

## **New Media and Political Change in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Assembling Media Worlds and Cultivating Networks of Care\***

**Amahl Bishara**

Anthropology Department, Tufts University  
Email: Amahl.Bishara@tufts.edu

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### **Abstract**

In terms of infrastructure and technology, the media environment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories developed extensively between the first and second Intifadas. Yet the media environment of the second Intifada was not necessarily more conducive to democratic change than that of the first. This paper argues that technological advances must be evaluated in their political contexts, and that the Palestinian context offers insight into what news media can do when they are not necessarily forums for an effective public sphere. For decades, Palestinians have assembled their media world out of other states' media, and a diverse collection of small and large media. This active process of assembly has itself constituted a productive field of political contestation. During the first Intifada, having no broadcast media or uncensored newspapers, Palestinians relied on small media like graffiti to evade Israeli restrictions. During the Oslo period, the Palestinian Authority (PA) established official Palestinian broadcast media, while Palestinian entrepreneurs opened broadcasting stations and Internet news sites. During the second Intifada, with Palestinian news media hampered by continued PA restrictions and intensified Israeli violence, small and new media enabled networks of care and connection, but were not widely effective tools for political organizing.

### **Keywords**

Occupied Palestinian Territories; Intifada; news media; small media; graffiti; censorship

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## Introduction

The role of media in the production and reproduction of national identities has been acutely analyzed with a focus on several different media forms, in various historical contexts (Anderson [1983] 1991; Abu-Lughod 2005; Askew 2002; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003). In the West Bank and Gaza, the nationalist uses of media have been restricted and shaped by Palestinians' condition of statelessness and by the multiple authorities that have administered, occupied, and led this Palestinian society, including Jordan, Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Palestinians' media world has also been shaped by dramatic changes in media technologies over the last several decades. New media have been vested, in the Palestinian context as elsewhere, with great hopes for the strengthening of participatory democracies and the coordination of political struggles.

The Palestinian case might seem to be utterly exceptional in debates about new media and political change because Palestinians lack a sovereign state. Palestinians have not had anything resembling a liberal public sphere. Most theories of the public sphere take for granted the fact of the nation-state and that the government will be influenced by the public sphere (Fraser 2007). However, some aspects of Palestinians' current political condition, such as the reduction of democratic practice to mere voting and the consequent diminishing of journalism's role, are hardly unique to the West Bank and Gaza. They have been identified as being widespread in many neo-liberal democracies (McChesney 1999: 112). New media do not provide easy solutions to these problems, as they emerge and are shaped by political and economic contexts (Williams 1975). In the Middle East, due to structures of ownership and government restrictions on media, 'it is change caused by divisions and realignments among ruling elites that surfaces via the Arab media landscape, rather than media content that triggers political change' (Sakr 2007:6). The Palestinian history of media engagement is a clear case for the argument that scholars must continue to attend to the political and economic structures that frame the use of new media forms (McChesney 1999, 2004; Sakr 2001, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite grim political circumstances, the Palestinian media world is still in many respects a vibrant one, making it an especially appropriate location at which to interrogate what media might do when they are *not* essential locations of an effective public sphere. I suggest here two possibilities. First, at key historical junctures during the more than 40 years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the basic fact of statelessness has generated a self-consciousness about media and their role in engaging in political struggle. Palestinians – including media makers and others – have thought reflexively

about the relationship between media form and political change. Through *an active process of assembly* of their media world, out of both small and mass media, they have attempted to constitute themselves as a polity. The concept of 'media worlds' emphasizes 'the necessity of linking media production, circulation, and reception in broad and intersecting social and cultural fields: local, regional, national, transnational' (Ginsburg et al. 2002: 6). I want to emphasize that because, in the Palestinian case, media infrastructure has been so erratic, Palestinians' acts of bringing together and consuming media sources drawn from various geographic scales has been an important act of cultural production. These acts are similar to the 'cultural activism' discussed by Faye Ginsburg (Ginsburg 1993), except that here I focus not on creation and circulation of media messages but on the deliberate selection of media forms deemed to be appropriate or useful for a Palestinian society that lacked standard national media infrastructures.

