Palestine's Occupied Fourth Estate:

An inside look at the work lives of Palestinian print journalists

Miriam Berger

Abstract

While for decades local Palestinian media remained a marginalized and often purely politicized subject, in recent years a series of studies has more critically analyzed the causes and consequences of its seeming diversity but structural underdevelopment.[1] However, despite these advances, the specific conditions facing Palestinian journalists in local print media have largely remained underreported. In this study, I address this research gap from a unique perspective: as viewed from the newsroom itself. I present the untold stories of the everyday work life of Palestinian journalists working at the three local Jerusalem- and Ramallah-based newspapers—*al-Quds*, *al-Ayyam*, and *al-Hayat al-Jadida*—from 1994 until January 2012. I discuss the difficult working conditions journalists face within these news organizations, and situate these experiences within the context of Israeli and Palestinian Authority policies and practices that have obstructed the political, economic, and social autonomy of the local press. I first provide a brief background on Palestinian print media, and then I focus on several key areas of concern for the journalists: Israeli and Palestinian violence, the economics of printing in Palestine, the phenomenon of self-censorship, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, and internal newspaper organization. This study covers the nearly two decades since the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) which put in place the now stalled process of ending the Israeli military occupation of Palestine (used here to refer to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip). My analysis is drawn from over fifty interviews with Palestinian journalists, media monitors, and politicians conducted in Jerusalem and Ramallah in August 2011 and January 2012.[2] From this in-the-field perspective I describe how—despite the potential for it to be otherwise—Palestinian print media remains an "occupied" fourth estate with the everyday lives of journalists shaped by red lines from all sides.[3]

Introduction

"Our profession is to edit, to liberate our material!"

– Maher Alami, *al-Quds*

It was late one night in December 1995, on the eve of the first Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, when Maher Alami, head night editor for *al-Quds* (Jerusalem) daily newspaper

in East Jerusalem, received a fateful call. "We want you to publish this story in the news for our President Arafat on the front page," Alami recalled hearing a voice on the phone say.[4] "What news?" Alami asked.

The news in question came by fax and concerned a meeting between Palestinian Authority (PA) President Yasser Arafat and the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. In the meeting, the Patriarch compared Arafat to the Caliph Omar, to whom the Crusade-era Patriarch allegedly conferred control of Jerusalem. The story's symbolism was important for Arafat who, on the eve of elections, wanted to see the Patriarch calling him the historic ruler of Jerusalem on the front page of the Palestinian newspapers.

Alami considered what to do. He read over the faxed statement and corrected many grammar mistakes and historical inaccuracies. He scanned the front page of the next day's paper and saw four other articles about Arafat. He thought about the many advertisements PLC candidates had paid for, a key source of the paper's revenue, which also needed to be published. Arafat may have placed the order, but "It's not news," he lamented. So in an act that came to define his career, Maher Alami published the article on page eight.

The next day, the head of West Bank Preventive Security called the newspaper owner and ordered that Alami come to his Jericho office. "Why? What crime did I do?" Alami asked over the phone in defense of the article's placement. "I'm a journalist. That's my profession. Your profession is to liberate us from the Israeli occupation and our profession is to edit, to 'liberate' our material."

Alami's reply was a play on the word *tahrir* which in Arabic means both to "edit" text and to "liberate" in the political sense. But the security forces did not find this amusing. Arafat ordered Alami imprisoned, where he remained for seven days. Several foreign organizations came to Alami's defense, but *al-Quds*, his own newspaper, did not publish the news of his arrest. Neither did the two other Palestinian dailies, *al-Hayat al-Jadida* (New Life) or *al-Ayyam* (Days). Nor did *al-Quds*' editor-in-chief, the Fatah-controlled journalists syndicate or most of his own colleagues offer public support.[5]

After a week of detention, Alami was brought to the Mukataa, the president's compound, where Arafat kissed him three times, told him he was sorry to detain one of his brothers, and ordered him released. But Alami's story does not end there.

Palestinian media and human rights reports often cite Alami's arrest as an indicator of the limited freedoms of press and expression in Palestine due to the PA's hegemony and the Israeli occupation.[6] But an often-overlooked part of Alami's story is that during the past sixteen years he has continued to write for *al-Quds* and to be a syndicate member. All this despite the fact that the Palestinian security forces detained him again in 2000, this time for 13 days, for writing about corruption in the PA. "I liked the press since elementary school," Alami said of his resolve

to stay with institutions that did not always support him. "This love of the press and journalism only grew with me. Now I'm in my sixties, and despite this I like to work and follow the news."

Indeed, the conditions and context of Alami's story reflect an unfortunate reality: under Israeli occupation and PA control, local Palestinian print media has remained an "occupied" fourth estate. And despite political and technological developments since the Oslo Peace Accords, in this respect not much has changed for local Palestinian journalists as they struggle, against many odds, to put out a newspaper each day.

In interviews I conducted with Alami and over fifty Palestinian journalists, public officials, and media monitors on two separate occasions in August 2011 and January 2012, a common theme resonated throughout: a frustrated resignation with the occupied state of work in the local press. The Palestinian journalists I interviewed were quick to criticize the material printed in their newspapers and frequently conveyed their desire for a more viable and independent press. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the newspapers' often politicized, censored, and unoriginal content, the lack of investigative and human-interest stories, and their low salaries, circulation, and revenue rates.[7]

"You can't imagine working at a newspaper without an editorial board, without a media policy, without contracts, without a syndicate that will protect you, with a political system that is not a state, as you have the PA, but then you have Israel which is controlling everything," mused former *al-Ayyam* editor Khalil Shaheen, who after over fifteen years left the newspaper in 2010 out of frustration. "There is no way to change the situation without developing the professional structure of the newspaper itself, because if you do not do that, the same thing will continue happening on a daily basis. Without structural changes everyone will turn out to be, as we say, a screw in the machine."[8]

In an article on the Palestinian media sphere, Nibal Thawabteh, executive director of the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University, echoed Shaheen's sentiments. "Palestinian media institutions lack the minimum components, such as a transparent legal framework, media management planning, and necessary specifications for the journalistic profession… Qualified people—and there are few—become like unqualified people, which leads to a brain drain from those institutions, or pushes them to search for another job because of the lack of salaries. There are no administrative councils, editorial boards, or plans. In addition, one of the assessments of standards in the work of any media institution's cadre is its degree of harmony with the institution's manager. In Palestine, the institution manager has extraordinary power to control performance of staff who thus turn into obedient servants."[9]

It did not have to be this way. The three dailies once represented the promise of a new Palestinian media for a new Palestinian state. As the newspapers' positive names convey, journalists envisioned a media that would report on a free Palestinian press and people. Now, two decades after the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords, neither has realized independence, and

political, economic, and socio-cultural restrictions—the red lines, as the journalists call them—keep the press in its occupied state.

Hani al-Masri, one of Palestine's most prominent commentators, knows this dynamic well. "The occupation is the main factor that limits freedom of press in Palestine," he argued in 2011. "It is the main issue for all the Palestinians. The second [obstacle] is the split inside the Palestinians [between Fatah and Hamas]. After that it's ordinary factors, such as we need big investments, another law without *tadakhkhulat* [interventions] from the PA, and we need a real journalist union that supports the journalists…Palestinian traditions are also a contributing factor," he added, listing the "no's": sex, religion, and the president. "We have traditions that prevent us from covering some issues."[10]

Indeed, independent papers in name, the ruling Palestinian Authority and the dominant Fatah Party retain significant editorial and financial control over the newspapers, while the violence and pressures of the Israeli occupation remain a constant threat and barrier to journalists seeking meaningful media independence**.** Add to this the occupation's arbitrary rule of law, the constant threat of violence, politicized subsidies, restrictions on freedoms of expression, socio-political censorship, and work life for local Palestinian journalists in the occupied West Bank becomes a much more complicated—and important—story.[11]

Historical Background

"There is still a lot we have to do to reach a standard where we can compete."

