup>72</sup> Nasir al-Lahham, *op. cit.*

<sup>73</sup> *Mada al-E’lam*, no. 1, June 2011, pp. 24–25.

3. Defending journalists, particularly those who are subjected to abuse, whether by Israel, the PASF, or political factions. PJS needs to treat journalists in a non-discriminatory manner and to support them regardless of their political affiliation or the source of the violation.
4. Achieve journalist interests and facilitate their work, providing them with syndicate basic services, such as health insurance and other services.
5. Fighting media normalization, which is considered by journalists to be a threat to the reputation of a profession considered different to other professions in the public and elite eyes.

These points illustrate clearly the gaps plaguing the PJS. The syndicate has repeatedly declared that it is working on meeting the basic rights and needs of its members, achieving democracy in its various structures, and addressing the many pending issues. However, journalist Ghazi Bani 'Odeh believes that the phase that followed the syndicate elections in 2010 did not succeed in dispelling the negative and bleak picture, fueled by 18 years of failed performance. He added that journalists are looking forward to a new beginning with the syndicate and an immediate upheaval that would undermine all the syndicate's negative aspects.<sup>74</sup>

### ***Summary***

The big question whose multiple answers can be summarized in only one word: “No,” is: “Is there complete media freedom in Palestine?”

Of course, freedom is a relative matter, and there is no total freedom in the world. But in authoritarian regimes, including many of the Third World and Arab regimes, together with the PA, freedom is restricted to conveying news that does not affect the ruling regime or the “ruling elite” that appoints itself the custodian of the country and the people. It is also restricted to views that do not criticize the regime, otherwise it could be interpreted that it is “weakening the stature of the ruler and the ruling regime in the eyes of the people.” The concept of freedom in these regimes also fades when a journalist finds himself unable to address certain issues or even film certain events, such as marches or

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<sup>74</sup> Ghazi Bani 'Odeh, “Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate on the Scale,” *Mada al-E'lam*, no.1, June 2011, p. 18. (in Arabic)

protests. This is what happened, for example, when the PASF prevented journalists from filming a Hamas rally in Hebron to protest what the Egyptian government did in breaking up the protests of Rab‘a al-Adawiya and al-Nahda square in August 2013.<sup>75</sup>

We have explained that the Palestinian media is dependent on two important factors that make its freedom suffer more than almost any other media in the world:

Firstly, it is subjected to a political system that is not based on pluralism, rotation of power, and the rule of law and state institutions. This limits freedoms in certain areas. It is understood that freedom is measured by the ability to disseminate information and views on matters opposing the ruling regime, and not in accordance with it.

Secondly, there is a higher authority, the occupation, which controls both sides: the Palestinian political system, and various areas of Palestinian life, including the media. Thus, the media is subject to control methods that greatly limit its mobility.

The lack of political tolerance, the inability to mobilize democratic values of pluralism and rotation of power, in addition to the fact that the political parties seek to impose their political agendas on people and the Palestinian issue, all make it difficult for the media to provide people with information. This in turn leads to depriving citizens of their simple right of free access to information and opinions without restrictions. It also prevents citizens from having an opinion and contributing actively in decision-making and in determining political choices.

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<sup>75</sup> MADA, 16/8/2013, [http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=2&id=1334&category\\_id=6&year=2013](http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=2&id=1334&category_id=6&year=2013)  
It is noteworthy that many similar incidents took place in WB against journalists, and the GS was no exception.

دراسة علمية

الإعلام في ظلّ  
السلطة الفلسطينية

د. فريد أبو ضهير