Second, in other moments, the functions of media have been more modest. Both small and mass media have been tools of connection during times of siege, facilitating what I call a *network of care* that may sustain communities. In both of these regards, media have not only signified by way of their contents or referential meanings; they have signified by bringing people together and by signaling miniature histories of struggle of which media are themselves the evidence and the prize.

### Questioning Media Production under Occupation

While Palestinians had been at the forefront of Jordanian journalism between 1948 and 1967, they faced new dilemmas and challenges when Israeli military occupation began in 1967. During this period, when Palestinian national identity was in flux, Palestinians actively considered how they should assemble their media world in relation to both Israeli military authorities and the PLO leadership in exile. Immediately after the 1967 war, Palestinian newspaper publishers debated their role under Israeli occupation (Najjar 1992). Some opposed publishing under occupation, because they thought it would normalize Israeli rule and support Israel's rhetoric that it had established a benign occupation. They also recognized that a Palestinian press would be a conduit of information to Israeli authorities. Those in favor of publishing worried that the occupation might last for a long time, and argued that newspapers were integral to political education and mobilization. They argued that running a newspaper with Israeli licenses was not the equivalent of recognizing the occupation but rather a contribution to a society under severe new pressures.

Those who supported publication eventually prevailed. When, after about 15 months, one paper began publishing and the demand for news was high, others soon followed (Najjar 1992: 100).

If the decision of whether to publish was in the hands of a few editors, Palestinians throughout the Occupied Territories made decisions about how to select their broadcast media. Palestinians lacked their own broadcast media, but regional geography made television and radio available to them from several neighboring countries. Israeli broadcasts in Arabic might contribute local detail and quality images, while the Syrian and Egyptian broadcasts would provide political perspective. Palestinians also listened to radio produced in Arabic by European organizations, such as the BBC Arabic service, known for its high quality, and Radio Monte Carlo, known for its live reports (Shinar 1987: 53). Palestinians' acts of media *bricolage*, a clever act of assembly from the parts that happen to be available (Lévi-Strauss 1962), likely deepened their awareness of the orientation of each medium, and of their own outsider relationship to it.

In this constellation of media, Palestinian newspapers remained important because they could cover events more closely than any foreign media. Yet they operated under severe constraints. According to Israeli law, the censor could forbid the publication of anything that might be 'prejudicial to the defense of [the state] or to the public safety or to public order' (quoted in CPJ 1988:67). Editors could be imprisoned for six months, fined, or both if their paper was suspended under these laws (Benvenisti 1983: 18). This was a system of prior censorship, in which every word that was to be published passed under the censors' eyes. Palestinian editors interviewed in the late 1980s and early 1990s estimated that about 25 percent of what they submitted was deleted, with censorship increasing during tense periods (Najjar 1992: 150). Israeli censorship did not seek simply to stop the spread of information. Sometimes pieces previously published in the Israeli press or information broadcast by other national media would be censored. Instead, censorship '[was] a means of diminishing the stature of the press by hindering its ability to serve its readers' (CPJ 1988: 33). Israeli censors aimed to dismantle media and political identity just as Palestinians were working to gather media and people together to create new political forms. Censors' primary concern was to 'eradicate expression that could foster Palestinian nationalist feelings, or that suggest[ed] that Palestinians are a nation with a national heritage' (Benvenisti 1983: 1).

Indeed, Palestinian journalists saw news media as having overtly nationalist goals at this time. One, Abed al-Latif Ghit, said in a roundtable article published in *Al-Dustur*, a Jordanian paper, in February 1980: 'The press here is an attempt at national expression, and every person with national sentiments also

has ambitions in that area. For us the press is not a profession, nor is it a hobby, but a need and a means of expressing national problems' (republished in Benvenisti 1983: 43). Those I interviewed more recently confirmed this view of journalism under occupation. One former journalist for a PLO-funded newspaper based in Jerusalem, told me in 2005, 'When I started working as a journalist,...I used to look at journalism's role as to mobilize the people... Later I started working as a professional journalist and learned from my contacts with the foreign and the Israeli press that this is not the role for a journalist.'