-Maher Abu Khater, formerly of *al-Fajr*

Maher Abu Khater smiled as he recalled his days at *al-Fajr* English newspaper, a Jerusalem-based pro-PLO publication that closed in the early 1990s. "Journalism is an interesting job," he said in 2011, speaking of his early passion for the press. "You are meeting with people, you discuss different subjects, you hear about differing issues. Something comes in your blood and you can't really give it up after a while."[12]

No longer a journalist, Abu Khater has remained active in the media scene; he now works at WAFA, the official Palestinian Information Service. Seated in the Ramallah-based WAFA office, Abu Khater recalled his optimism when PLO leaders returned to Ramallah in 1994 after their decades in exile. "When the PA came in and there was some real changes in the way of life and we became more autonomous in our work, I was hoping that the Palestinian press and papers would eventually become competitive with the foreign press and be able to produce some really good quality stories, and writers and columnists that really reflect the views of the people here. Unfortunately, it did not happen...."

Indeed, after a century of rule by others—Ottoman, British, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Israeli—most Palestinians hoped that the signing of the Oslo Accords and the beginning of the PA's rule would lead to the creation of an autonomous Palestinian state—and a more open local media environment. Until now, neither has happened.[13]

For former journalists like Abu Khater, the legacy of occupation and its effect on Palestinian political and daily life is a large part of the problem. During the first phase of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip from 1967 to 1994, there were few media options for Palestinians. The Israelis forbade indigenous Palestinian radio or television stations (although channels from abroad could sometimes be reached) and placed heavy licensing and content restrictions on Palestinian publications.[14] The few newspapers published were a primary means for communication and political mobilization against the military occupation. Openly pro-PLO newspapers were banned outright, and publishing could only occur in Jerusalem where the Israeli Military Censor had to approve the contents of all Palestinian media prior to publication. "We had to be careful how we wrote the stories," Abu Khater said. "And the censorship was always in our thoughts."

Under these restraints, newspapers relied on under-the-table support and subsidies from the various political forces at play, financial models that to a degree continue today. *Al-Quds*, for example, began as a pro-Jordanian paper in 1952, but then switched allegiance to the PLO in the early 90s when the tides began to change in favor of the Palestinian cause. Decades later, Abu Khater and several other journalists I interviewed still hesitated at first to speak about some of the past PLO ties.

The prospects for Palestinian sovereignty—and local media opportunities—started to improve in the period between the first intifada (1987) and the signing of the 1994 Oslo Accords.[15] The agreement created the PA and granted it partial sovereignty over Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem—areas it designated as the future state of Palestine. The PA, led by the recently returned Yasser Arafat and his Fatah party, moved quickly to assert control over the local media that had begun to develop during the PLO leadership's absence. Beginning in 1994, the PA directly or indirectly closed all local newspapers and helped to create two new daily papers in the West Bank—*al-Hayat al-Jadida* in 1994 and *al-Ayyam* in 1995—and revitalized a third, *al-Quds*.[16]

Between puffs of his cigarette, Abu Khater tried to situate the press' evolution and stagnation since the early 90s. "To be honest with you, I don't really have high hopes at the moment. The way I see it, without the rule of law, without some really strong legal system so journalists who write a story feel like there is someone or something to protect him if some political party tries to attack him because of his views, we are not going to go anywhere. Journalists who work under such constraints are not going to dig into some really interesting stories, to talk about corruption and political officials…. Because of the political situation we live under, everyone says that we

have an occupation that should be our concern and not worry about internal differences. But if we focus mainly on the occupation and ignore our own problems we keep sinking lower and lower. And that's unfortunately how I see it happening now… The foreign press still relies on the Israeli media for news, even about the Palestinians. There is still a lot we have to do to reach a standard where we can compete."

Overview of Time Period Covered

"Imshi hadd al-heit."(Walk along the wall.)

– Hani al-Masri, political commentator

Journalists I spoke to generally divided the ups and downs of the media scene under the PA into five key phases.[17] In the first stage, from September 1993 to mid-1994, Palestinians for the first time were allowed to develop their own indigenous radio and TV stations in addition to the print sector. In the second phase, from July 1994 to the first PLC elections in January 1996, journalists from newly created or revived media organizations experienced a great deal of repression from the PA as it tried to assert its newly legitimized control. During the third period, from the 1996 elections to the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, the overall rate of harassment decreased, but an atmosphere of fear further entrenched the culture of self-censorship and poor professional services offered journalists.

In the fourth stage, from September 2000 to the second PLC elections in March 2006, the press was largely concerned with the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at the expense of coverage of local and internal issues.[18] During the second intifada, journalists daily faced war-like conditions in their territories, difficulties in accessing information and resources, and threats from armed Palestinian brigades who amidst the chaos became their own fourth authority. The death in 2004 of the charismatic leader Yasser Arafat also affected the PA's media politics, raising the ceiling for criticism slightly.

The fifth phase began in June 2007 with Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip after its success in the 2006 elections. The Palestinian journalists I interviewed commonly used the word "painful" to describe this polarizing stage. Beginning in 2007, the Hamas and PLO-aligned governments in the Gaza Strip and West Bank respectively cracked down, closed, and closely monitored many media organizations. Those that remained were forced to take sides and for the first time the term incitement, *tahrid*, a word commonly used to describe violently anti-Israel and anti-Jewish messages in Palestinian media, became a norm when discussing the divisive discourse of intra-Palestinian media coverage.[19]

Future analyses will have to consider the impact on Palestinian media of the revolutionary events of 2011 in the Arab world. There is no doubt that the Arab Spring has created new facts on the

ground that are affecting the local Palestinian newsroom. But while the rise of media such as the pan-Arab satellite channel Al Jazeera and more recently social media platforms like Facebook have challenged the authoritative routines and conventions of print journalism, they seem to have had a far less significant day-to-day effect on the three West Bank-based newspapers in terms of how and why information is shared and published. The Internet has enabled the easier exchange of news between the disparate parts of Palestine, but it has not affected how this information is then constructed and conveyed as dramatically as in other media systems.[20]

Rather than rely on local media as a source for news and analysis, studies show that over 70 percent of Palestinians today turn to the Qatar-based Al Jazeera as the first or second source for news. Less than 30 percent of Palestinians read the local newspapers. Studies also show that Palestinians want more local coverage and investigative stories—and still the newspapers do not respond to that demand.[21]

An aging man now, Hani al-Masri has lived these ups and downs. He has been in the field for decades, first as a writer for the pre-Oslo newspapers and then as Director General of Publications at the Palestinian Ministry of Information. He began writing while at university in Egypt as part of his activism for Palestinian causes. Now he writes a weekly column for *al-Ayyam*, the newspaper of the elite. From his years both writing for and regulating the press, al-Masri has a sense of the larger picture: the way that Israeli and Palestinian policies and practices—some of which he was responsible for—have come to suppress the press' autonomy.

Sitting in his Ramallah office, he shared a Palestinian saying that cautions people to toe the line and not anger those in power: "Imshi hadd al-heit." *Walk along the wall.* In this case, the wall he was referring to represents the intra-Palestinian social and political red lines that journalists are instructed not to cross lest they face the amorphous consequences. In particular, he was discussing the political polarization of the local press after the 2007 split. But a few miles away from al-Masri's office sits the Qalandia checkpoint that separates Ramallah and Jerusalem. There, a real wall also serves as a visual reminder of the multi-layered barriers that shape Palestine's "occupied" fourth estate.

Israeli Anti-press Violations

"The Israeli system is against Palestinian journalists."

– Fadi Arouri, formerly of *al-Ayyam*

Fadi Arouri did not see the bullet coming. It was 2007 and Arouri, then a photojournalist for *al-Ayyam* as well as several foreign news outlets, was covering a clash between the IDF and an armed Palestinian faction in Ramallah's iconic al-Manara square. A moment later he was down,

lying in shock on the pavement, shot three times by an Israeli tank ten meters away. Arouri lost an appendix and half a liver that day, and spent ten months recovering, with the hospital and court costs reaching thousands of dollars. The IDF denied responsibility: they claimed he was negligent and in the confusing line of fire with no obvious press credentials. But a colleague caught Arouri's assault on camera. In the shaky video, he is wearing a helmet and a bulletproof vest with the word "press" written on it—generally known signs of a journalist. Now confined to the territories without traveling rights, Arouri cannot avoid driving past the bullet-ridden lion statues that sit in the center of al-Manara square.[22]

Every Palestinian journalist I interviewed had clashed with an Israeli soldier, whether on or off the job. The Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem is an undeniable barrier obstructing the opportunities of local Palestinian journalists.[23] It is not always as bloody as Arouri's encounter, but through displays of direct violence and disciplinary power, the Israeli military control of Palestinian territories is an inescapable reality for any journalist in the field. Even weekly non-violent protests, such as those that have emerged in villages like Bil'in, have become a major flashpoint, with soldiers firing rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas at journalists—which in the eyes of the journalists further politicizes the events and their coverage.