Working under conditions of censorship continued to raise existential questions for these politically committed journalists. An editor of *Al-Fajr*, Ali Khalili, wondered in 1984: 'We...are a movement of resistance literature, and we have no other reason for being except that resistance itself. How do we manufacture our literature, what type of literature?' (quoted in Najjar 1992: 210). Ma'amun Al-Sayyid, another editor at *Al-Fajr* said: 'There is a clear contradiction between the terms "national press" and "occupation"...[our task is to] mobilize the masses against the occupation and the escalation of national activities in that struggle. That is a task best fulfilled by the secret pamphlet' (quoted in Benvenisti 1983: 38-9). His words point to a critique of the structural constraints of certain media practices. The underground forms of media Al-Sayyid mentions took center stage during the first Intifada.

### **The First Intifada: Struggles for Sovereignty**

The first Intifada, a popular uprising against Israeli occupation that began in 1987, was a struggle for Palestinian sovereignty: an assertion of self-sufficiency, an effort to produce and reproduce social meaning, and a precarious attempt to secure authority on the ground. Palestinian organizations proffered many of the services usually provided by a state, including health care, education, and the distribution of information. Palestinians tried to build a self-sufficient economy as well, refusing to buy Israeli products and growing Intifada gardens on rooftops and near homes. For 20 years, Israeli occupation had ruled more or less by force: controlling schools, establishing a network of collaborators, restricting movement and employment, and using violent means such as shootings, arrests, and curfews. During the Intifada, the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) aimed to establish a parallel structure of authority that ruled by popular legitimacy.

In widespread demonstrations, youth armed with stones attempted to establish Palestinian control over neighborhoods and cities. Although on a few

occasions Palestinian towns had to be ‘re-occupied’ by hundreds of Israeli troops, Israel maintained effective control over the Occupied Territories. Nevertheless, an essential victory of the Intifada was that, despite Israeli control of many significant events on the ground, Israel’s control over political meaning was much less secure. When Israel closed schools, Palestinians held classes in homes, and seized the opportunity for popular education of Palestinian history and society of the sort prohibited in the Israeli-mandated schools. When schools were open, youth saw an opportunity to gather and stage protests. Either way, the Israeli army did not determine the social and political meanings of school closures and openings.

### *Underground Media in the First Intifada*

During the first Intifada, newspapers endured intensified restrictions. All the major dailies lost their licenses to distribute in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for periods of seven to 45 days. The Palestine Press Service, the main news agency in the Occupied Territories, was closed from March 1988 until at least March 1990. During the first full year of the Intifada, in 1988, at least 44 journalists were detained for two days or more, and many were held for six months without charge. Others were put under house arrest. At least two journalists were deported from Israel and the Occupied Territories (CPJ 1989). Due to the intensity of both censorship and everyday political activity, Palestinians embraced more fully the underground tactics that Ma’amun al-Sayyid had recommended years earlier. Young people would distribute UNLU bulletins at night or deliver them to the mosque during Friday prayers, under risk of being arrested or shot. These communiqués included practical information, political arguments, and discussion of internal issues. Occasionally the UNLU would address Israelis (Lockman & Beinun 1989). UNLU communiqués were disseminated in audio form by way of radio stations located in Arab countries (Bookmiller & Bookmiller 1990: 97).

Anthropologist Julie Peteet demonstrated that during the first Intifada, graffiti also became a key medium of political discourse. This was another moment in which Palestinians actively selected the media that would make up their media world. One respondent told her that reading graffiti was ‘kind of like reading the newspaper’ (Peteet 1996: 151). The graffiti consisted of memorializations for those who had been killed during the Intifada, political declarations like ‘No taxes without representation’ (Peteet 1996: 142), instructions about collective actions, and statements by particular political parties. But graffiti were not just a transparent medium of knowledge, since graffiti writing was a hazardous pursuit. Another of Peteet’s interlocutors told her,

‘When I wake in the morning and see new graffiti I know that resistance continues. It tells me that people are risking their lives and that they live right here in this neighborhood’ (Peteet 1996: 151). Writing and reading graffiti was part of Palestinians’ constitution of themselves as a society committed to resisting military occupation. In sum, just as Israeli authorities could close schools but they could not determine what Palestinians would make of these closures, they could also censor newspapers and erase graffiti, but Israeli authorities could not control the political significance of the small media that Palestinians employed.

### *The First Intifada on the World Stage*

The first Intifada changed the relationship of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to the West, and news media were one mechanism of this transformation. The Intifada attracted sustained interest of Western news organizations and created a demand for Palestinian journalists to work with these organizations. Palestinian journalists initially believed that work with Western media organizations fulfilled national goals of circulating their story to international audiences. The mostly unarmed Intifada transformed the Western image of Palestinians from that of refugees or terrorists to that of a people resisting one of the world’s most powerful armies in the streets and alleyways of their own cities, villages, and refugee camps. US media reported on repressive Israeli policies, like that of breaking the arms and legs of demonstrators (e.g. Frankel 1988; Kifner 1988). Polls indicated that sympathy for Palestinians and support for an independent Palestinian state grew significantly in the US during this period (Moughrabi 1990). The first Intifada also set the stage for Palestinian concern with Western public opinion.

### **Palestinian Media in the Oslo Period**

The first Intifada led to negotiations with Israel and the Oslo Accords of 1993. However, during the Oslo period of 1993-2000, Israel’s ongoing occupation continued to limit Palestinians’ economic and national development (Roy 2001). Yet, during this period, Palestinians were allowed to establish their own broadcast media in the Occupied Territories. It was a time of professionalization and development in media as in other fields. The Palestinian Authority (PA), itself the product of the Oslo Accords, established the Voice of Palestine radio station and Palestine TV in 1994. Gaza had its own newspapers for the first time since Israeli occupation began. Major universities expanded their

offerings on journalism. The model was that of 'objective' journalism, often taught to Palestinian journalists by development organizations and advocates for peace journalism, and also picked up by the many Palestinian journalists who worked with international media. Professionalized, objective journalism, as opposed to the overtly nationalist journalism of the previous period, was seen as fitting for the new Palestinian state that many Palestinians hoped was under construction. However, as in other contexts, the goal of objectivity had its drawbacks.

Technological as well as political developments changed the mediascape in the 1990s, yielding a great proliferation of non-official media. First, Arab satellite television stations brought high quality news that presented an unprecedented level of critique of Arab governments, including of Arafat's regime (Miles 2006; Sakr 2001; Lynch 2003; El-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). Second, local television and radio stations proliferated during the 1990s, especially in the West Bank. Many of these stations started as small businesses and their production norms were not consistently high. They did not produce a great deal of their own programming and instead often took advantage of weak copyright laws to rebroadcast materials from satellite stations (Batrawi 2001). Nevertheless, they served as mediums for articulating alternative viewpoints, for example regarding the US bombing of Iraq and issues of PA governance. Third, Palestinians, often with Western funding, initiated Internet news projects. Fourth, Islamist publications began to circulate more widely and more freely (Jamal 2005). While these Islamist media addressed religious and social issues, their main focus was political. They often utilized secular discourses about human rights and political pluralism to critique the PA. Heretofore Islamist political groups' media had been limited to unofficial, unlicensed media like underground communiqués and sermons read in mosques; now, legalized, they faced restrictions from the PA.

Indeed, the PA exercised its own forms of control over media institutions. A 1999 Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report summarized the situation: 'The censorship, intimidation, and arbitrary arrests of Palestinian journalists that marked full-fledged Israeli occupation are now practised by Palestinian president Yasser Arafat and his coterie' (Campagna 1999: 384). In 1995, the new Palestinian Press Law replaced Israeli military regulations and included language about the importance of freedom of expression. Yet, the law was dangerously vague and allowed for severe limitations on free speech (Jamal 2005: 92). Penalties for breaking this law included prison (Gidron & Onaran 1995: 208). Though punishments of journalists were carried out only rarely, they encouraged a system of self-censorship (Musa 1996; Campagna 1997: 293). In restricting the press, the PA was constantly balancing internal and



external pressures upon it. The PA's more erratic media repression sometimes functioned as a new proxy for Israel's prior censorship, because the PA ultimately depended on Israeli and Western support for its survival.