Like all Palestinians, journalists are subject to internal checkpoints and closures that Israel controls, making movement within the territories an often arduous and time-consuming endeavor and movement outside the territories generally impossible. "As a lot of Palestinians, I paid the price for occupation," *al-Ayyam* journalist Hussam Ezzedeen concisely put it.[24] Palestinian journalists are quick to point out the harassment, arrests, destruction of property, and other abuses, sometimes to a deadly degree, that they face at the hands of Israeli soldiers and settlers at checkpoints and during raids and demonstrations. The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) delineates twelve common tactics that Israeli (and Palestinian political and military forces) use to suppress the press: attacks, detentions, arrests, summons for investigations, prevention of coverage, prevention of travel/deportation, destruction of property, threats, closures/blockades, equipment confiscation, and frequency disruption.[25]

In addition to conducting cross-border raids, the Israeli military has reoccupied parts of Area A and B during certain periods in the last two decades, while the growth of Israeli settlements has also extended the Israeli civilian and military presence in the territories. Palestinians with a Jerusalem ID or Jordanian citizenship have a slightly higher threshold for travel, but are still subject to the whims of the young soldier at the checkpoint or the District Coordinating Office. As the Israelis control who and what legally crosses the borders, journalists face barriers when trying to transport equipment such as cameras and computers, which can sit for months or more at crossings waiting for the proper clearance. This also limits the ability of journalists who are West Bank or Gaza residents to work for *al-Quds*, which is Jerusalem based, or to cover a beat outside their area.

Editor-in-chief of *al-Hayat al-Jadida* Hafez Barghouti recalled with revulsion how the newspaper's building was bombed by the Israeli military during the Ramallah siege in the second intifada.[26] "We printed in the morning and people came with cars without lights to take the newspapers," he recalled. "I used to have to come to the newspaper by ambulance, because it was under curfew and it was the only way. We had to change the staff every week: they ate, slept, and worked here." For many weeks, however, the newspaper was unable to publish. "No one could move. Why should I print a newspaper—for the soldiers to read it?"

The journalists I interviewed were also all very conscious of their second-class status. "The Israeli system is against Palestinian journalists," Arouri said in 2011 of his experiences. "For the Israeli army it makes no difference how you are working. You are a Palestinian journalist and you are at the top of the list."

This feeling of unequal treatment is in part codified by the Israeli Government Press Office's (GPO) generally unequal treatment of Palestinian journalists. Palestinian journalists work without freedoms afforded to other media workers, such as holding Israeli press credentials and enjoying equal access to court systems, severely limiting where they can travel and how they can request information. The GPO argues that too often Palestinian journalists act as nationalist activists rather than journalists, publishing stories that incite violence against Israelis and Jews, as several media-watchdog groups document.[27] It is worth noting, however, that the secretary of the Israeli Foreign Press Association (FPA) has criticized the larger effect of this policy, saying of Palestinian journalists: "They have no recognition. Not as journalists, not as anything else.[28]

In the Oslo years, journalists in the local press could more easily access Israeli politicians, spokespeople, and press conferences. Maher Esheikh, *al-Quds* managing editor, recalled interviewing Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu. "Nowadays you hardly ever think of things like that," he explained in August 2011.[29] It all changed with the second intifada and beginning in 2002 the GPO refused to renew Israeli press passes for journalists from the territories who were working in both the local and foreign press. In contrast, Israeli and foreign (i.e. non-Palestinian) journalists receive press passes with relative ease.[30] Mohammad Abu Khadier of *al-Quds* recalled how he lost his Israeli press pass six years ago after he asked Ariel Sharon a question about Palestinian freedoms at a press conference. He has been unable to cover anything in depth on the Israeli side since.[31]

It is important to consider how although the Oslo Accords provided a great many improvements for Palestinians, it also institutionalized an unequal distribution of power between Israeli and Palestinian forces that gave Israel continuing jurisdiction over local journalists. One of its ongoing legacies is the ingrained sense that Palestinian journalists must necessarily be Palestinians first and journalists second.

At the conclusion of our conversation in 2011 I asked Arouri what being a Palestinian journalist meant to him. He expressed it in the following way: "As a Palestinian journalist, I feel I am responsible to publish the Palestinian news story in all matters. I am responsible to fight for the Palestinian story and to fight against the Israeli story that is published against the Palestinians… But I think that all Palestinian journalists in their character for sure they are much more patriotic because they live everything. They lived the first intifada, the second intifada. For sure their friends being killed or injured, maybe themselves being injured or facing problems with the Israeli army. The best word for the Palestinian [journalist] is that he is a soldier, maybe a soldier without a gun. A soldier of the pen."

Palestinian Anti-press Violations

"'We deny, and we condemn strongly' and blah blah blah. Ok, let the political line go, and go to the [real] life."

– Hussam Ezzedeen, *al-Ayyam*

The professional impediments that Palestinian journalists face are not limited to direct Israeli anti-press violations: they are also fostered by repressive norms and routines that the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinian political, social, and security forces reinforce.[32]

Acclaimed Palestinian journalist Yousef Shayeb knows this well. Sitting in the chic Zaman café in Ramallah smoking a cigarette and flipping through the pages of the day's *al-Ayyam,* he stressed his personal commitment to the paper. "I love *al-Ayyam*," he said in August 2011. "I cannot get out."[33] Shayeb, who has been at *al-Ayyam* for thirteen years and is Palestine's only film and art critic, wanted to be a journalist since his childhood in Kuwait: he used to watch an animated French show in which the main character was a journalist. "Since then I knew that I must be a journalist," he said.

Yet Shayeb was also quick to criticize the political, military, and commercial "interventions" (*tadakhkhulat)* on the part of the PA that plague his profession. It is not merely that the newspapers generally mimic the PA's version of events, Shayeb explained, but these politicized pressures have come to control virtually all parts of the profession. In practice, political expediency trumps journalistic integrity. "I can write what I want outside of Palestine," Shayeb sighs as he closed the paper. "But I cannot write what I want inside Palestine."

Six months later, in early February 2012, West Bank Palestinian security forces detained Shayeb without a warrant, interrogating him for eight hours. The arrest was allegedly for stories he wrote in *al-Ghad*, a Jordanian newspaper, on corruption in a Palestinian diplomatic mission in France. He refused to disclose his sources to the security forces, which he technically must do under Palestinian law. On March 25, the Palestinian Attorney General ordered him arrested again,

reportedly on charges of libel based on the Jordanian Penal Code still in place in Palestine. Shayeb has since been released on bail, but is reportedly being sued by the Palestinian foreign minister, in addition to the French Ambassador and his deputy.[34]

Referring to the challenge of reporting amidst the Palestinian *tadakhkhulat*, Shayeb said back in August 2011, "It makes me a lot of trouble with the politicians here… But it makes me feel that I am a real journalist."

Indeed, the journalists interviewed had many stories of *tadakhkhulat* of varying severity, from hostile calls criticizing certain coverage to the destruction of recorders and cameras while in the field, to summons, interrogations, and detentions at the hands of Palestinian security forces. Thus, government, business, and security forces all combine to flex their soft and hard power in preventing Palestinian print journalists from developing an empowered and independent professional sphere.