During the Oslo period and the second Intifada, political repression was not the only reason that Palestinian media were unable to consistently foster vibrant conversations about urgent political issues; financial resources were also lacking. Newspapers too seldom sent journalists to the scene of an event to report about it and, according to a 2005 study, a full 55 percent of newspaper content was reportedly translated or republished from other international, Hebrew, and Arabic sources, including Western wire services (MIFTAH 2005).

### **The Second Intifada: A New Configuration of Uprising**

The Intifada that began in September 2000 took a very different shape from the first Intifada because of the distinct constellation of Israeli and Palestinian authorities at that time. Unlike the first Intifada, when protests against Israeli occupation were geographically widespread within towns and cities, during the second Intifada, clashes with Israeli troops – who were no longer inside most Palestinian areas due to PA administration – occurred primarily on the borders of towns, on bypass roads, and at Israeli-controlled religious sites. In the Intifada's early months, the presence of armed Palestinian police and security forces helped Israel to justify its use of more extensive military force, despite the fact that PA forces were not initially involved in the uprising (Hammami & Tamari 2000). Israeli force swiftly escalated to include the use of air power against a civilian population. As Palestinian resistance grew more militarized and Israeli attacks still more deadly, it became more and more difficult for large numbers of Palestinians to participate in the second Intifada as they had in the first (Johnson & Kuttub 2001). Palestinians' options for civil disobedience had also shifted. Rather than holding strike days when they refused to deal with Israel, Palestinians found that Israel prohibited their passage into Israel.

Internal politics also made resisting the occupation more complicated. Before the first Intifada, Palestinian civil society had flourished despite direct colonial rule and an exiled political leadership. In the years leading up to the second Intifada, the PA, through its harsh restrictions on opponents, had weakened Palestinian civil society (Hammami 2000). What were assumed to be the state building processes of the Oslo period spurred professionalized NGOs funded by Western governments and foundations rather than popular

organizations (Hanafi & Tabar 2005). This limited the kinds of political actions in which these organizations could engage. The PA itself played an ambiguous role in the second Intifada, occupying the administrative space that had been dominated by Israel during the first Intifada. It administered schools and even the issuing of permits for entry into Israel. This further limited Palestinians' options for carrying out strikes and other forms of political action. Moreover, while some PA officials believed that the Intifada might strengthen the Palestinians' position at the negotiating table, structurally, the PA had been created to maintain order. Its survival depended on forestalling any broad revolution and on maintaining relations with Israel and the US. The PA exhibited a profound lack of leadership, resulting in splits among Palestinian factions and an absence of strategy (Usher 2003). Along with Israel's excessive use of force during the first months of the uprising, the PA's role shaped the character of the uprising as one that actively included a much narrower segment of society.

#### *Emergency Media & Networks of Care*

Despite severe Israeli violence against the news media, in some ways the mediascape of the second Intifada seemed less restricted and more varied than in the first. Israel was no longer able to close down news media as it had during the first Intifada. Due to the arrangements of Israeli, Palestinian, and other international power, and due to the poor political organization of the second Intifada as described above, small and new media did not play the dynamic role they did in the first Intifada. However, some of the media that emerged in the 1990s did play an integral role in spreading emergency information and providing a mode of connection among Palestinians during periods of intense violence.

As during the first Intifada, Israeli restrictions on and violence against the news media escalated drastically, affecting both Palestinian and international journalism. From 2000 to 2004, Israeli incursions and attacks left seven journalists, including five Palestinians, dead. At the beginning of 2002, Israel refused to renew Palestinian journalists' press passes, stating that they presented a security threat to Israel. Even after successful legal challenges from international news organizations, few journalists were able to regain their passes. This limited journalists' ability to travel within the Occupied Territories and into Israel. Israel militarily targeted both official and independent Palestinian media starting in 2000, when it bombed the radio transmitter for the Voice of Palestine. In the winter of 2001-2002, the Israeli army confiscated equipment and then detonated explosives in the building that housed

administrative and broadcast facilities for the Voice of Palestine and Palestine TV; it also ransacked the facilities of one of the premiere independent television stations, Al-Quds Television, among other independent stations. CPJ listed the West Bank and Gaza as one of the worst places to be a journalist for three years running, from 2002-2004.

The PA also continued to repress the Palestinian news media, particularly during the first years of the Intifada. Arrests, detentions, and abuse of Palestinian journalists critical of the PA continued. In 2001 the PA closed several Hamas and Islamic Jihad media following a series of bombings inside Israel (Campagna 2002) and temporarily closed a local television station in Bethlehem after it aired a militant group's statement of responsibility for an attack that implicated the PA as being involved with such activity during a truce.

Local television and radio stations, which often broadcast to a single city, played a pivotal role in disseminating vital information during the second Intifada. These stations, despite weak signals and small audiences, allowed their audiences to connect with each other. Because Palestinians were often caught under curfew for long periods, 'television news became a centerpiece of daily life for most Palestinians. TV became an instrument of extended solidarity and support' (Allen 2009: 170). Television and radio were both pastimes and tools. Traffic reports took on new meaning as radio stations reported on checkpoints. Especially during extended curfews and sieges, radio provided crucial social and logistical support for Palestinians, helping listeners to track the safety of relatives and friends. As Amer Abdelhadi, the now deceased owner and director of Radio Tariq al-Mahabbeh (TMFM), an FM station in Nablus, recounted about broadcasting during sieges:

TMFM tried to find creative ways to keep the community informed of what was going on outside and in communication with each other. Besides getting information from our regular community network, we called around to different neighborhoods to find out how people were coping... We hit upon the idea of using the radio itself as a tool for helping hardship cases: we invited people to call us if they were in desperate need of vital items, and we then relayed those messages on air, asking listeners to call in either if they themselves could help or if they knew someone who could. (Abdelhadi 2004: 60-61)

In this time of crisis, radio did not resemble the liberal public sphere, a venue for rational deliberation among disinterested parties. Instead, by being an instrument of connection, it facilitated social networks that were significant on a political level and imperative on a practical one. In times of the most violent conflict, the Arab satellite news station Al-Jazeera played a similar role for Palestinians, broadcasting urgent emergency information, and hosting

call-in shows about Israeli invasions. Mass media were used to forge a network of care among people who shared a basic political orientation – opposition to Israeli occupation – but who needed to know the details of the violence surrounding them both in order to stay safe themselves and in order to provide for their neighbors and communities.

### *Palestinian Media Go Global*

Because of technological developments that facilitated transnational media, funding structures developed during the Oslo years, and a desire on the part of Palestinian leaders and many others to see Palestinians favorably represented in the Western news media (Bishara 2008), media during the second Intifada had a crucial international dimension. In the middle of the second Intifada, Al-Jazeera was the most popular Palestinian source for television news (Maiola & Ward 2007: 99). Al-Jazeera and other satellite television networks' intense focus on events of the Intifada made Palestinians feel that they were at the center of events and sympathy in the Arab world more than at any time since the Nasser era (Hammami & Tamari 2001), at least until the US invasion of Iraq. However, as shown by Giovanna Maiola and David Ward, Al-Jazeera and other satellite stations could never take the place of the kind of national media that could be a forum for discussion of national priorities. Although they covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in some depth, they covered it not only, or even primarily, for their Palestinian audiences but because it has been a hot topic for many Arab viewers. Internal Palestinian questions have thus necessarily been given less weight. Researchers have found no evidence that Al-Jazeera's coverage encourages Palestinian media to cover internal issues more critically or more thoroughly (Maiola & Ward 2007: 117).