While the PA formally provides freedoms of the press and expression for journalists through several laws, such as the Basic Law and 1995 Palestinian Press and Publications Law, in practice these legalities further a framework that fails to recognize journalistic work as differentiated from other practices or institutions. Journalists, for example, are often denied access to buildings or meetings; *al-Ayyam*'s Ezzedeen indignantly recalled how he was banned from the Parliament in late 1999 because of an article he wrote on the PLC. Moreover, in order to publish, a newspaper must attain a license from the Ministry of Information, a condition that reinforces the carrot-and-stick relationship between the newspapers and the PA. Palestinian media scholar Juman Quneis summarizes the situation journalists generally face: "The laws are too weak to protect anyone, especially journalists. Any security group can go and arrest a journalist from their home without even a warrant, a notice, anything legal."[35]

To a great degree, the unclear division of labor in and between government branches and ministries that Oslo instated also institutionalized the personalization of politics that continues to characterize the PA's rule and the work of journalists.[36] The limited development of democratic processes and an autonomous civil society in Palestine enabled Arafat, and now other high-level politicians, to easily monopolize and coerce civil society, including the construction and content of the media. "Until now our media is controlled by old guys, the old generation that is still affected by the political regime," Ezzedeen said in 2011.

In a system of cliental politics, security forces often run rampant at the behest of certain parties, personalities, or families, while the courts and legal systems remain a corrupt and dead-end route for journalists seeking safeguards. To maintain control of the Palestine agenda vis-à-vis Israel and Palestinian opposition groups, the PA and Fatah have tried to silence internal disagreements while co-opting powerful families, businesspeople, and civil society leaders. Journalists have no recognized right to access information or to criticize the actions of these powerful entities. Denied the necessary protections to disseminate information freely, journalists mimic

government press releases, avoid investigative reporting or specializations, copy and paste news from international agencies, and generally self-censor to avoid crossing into controversial coverage.[37]

The results are notably evident in the kind of news presented. As Jamal summarizes, "The dailies' selection of subjects worthy of coverage and their methods of priming help to promote the PA's national agenda and frame public attitudes in favor of official policy making…. Most of the front-page headlines, as well as the editorials, address the efforts of the national elite to achieve a suitable solution for the Palestine question… Internal affairs are covered from the same vantage point, with problems and disagreements framed in order to contribute to the national endeavors for statehood."[38]

Indeed, the journalists I interviewed routinely criticized the intense politicization of the content. "'We deny, and we condemn strongly' and blah blah blah," Ezzedeen exclaimed in frustration in 2011, parroting the writing style of news reports that present information through official PA statements. "Ok, let the political line go, and go to the [real] life. There's a life of the people, restaurants, festivals, sports. Our media should deal with this kind of life." This kind of pro-PA coverage became most pronounced in the months following the 2007 split between the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, when headlines and articles in the three newspapers took very polarized positions—often through violent language and images—against Hamas and its supporters.[39]

The lack of security also reinforces the prominence of *wasta* (connections), big business, and family interests in the media sphere, further limiting the professional autonomy of journalists in the Palestinian press. As journalist and media scholar Walid Batrawi put it, "The duty of monitoring and censoring what the Palestinian media say is not limited to the security forces but [is] also taken up by local communities, militant groups, and political parties."[40]

In this way, while in the past two decades technological developments have greatly altered the global media scene, on the local level the Palestinian media landscape is still very much a product of its political context. Nabil Khatib, a former *al-Fajr* journalist and now *Al Arabiya* executive director, emphasized the relationship between the shape of local media and the political environment, "We are three hundred years behind Sweden; we have not yet had the chance to develop the internal institutions that would enable freedom of the press to become a reality."[41]

Commercial Politicization

"The more you print, the more you lose."

– Hafez Barghouti, *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*

Hafez Barghouti always wanted to run a newspaper. He started writing for a paper in Kuwait in the mid-70s, but was expelled in 1986 for what he called his "professional activities" and "satiric style." A longtime PLO member, Barghouti returned to Palestine and worked in local papers during the first intifada. In 1994Arafat asked him to open a paper, Barghouti recalled in an interview in August 2011. Thus he became editor-in-chief of *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, a position he has solely held since.

Barghouti described how he once proposed to raise the price of his paper from one shekel to two, but Arafat objected. "He said why? Let the people read. Don't you know that one shekel can provide a paper for a family in Gaza?" Today *al-Hayat* sells for one shekel, and *al-Quds* and *al-Ayyam* for two. But they all face a similarly difficult financial situation. In conversations with top editors of the three newspapers, all expressed the desire to increase circulation but described no strategies in place or plans to do so. "The more you print, the more you lose," Barghouti put it.

But there is more to the story. As Palestinian journalist and media activist Daoud Kuttab explained, "The PA and the PLO have an invested interest in the newspapers, and they provide direct or indirect funding to keep these media alive. They provide funding in terms of advertising, by giving them grants to print schoolbooks and things like that, and there are also strong rumors that they have a number of senior editors on their payroll. So there is a soft kind of sponsorship and control."[42] Hillel Nossek and Khalil Rinnawi elaborate on this politicized commercial model: "Mainly as the result of economic instability, most of the media organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip subsequently fell under direct or indirect PA control, making it virtually impossible for media to effectively organize independently."[43]

Indeed, it is common knowledge that the newspapers prioritize their commercial and political sponsors over the value of reporting stories. Along with large Palestinian business companies and foreign NGOs, the PA is a key source for advertisements, making its support a de facto financial requisite. The PA also subsidizes the distribution of the newspapers to offices "free of charge," further inflating circulation and revenue rates. The editors of the papers estimate that *al-Quds*' circulation is at 50,000, *al-Ayyam* 10,000, and *al-Hayat* 8,000.[44] No doubt the true numbers are much lower.

With the development of the private sector economy in the 1990s, including banking, housing, and electricity, as well as small businesses and foreign campaigns like USAID projects, new sources of funds emerged for Palestinian newspapers.[45] However, these new economic elites have largely remained tied to the PA and its beneficiaries. "If there is a story against *Jawwal* [major Palestinian cell phone carrier], of course they will not publish it because it is against their client," Arouri said in 2011. Indeed, substitute *Jawwal* with any large business, organization, or charity, and chances are high that probing investigations will not reach the newsstand.

In such a small economy, the PA and the economic elite can directly and indirectly control the business model: critical coverage of a business or ministry may be missing, but their advertisements surely are not. "Newspapers have emphasized a national responsibility approach to the role of the press, rather than of the press driven by the economic forces of the market," Jamal explained.[46]

Some *al-Hayat al-Jadida* workers are indeed on the PA payroll, as Kuttab suggested. According to an interview with Barghouti in January 2012, in the late 1990s Arafat bought the bulk of *al-Hayat* shares to bolster the new newspaper. Since then, the PA has continued to subsidize the salaries of some *al-Hayat* writers; Barghouti would not give exact numbers when pressed or provide further details about the current status of these shares. Amongst Palestinians, *al-Hayat* has the reputation of being closest to the PA—no surprise given its financial relationship.[47]

Speculation that journalists at the other two dailies are also paid by the PA could not be confirmed. These kinds of facts are hard to come by, as there is little available accounting and, conscious of the publishing license's capital requirement, editors are loath to provide real circulation and revenue rates. *Al-Ayyam* makes significant profits from its printing press, which as Kuttab alluded to, prints textbooks and other publications funded by the PA. *Al-Quds* is known for its advertisements, which editors say provide the bulk of its revenue.[48]

Palestinian Government Media Center director Ghassan Khatib highlighted the overall importance of this commercial process. He explained in August 2011, "The Authority has created unfair competition. It is the continuous line of the Palestinian Authority that is giving attention mainly to the official media. This factor is continuing its effect on reducing the chances of free initiatives."[49]

For the journalists, these financial restraints are acutely felt in the low salaries they receive and the inadequate investment in the equipment with which to work. On average (at the time of the interviews) journalists are paid around 2,000 shekels ($500-$600) a month, and section editors at most around 4,000 shekels; in comparison, foreign journalists are paid much higher salaries. According to Jamal, these low and insecure salaries make journalists more susceptible to bribery and patronage, as well as increasingly likely to work for foreign media outlets at the same time.[50] *Al-Ayyam* journalist Shayeb told me in 2011 that although he has now won several international rewards, he is still paid the same low salary as before his career advanced. "They treat us as children," he complained.

In this way, while the international press reaps the financial benefits of covering this region, journalists in the Palestinian press continue to lack the basic contracts, viable salaries, and functioning technologies with which to develop themselves and compete.[51]

Self-Censorship

"What would you do?"

– Khalil Shaheen, formerly of *al-Ayyam*

"What would you do if you have news about a female child that is kidnapped, raped, and killed? How would you deal with that?" It was the fall of 2000 and Khalil Shaheen, then an editor at *al-Ayyam*, was asking himself that very question. The police had just found the raped corpse of an eight-year-old girl who went missing two days before while walking to school. The killing occurred in a village shortly before the outbreak of the second intifada, a time of great insecurity and frustration in the territories. Now Shaheen had to decide how to cover the news: what should he do?

Al-Ayyam has no internal media policies formally delineating the paper's institutional norms of conduct for coverage. In fact, at the time of the interviews, none of the three main newspapers had written guidelines for reporting and editing, nor did they have a code of ethics to provide. As a result, the pages within are often fraught with inconsistencies in sourcing, repetitive information, and little attention to the accuracy, details, or overall presentation of the news narrative. When questions arise over how to cover certain events, the editor-in-chief or managing editor wields discretionary power and acts according to whatever political or social actors and factors are pressuring the media that day. In this environment rife with self-censorship, issues like rape generally go unreported, and journalists, weary of the amorphous consequences, rarely try to violate this unwritten rule.

Shaheen disagreed with the way *al-Ayyam* covered the girl's rape and murder that day. He wanted the story on the front page alongside the victim's photo. It was, he argued, a shocking story deserving of this coverage. But editor-in-chief Akram Haniya intervened and refused.[52] Instead, Haniya put the article below the front page fold, without a photo. The article was short and descriptive, with no framing or discussion of the event within its larger context. As is customary for the rare reports on sexual assaults, only the girl's initials were used.

"He said you have to imagine the impact on society," Shaheen said, recalling Haniya's rationale. "We have a conservative society that will not accept publishing the name of their daughter and we will have problems." In this case, the murder's backdrop—the imminent second intifada, a period of socio-political turmoil—greatly conditioned its coverage. It was not simply that Haniya feared upsetting the girl's family by publicly airing their grief, but also the larger message this publicity might send: namely, that Palestinian society was unsafe and rampant with internal problems. And according to the newspaper's unwritten code, exposing this was not the role of the Palestinian journalist.

A 2008 MADA report placed Shaheen's experience in context: "Palestinian territories are characterized by the security domination of many factions, which leads to a multiplicity of actors who violate media freedoms: the Israeli occupation forces, the Israeli settlers, the Palestinian

security services in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in addition to armed Palestinian groups. This combination has not only led to a significant decline in the freedoms of expression and freedom of information landscape, but leads journalists and media outlets to practice too much self-censorship."[53]

Journalists recalled how, when they sit to down to write, they instinctively err on the side of caution, a practice in their workplace that is now like second nature. Mohammad Abu Khadier of *al-Quds* explained in 2011, "Ah, *reqaba zatiyya* [self-censorship]. Sometimes when you feel that the editor upstairs of our newspaper maybe he doesn't like this guy [in an article], you are going to chose another. Maybe not the expert, but maybe if I use him they will publish it. If you work in this country, you can't avoid some issues like this."

Indeed, in a tiny territory of just 2.5 million, the creation of the news in the West Bank is very often based on interpersonal relations. Self-censorship regarding certain people, topics, or terminology often reflects the personal, day-to-day experiences of the journalists and the societal pressures under which they operate. While politics are part of the story, sometimes it is as mundane as a journalist trying to find a way to publish a story within the discretionary likes and dislikes of the editor on top. "I wrote about problems in one hospital in Ramallah and later found it canceled because of [the] relation between the editor-in-chief and the head of the hospital," Arouri of *al-Ayyam* recalled in 2011. "It was not something political, but a way for the editor to make a favor for that person."

The journalists I interviewed were quite open about the prevalence of self-censorship and, after decades of conflict, they all assumed that everyone else was doing it. While self-censorship is, by nature, difficult to quantify, the subjects that trigger it are part of the unwritten code of what is not fit to print for the Palestinian journalist. Listed by Jamal in 2000, they cover: any material that reflects negatively on the PLO chairman or his family; criticism of the PA patronage system, especially favoritism and corruption; any subject concerning the lack of political, administrative or financial accountability of PA officials; and criticism of social and immoral behavior in society, having to do with clan relationships, religious discrimination or gender problems."[54]

Palestinian media expert and Al Jazeera Jerusalem Bureau chief Walid Omari adds several more specific red lines: incest, suicide, Islam, sexual assault, honor killings, corruption, prostitution, extremism, child exploitation, and persecution of women. Self-censorship thus not only leads to restricted coverage of the political domain but of social, cultural, and religious domains as well.[55]

Walid Batrawi also drew a direct connection between self-censorship and the vague wording of the 1995 Palestinian Press and Publication law, which prohibits publishing information that threatens national unity. "If the law says that nothing should be published against Palestinian unity, or national unity, but they do not give a definition of what national unity means, I start thinking when I begin to write that maybe this sentence might harm the national unity. Ultimately, it leads you to self-censorship, which is an extremely dangerous thing. The

Palestinian Authority does not ask you to submit your articles to the censor, but in one way or another, the Palestinian press law restricts you."[56]

While Palestinian journalists are conditioned to accept and exercise self-censorship, some do try to resist it. For example, *al-Ayyam*'s Ezzedeen described how he wrote a now famous report about the abuse of government cars by PA officials. He explained how "he protected himself with his professionalism," meaning that he spent weeks thoroughly researching the story so that no facts could be contested. The success of his story showed that taboo topics can sometimes be safely broached if investigated and reported thoroughly. Most interesting, he criticized the tendency of some journalists to hide behind the excuse of self-censorship out of complacency rather than concrete fear.

His is not a typical situation, though. As a distinguished writer in both the international and local press Ezzedeen has more privileges and protection than the average journalist. The typical journalist, he noted in the same conversation, could face severe consequences: "If I write something about an officer, maybe if I am weak I will suffer from the officer directly."

For some journalists, the foreign press hence serves as a welcome outlet for stories that they cannot get published in the local press. Mohammad Daraghmeh, formerly of *al-Ayyam*, described how he wrote an article on arms smuggling amongst Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians. "I was proud of that story because I made a huge research and it touched a nerve to society and I thought that I was doing a great job," Daraghmeh explained.[57] But *al-Ayyam* "killed it," deeming the content too politically damaging. The PA has an agreement with Israel to stop the flow of arms, which the article proved it was failing to do. At the time, Daraghmeh was also a stringer for the Associated Press, which gladly accepted the story. "Oh, AP was joyful for that story. And they disseminated the story and they gave me a bonus."

The Israeli Military Censor of Jerusalem Publications creates another layer of complication for journalists in the struggle over their professional autonomy. A legacy of the British mandate period, the censor was much harsher in the pre-PA period; currently it only mandates prior review of information it deems seriously concerned with security, such as the covert movement of military forces. As Esheikh, *al-Quds* managing editor, explained in 2011, "Nowadays there almost is no censorship, because it doesn't mean anything anymore. Why would they censor the newspaper when you can turn your computer on or the TV and you would listen to anything that in the past they would not be allowed to publish?"

Of the three daily newspapers, *al-Quds* is the only one that is daily subject to the Israeli censor, although during sensitive security times, the IDF occasionally censors *al-Hayat al-Jadida* and *al-Ayyam* when they are brought across Israeli-controlled borders into Gaza or East Jerusalem.[58]

In spite of the increasing rarity of active press censorship, the stigma of Israeli censorship, however, still remains. All journalists interviewed (and an unmeasured number of Palestinians)

knew that *al-Quds* used to be harshly censored and still remains under Israeli control. From their perspective, this seemed to reinforce the degree to which journalists continue to view their work as a politicized and subjugated practice. Many of those who presently work at *al-Quds* (and the two other newspapers) have also been journalists since the days of harsher Israeli censorship. They remember the sting of the Israeli censor, whose existence was cited as another sign of the persisting occupation.

The Palestinian journalists I interviewed also struggled over how to mediate the competing missions of their work: the desire to be independent and responsible journalists—to present their people with the realities of their condition—and the individual and socio-political implications of their job under occupation. "[The Israeli occupation] is the kind of existential question that predominates the work of Palestinian media," Kuttab concluded in an interview. "And so it is very difficult to deal with issues like corruption, like workers' rights, women's rights, all these issues that require a kind of breaking the consensus."

Indeed, there was a general sentiment expressed that the international media is biased against the Palestinian narrative and Palestinian media must work to counteract this prejudice by portraying PA politics and society in a positive light. "No one in this kind of work here can tell me they are completely subjective," *al-Ayyam* managing editor Abdul Nasser Najjar argued in 2011. "For example, if now there is an accident at a demonstration in Bil'in, how can I write about the demonstration? Do I write 'an Israeli soldier' or 'Israeli occupation'?"[59]

On the other hand, journalists emphasized terminology like fourth estate, independence, and objectivity as ideals to which they should strive. They also had their own ways to characterize the desire to speak truth to power. "I usually write just from what I am seeing," explained Khadier of *al-Quds*. "I try to be in the field, not to quote from the TV. I try to be straight. I pray." Yousef Shayeb emphasized the human side of events that is too often sidelined. "The good journalist catches what other people think is normal. When I walk in the street I must have ten eyes… I'm not interested if Israel builds the wall in a village, but I'm writing about the effect of this on the Palestinian people." Others echoed Khadier and Shayeb's emphasis on reliable and realistic field reporting, rather than rehashing reports from too often duplicitous sources.

But rather than openly address these unresolved tensions over the roles and responsibilities of Palestine's local press—i.e. should it strive to follow an ethic of objectivity, to be a force for agenda-setting, or something else?—those in power have largely dismissed internal deliberations over what principles and norms Palestinian journalists should follow as a counter-productive endeavor in an occupation era.

In this way, caught in conflict and shaped by Israeli and PA red lines, the three dailies benefit from presenting an overtly biased account that reinforces the perspectives of the political elite and often casts Israel in a violent light. For many, objectivity is a professional ideal stressed at

training sessions held by NGOs, but that in practice has few institutional benefits. Beginning in the twentieth century, the ethic of objectivity—the press' claim to serve as an honest broker—was institutionalized as the ideal standard of American journalism as it became professionally honorable and financially profitable for journalists to claim to provide objective news narratives for mass dissemination, in conjunction with other media trends.[60]

Facing an occupation and authoritarian proxy governments, however, the local press in Palestine has for decades operated under quite different configurations. Instead, news-value decisions are made on a day-to-day basis and the journalists are thus left with no foundation upon which to assert their right to more standardized working conditions.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate

"If we have a strong syndicate, we have a strong media."

– Abdul Nasser Najjar, *al-Ayyam*

Of all the problems they faced, many of the journalists I spoke to were most eager to discuss those rife in the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate. "I look to what goes on in the syndicate for what is really going on the ground," explained Ezzedeen in 2011, echoing a common sentiment. "When can I say that the media will be free? When I can say that the syndicate elections will be free."

Palestinian labor law allows for organizing professional unions, most of which have long been institutionally connected to the PLO and its liberation movements. In theory, the Journalists Syndicate "purports to have taken on the task of defending the interests of journalists, establishing a social system that respects journalists' rights, and supporting journalists who face the oppression of the authorities and occupation."[61] In practice, the story reads differently. As Ezzedeen expressed, journalists today see the syndicate as a microcosm of the larger media sphere: it too is co-opted by political rather than professional forces that interfere in the production and dissemination of the news. Issues surrounding salaries and workers' rights are rarely addressed and for many years strong objections to PA violations were largely dealt with privately, with few public campaigns.

This is partly the case because trade and professional unions in Palestine are not independent bodies, but are considered part of the PLO and therefore implicated in broader politics.[62]The head of each union is automatically a member of the PLO council, a powerful and prestigious position. Consequently, the Fatah party, the dominant party in the West Bank, is invested in preserving its majority in the unions in order to maintain its control in the PLO council. The syndicate rarely holds free elections, and until 2010 the same Fatah-affiliated man, Na'im al-Tubasi, was president of the syndicate—and widely known not to be a journalist.

The few times the syndicate has held elections votes have been cast along party lines. Journalist press cards have been granted to virtually anyone applying—journalist or not—so that Fatah can retain its majority when elections are held; the vegetable grocer or delivery man is a common stereotype of who votes for Fatah in syndicate elections. Shaheen confirmed this fact with a devious smile; and Al-Masri asked with evident frustration, "How can you have democratic elections when more than three hundred of them are not journalists?" An unfortunate consequence of the politicized distribution of journalist ID cards adds weight to the Israeli claim that they cannot assume that those carrying Palestinian press passes are in fact journalists.

There have been several movements to reform and improve the syndicate over the last two decades, and recent changes in leadership in particular have proven fairly promising in initiating reforms. In November 2010, Abdul Nasser Najjar (*al-Ayyam* managing editor) was elected president, ending al-Tubasi's reign. A group of journalists has also developed substantial new internal guidelines that address many of the syndicate's structural problems, particularly the registry and elections, and are intended to replace the old bylaws.[63] "The problem is not just the elections, but how to upgrade and develop the basic law of the syndicate…to have a syndicate that represents those who work in the media," Shaheen explained in 2012.

In the past year, however, there has been a split between the West Bank and Gaza Strip branches of the syndicate. When the syndicate held another round of elections in the beginning of March 2012, Hamas threatened to arrest any journalist who participated. This divide has put further internal changes on hold, like much else in Palestine, until after a long-anticipated Fatah and Hamas reconciliation.

"Sometimes I ask myself, what is point of being part of the Palestinian syndicate," Arouri said. "They will not give me anything. They will not help me to solve any kind of problems. But again we think that at some point we need a group to collect all the Palestinian journalists under an umbrella."

Najjar is insistent that positive changes can be made. "I want to see the syndicate as what I saw in Belgium and France and other Western countries. I want it to be an independent syndicate. If we have a strong syndicate, we have a strong media. They depend on each other."[64]

Internal Organization

"We need a system to support the journalists."

– Muntaser Hamdan, *al-Hayat al-Jadida*

For Muntaser Hamdan, the staff of *al-Hayat al-Jadida* is like his family. For the last 15 years he has worked in the same office under the same management with many of the same men covering

much of the same story. He has been with these men during their highs and their lows, at the moments that made it into the newspaper's pages, and those that did not. But while decades of discord have disrupted much of Palestinian political, economic, and socio-cultural life, for Hamdan the routines and norms of his newspaper have largely remained unchanged.[65]

For 15 years the organization has not profoundly changed from within. Since Hafez Barghouti became editor-in-chief in 1994, there have been no all-staff meetings or editorial board meetings that might contest his power. There are no internal incentives for journalists to pursue investigative stories, or structures that enable them to specialize in a field or advance their career. In addition, salaries are low, contracts ineffective, and the Palestinian press card is too politically compromised to be of real use. "We need a system to support the journalists," Hamdan concluded. But those in power prevent that.

Seated in a side room off the main *al-Hayat* office with a cigarette in one hand and a Turkish coffee in the other, Hamdan admits that his newspaper—rife with political, military and commercial interference and limited reporting, editing, and ethical standards—is not what he had originally imagined. He joined the newspaper as a sports writer in 1996 and eight months later moved to the politics and society division where he remains today. When asked why he began he echoed a familiar refrain: because he liked the news and he wanted to report on the Palestinian story.

But now Hamdan has nowhere in the newspaper to advance. Instead, as the best of the Palestinian press often do, he began to write for foreign news agencies. Like many others, he is deeply frustrated with the limited protections afforded by his politically corrupted union. It should be "the house" of journalists, but in fact it only further complicates life for his extended family at the paper. He knows they can do and deserve better.

Nail Mousa, also of *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, placed these problems within the context of the profession's internal organization. "It's an infrastructural problem," he said in 2012. "Palestinian journalism reflects the news that is in front of it rather than makes the news. It's like the sun. It reflects the rays."[66]

It is no coincidence that while Palestinian journalists win many regional and international writing and reporting rewards each year, it is often for work published online or by an international agency. Indeed, the newspapers are not structured in a way to empower the journalists, increase their competitiveness, or facilitate their advancement. Management at Palestinian newspapers mentioned no internal monetary or symbolic prizes offered as a reward for excellence in coverage or conduct. Editors rarely provide in-house training or professional assessments for their employees; instead, they rely on outside training organized by NGOs.

Other times they simply blame the problems on the university journalism programs, despite some recent improvements in several programs. "It's a very difficult process to create a journalist,"

Barghouti argued in an interview in 2011. "You could not find a complete journalist by advertising in the Palestinian territories. If he finishes university and he studied journalism we find him empty, because he only learned theory and never practice. And when he comes to work he finds all the things that he studied in the university are not useful in the written press."

When speaking about daily reporting practices, journalists from all three newspapers referred to a similar stifling pattern: editors tell them each morning what news they will cover that day rather than encouraging them to seek out or report stories of interest. Often, they spend much of their day covering workshops or conferences, leaving little time for in-depth reporting or developing long-term coverage or investigative studies. Shaheen in 2011 also told of a pattern he observed over the years: at first, new or more daring journalists would ask to cover a certain story or event, but over time they stopped asking. Those already schooled in these restrictive patterns generally never even bothered.

"One of the problems with the Palestinian Press is a management problem," argued Nabil Khatib in a 2003 article on the structure of Palestinian media. "There are seldom editorial meetings in the newspaper or the newsroom. This usually leads to miscommunication between the journalist/reporter and the editors or simply leads to poor coverage of events."[67]

For the journalists, the lack of opportunities to advance professionally within their newspapers was another related managerial problem. Amongst the journalists there is also little room for turnover and even less room for upward mobility. The average journalist has worked at the paper for about ten years, and while reporters can be promoted to be editors, there are a finite number of editorial positions and they do not become vacant often. Similarly, at the management level, those who hold positions of power have strong political affiliations and have stayed in those positions for years, with no mechanism to rotate them. Barghouti has been editor-in-chief at al-*Hayat al-Jadida* since the newspaper opened in 1994. At *al-Ayyam*, Akram Haniya and Abdul Nasser Najjar have been editor-in-chief and managing editor respectively since the newspapers opened in 1995. At *al-Quds*, Walid Abu Zalaf has been editor-in-chief since his father, Mahmoud, died in 2005.

The journalists I spoke to were aware that newsrooms in other places were run differently and they expressed irritation at the lack of opportunities available. Ezzedeen, speaking the day of the August 2011 terror attack in Eilat by Gaza militants, expressed his frustration with the press' stagnation: the majority of Palestinians turn to pan-Arab news outlets like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya as a first source for news, and the newspapers have made no attempt to try and compete. "All the news on the front page is bullshit. For example, today something happened in Eilat. Tonight, Al Arabiya will speak about that, Al Jazeera will speak about that; all the channels will speak about it. Tomorrow in the morning [in the newspaper] we will see about the operation in Eilat. Who will read it [this news in the newspaper]? They are looking for something new.

Tomorrow people want to know when [PA Prime Minister Salam] Fayyad will give them their salary. They already know what happened in Eilat from last night."

Conclusion

This study intended to provide a new perspective on the red lines that shape the practice of local print journalism in Palestine. There are of course many interconnected causes for the press' current stalemate. But understanding print media's political and socio-economic context in the post-Oslo framework is crucial to assessing the occupational problems that Palestinian journalists face and the kind of news that they create. Palestinian journalists in the local press face a unique set of barriers that too often become lost in the larger headlines driven by cycles of Israeli and Palestinian negotiations and violence. Reconsidering the context in which these stories are mediated and constructed, however, can lead to new insights—and perhaps solutions—into the region's seemingly intransigent conflicts. For such a scrutinized territory, there are still many stories left untold.

Further research is needed in all media fields to understand better how Palestinians collect, construct, convey, and communicate information, ideas, and experiences. These issues are of particular importance for journalism where today media changes globally are felt rapidly locally. How, for example, do the news values and production styles of journalists in Palestine vary with other models cross-regionally? How, in the face of new digital challenges such as social media, can journalism as a profession be defined and regulated? How have foreign journalists and international media organizations affected the form and function of local media?

This study focused on one particular facet—local print media—because of these newspapers' important historical and socio-political place in Palestine. However, as Shaheen expressed in an interview in 2011, the status quo at these newspapers is increasingly unsustainable for the journalists and populace alike, both of whom expect more from their local media: "What is the real role of *al-Ayyam* and the others [newspapers] in society if they don't go inside the stories and present the voice of the people themselves? That's why if you ask an ordinary man do you read the newspapers like *al-Ayyam* or *al-Quds*, he will say no I don't read them. If you ask why, he will say I don't trust them. Or somebody told me once in a supermarket…I know more information than they [the newspapers] provide me. And it's true… If the people don't feel that they are present in your coverage, in your news, in your features, in your reports, why should they read what you offer them?"

No doubt the long-promised Palestinian sovereignty would lift much of the burden that Palestinian journalists bear. But it is to the detriment of the Palestinian polity to avoid addressing questions over the appropriate roles and responsibilities of their press now. This "occupied" fourth estate cannot last forever. But what form will follow will in part be shaped by the current

political and socio-economic context. "We hope that we will have a state where no one will be above the law..." Alami concluded in 2011. "We hope that the journalists will be like the watchdog, an honest monitor. And we are working on it."

Miriam Berger *is a freelance writer, a 2012-13 Fulbright Fellow in Egypt, and Fellow at CASA (Center for Arabic Study Abroad) in Cairo. She is currently working on a research project on Egyptian print media and the Internet.*

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[1] See Amal Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy in Palestine: Political Culture, Pluralism, and the Palestinian Authority* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), Amahl Bishara, "Local Hands, International News: Palestinian Journalists and the International Media," *Ethnography* 7, no.1 (2006): 19-46 and Helga Tawil-Souri, "Global and Local Forces for a Nation-State yet to be Born: The Paradox of Palestinian Television Policies," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4, no.3 (2007): 4-25.

[2] These interviews were part of a yearlong honors thesis at Wesleyan University, CT. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from my own interviews conducted in person in August 2011 or January 2012. I was able to conduct research in Ramallah with the generous help of a Davenport summer study grant. I conducted the interviews in both English and Arabic. I specify the language only when the interview was entirely in Arabic. All journalists directly quoted gave permission for their names and affiliations to be used. Because of current research restrictions in Gaza, my researched focused on conditions within the Palestinian Authority-controlled West Bank.

[3] This study intentionally does not focus on analyzing specific content in the newspapers, as its primary concern is reporting on the newsroom environment from an often overlooked angle, that of the journalists.

[4] Maher Alami, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 26, 2011.

[5] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 91. Only the pro-Jordanian *al-Nahar*, which closed in 1997, published news of his arrest. One notable Palestinian journalist, *al-Quds* colleague Daoud Kuttab, did stand up for Alami and was subsequently fired after signing a petition protesting his colleague's detention.

[6] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 89. I use the term Palestine to refer to the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem—the areas generally designated as the future Palestinian state under the Oslo Accords.

[7] Palestinian Government Media Center (PGMC), *Dirasa mashiyya hawla al-wad'a al filastiniyya* (A Baseline Study of the Palestinian Situation), Ramallah, 2011, 27 (Arabic). According to the PGMC's 2011 study, 18% of Palestinians turn to *al-Quds* as a first or second source for news, 8% to *al-Ayyam*, 6% to *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, and 5% to another local paper.

[8] Khalil Shaheen, interview by author, Ramallah, August 28, 2011.

[9] Nibal Thawabteh, "Palestinian Media Map: Production Congestion and Consumption Dispersion," in *Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media*, ed. Beate Josephi (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 74.

[10] Hani al-Masri, interview by author, Ramallah, August 16, 2011.

[11] The local press conditions in Gaza are beyond the scope of this article, given Gaza's differing media history and current research restrictions.

[12] Maher Abu Khater, interview by author, Ramallah, August 19, 2011.

[13] For more on the Palestinian press in this period, see Dov Shinar, *Palestinian Voices: Communication and Nation Building in the West Bank* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 1987), Dov Shinar and Danny Rubenstein, *Palestinian Press in the West Bank: The Political Dimension West Bank Data Base*

Project, ed. The Jerusalem Post (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), Hillel Nossek and Khalil Rinnawi, "Censorship and Freedom of the Press under Changing Political Regimes: Palestinian Media from Israeli Occupation to the Palestinian Authority," *Gazette* 65, no.2 (2003): 183-202, Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Olso Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2003).

[14] Prior to the Israeli occupation, the Jordanians and Egyptians also limited the development of local Palestinian media; the Jordanians incorporated Palestinian media into their own, while the Egyptians outright banned any indigenous publishing.

[15] See Daoud Kuttab, "The Palestinian Media and the Peace Process: The Palestinian Media from the Dark Period of the Intifada to the Emergence of the PNA," in *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 5.4 (1998) and Nabil Khatib, "Media-Communication Strategies: The Palestinian Experience," PASSIA (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs), 1999.

[16] In general, *al-Ayyam* is known as the newspaper of the elite, *al-Quds* as a source for advertisements and read because it is the oldest, and *al-Hayat al-Jadida* as the most aligned with the PA.

[17] Walid Omari, *Al-sahafa al-filastiniyya: thalath mutarek wa sendan* (The Palestinian Press: Three Anvils and a Hammer), Ramallah: The Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, 2010. (Arabic)

[18] Ghazi Bani Ouda, *Al-sahafa al-waraqiyya fi al-daffa al-gharbiyyawa-al-inkisam* (The Print Press in the West Bank and the Split), in *Al-i'lam al-filastiniyya wa al-inkisam* (The Palestinian Media and the Split), eds. Khaled Hroub and Juman Quneis, Ramallah: Muwatin (Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy), 2011 (Arabic).

[19] Incitement may take several forms in newspapers, including direct calls for violence, omitting or sidelining information on Israeli deaths or injuries, provocative photographs, cartoons, etc. See Hroub and Quneis.

[20] The websites of the three dailies are generally a repeat of what was printed, put online daily in PDF form. *Al-Quds*' website is updated more often with new and multimedia information; news is largely provided through partnerships with other news institutions and largely does not come from within the newspaper itself.

[21] Palestinian Government Media Center, *Dirasa mashiyya*.

[22] Fadi Arouri, interview by author, Ramallah, August 18, 2011. I was shown the video by a colleague of Arouri's.

[23] Although based in the West Bank, the three local dailies were also popular in the Gaza Strip before 2007. The Hamas Government in Gaza has since banned their import. There are still a few journalists who write for the papers from Gaza, but the situation is precarious.

[24] Hussam Ezzedeen, interview by author, Ramallah, August 18, 2011.

[25] Mahmoud Altatatetta, *Ta'thir al-intihakat 'ala al-reqaba al-dhatiyya lada al-i'lamiyyin al filastiniyyin* (The impact of violations on self-censorship among Palestinian media workers), Ramallah: Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), 2010.

[26] Hafez Barghouti, interview by author, Ramallah, August 18, 2011.

[27] *Tahrid* is often used to describe the more serious instances of provocation to violence or hatred towards Israelis or Jews and has serious political and legal ramifications under agreements such as the 1998 Wye Agreement. For more on the issue of incitement, see the work of Israeli and Palestinian media monitors Miftah and Kishev. For another perspective, see the work of American groups like MEMRI.

[28] Anonymous, personal Skype interview by author, January 2012.

[29] Maher Esheikh, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 20, 2011.

[30] Stephanie Gutmann, *The Other War: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Struggle for Media Supremacy* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2005). A court case ensued between Reuters and the GPO, but journalists in the local media had no international clout with which to protest. As of 2005, Palestinian journalists first needed to obtain a work permit to enter Israel before they could apply for a GPO card (and then received it only for three months). Most international and Israeli journalists can get a yearlong

pass with relative ease.
[31] Mohammad Abu Khadier, interview by author, Ramallah, August 26, 2011.
[32] This study focuses on the PA, in part because the three newspapers I profile have over the last two decades faced more problems in relation to the PA than to Hamas. I was also unable to access journalists living or working in Gaza.
[33] Yousef Shayeb, interview by author, Ramallah, August 29, 2011.
[34] Reporters Without Borders, "Journalist accused of libel held for another 15 days," April 20, 2012, http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=42223; Amira Hass, "What happens when a Palestinian journalist dares criticize the Palestinian Authority," *Ha'aretz English Newspaper*, April 2, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/what-happens-when-a-palestinian-journalist-darescriticize-the-palestinian-authority-1.422038.
[35] Juman Quneis, "How Laws and Legislations in Palestine Affect Freedom of Expression in Media," *Journalism Testing Legal Boundaries: Media Laws and the Reporting of Arab News*, 2008. (Unpublished)
[36] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 75.
[37] For more examples and analyses, see Miftah's many content analysis studies at miftah.org.
[38] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 77.
[39] For more on this see Haroub and Quneis and Miftah's studies.
[40] Walid Batrawi, "Media-Less Reforms vs. Reform-Less Media" (2002). Accessed August 2011.
[41] Nabil Khatib, "The Structure of the Palestinian Media," The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (2003): 3.
[42] Daoud Kuttab, interview by author, Ramallah, August 24, 2011.
[43] Nossek and Rinnawi, 188.
[44] Walid Batrawi, interview by author, Ramallah, August 14, 2011.
[45] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 96.
[46] Ibid., 77.
[47] In a seeming paradox, journalists noted that because of the paper's more open financial relationship with the ruling regime, it is occasionally able to conduct investigations and criticize actors in the government without facing grave consequences.
[48] Thawabteh, 75. *Al-Quds* is often described as a "family firm," as the same family has run it since it began. There were two commonly heard stereotypes for why al-Quds, the oldest newspaper still publishing in Palestine, had the highest circulation: first, that people buy the paper for the advertisements, and second, because that is what their family has been doing for decades now.
[49] Ghassan Khatib, interview by author, Ramallah, August 17, 2011.
[50] Amal Jamal, interview by author, Nazareth, Israel, August 11, 2011.
[51] See Salah Al Nasrawi, "Western Reporting in the Middle East: The Dilemma of Local Arab Journalists." *Arab Media and Society* 16, Fall (2012).
[52] Requests to interview Haniya in order to verify this part of the story were denied.
[53] Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), *Annual Report: 2008*, Ramallah: Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms, 2008, Online English Abstract.
[54] Amal Jamal, "The Palestinian Media: An Obedient Servant or a Vanguard of Democracy?"*Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no.3 (2000a): 55.
[55] Omari, *Palestinian Press*, 146.
[56] Jamal, *Media Politics and Democracy*, 102.
[57] Mohammad Daraghmeh, interview by author, Ramallah, August 19, 2011.
[58] For more on formal and informal censorship see Article 19 (The International Centre Against Censorship) and The Centre for Media Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, Memorandum: The 1995 Press Law of the Palestinian National Authority: Article 19 (The International Centre Against Censorship) and The Centre for Media Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, 1999, Altatatetta, *Ta'thir,* Nossek and Rinnawi, "Censorship and Freedom," Orayb Aref Najjar, "The 1995 Palestinian Press Law: A Comparative Study," *Communication Law and Policy* 2, no.1 (1997): 41-103, and "Media

in Palestine: Between the Hammer of the PNA and Anvil of Self-Censorship," ed. The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, 2000, http://www.phrmg.org/monitor2000/mar2000-media.htm

[59] Abdul Nasser Najjar, interview by author, Ramallah, August 2011

[60] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, NY: Basic Books Inc, 1978).

[61] Thawabteh, "Palestinian Media Map," 85.

[62] For more on the unions see Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords* and Nina Sovich, "Palestinian Trade Unions," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 4 (2000): 66-79.

[63] For this study I received print copies of the bylaws in Arabic.

[64] Abdul Nasser Najjar, interview by author, Ramallah, January, 2012.

[65] Muntaser Hamdan, interview by author (Arabic), Ramallah, January, 2012.

[66] Nail Mousa, interview by author (Arabic), Ramallah, January, 2012.

[67] Khatib, "The Structure of the Palestinian Media," Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, (2003): 6.