Continuing a trend that had started during the Oslo period, funding from international organizations and technological developments facilitated the expansion of alternative news organizations, either under the rubric of 'peace journalism' (Stanley 2007), as part of efforts to develop Palestinian democracy, or as a complicated combination of both. In the West Bank and Gaza, some of these media funded by Western NGOs and development organizations have encouraged a focus outwards, for example by publishing either exclusively in English, as with the weekly e-magazine Bitter Lemons (<http://www.bitterlemons.org/>), in English and Arabic, as with the Arab Media Internet Network (Amin, [www.amin.org](http://www.amin.org)) or in English alongside Arabic and Hebrew, as with Maan News ([www.maanneews.net](http://www.maanneews.net)) and the International Middle East Media Center/Palestine News Network (<http://www.imemc.org/> and

<http://arabic.pnn.ps/>). Still, some of these Internet sites have become respected sources of independent news for Palestinians and they have provided a vital means through which journalists can avoid the restrictions of the print media. More research should be done on how publication in a second or third language influences coverage in Arabic.

Even the low-tech, highly emplaced medium of graffiti has sometimes been oriented around Western audiences and producers in curious ways. Given the risks that graffiti writing entailed in the first Intifada, and given that graffiti take as their slate the very surfaces of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories, graffiti would seem to be a medium quintessentially expressive of Palestinian voices. Yet, in key locations of the West Bank today, most notably on the separation barrier in areas of high traffic from Western solidarity groups, graffiti and murals are often produced by Western visitors (Bishara 2007). This is the case with the prominently located Face2Face murals of Israeli and Palestinian faces, which propound a simplistic view that cross-cultural awareness will lead to political solutions (JR 2007).

As I found during my fieldwork, many Palestinians proscribe murals on the wall, because they see it as beautifying something that is essentially ugly and which must be torn down (see also Kalman 2006). Though this is a negative example, it is a contemporary instance of how Palestinians are still actively assembling their media world – selecting media forms and locations – according to their political values and aspirations. Yet, foreign-produced graffiti and murals sometimes come to stand in as the quintessential representations of Palestinian public life, as photographs of graffiti and murals on the separation barrier are common images of Palestinian life found in Western media. Thus, for both large media such as the press and small media like graffiti, the international orientation of Palestinian media did not necessarily promote internal dialogs about Palestinians' political path.

### **Sustaining Networks of Care**

In the long and diffuse wake of the Intifada, which has been beset by a lack of political progress or optimism (Allen 2006), media have continued to be tools for establishing networks of care, as I discovered during fieldwork in 2007. Just after midnight on a quiet August night in a Bethlehem refugee camp, my hosts and I suddenly heard gunshots. In my years of fieldwork, I have come to think of a sound in the night as the most elementary form of news in the West Bank. Local Palestinians or long-term residents know that if the sound is sharp and dry, it is likely that of a bullet; if it is broad and booming, a house may

have been demolished; if it is shuffling and clattering, a cadre of special forces could be approaching to make an arrest. These noises in the night often signaled no new political development. But there was every reason for people to stay informed, since these noises could bear great social and personal consequences.

On this night, my host, whom I will call Kareem, could tell that this was Israeli gunfire. Like many people in the camp, Kareem wanted to know what was going on not only in order to stay safe, but also because he considered it his business to keep up with community events. He called a friend who lived high enough to see the military encampment from his bedroom window. Kareem's friend Rashid reported that he had just received a phone call from his mother-in-law Rawia telling him that the bullets had hit her house, but that no one had been injured. This was vital information, as we knew Rawia, but Rashid also had another level of analysis to contribute. From his vantage point, he further deduced that there was no larger reason for the shooting. It seemed just to be a spattering of gunfire from the military base that loomed over the camp. No jeeps had entered the camp for an arrest raid. There was no sign of Palestinian fire towards the Israeli military base. After an hour of silence outside – no gunfire, no ambulances – there was nothing else to say inside, and we went to sleep.

Cell phones have been hailed as important new democratic technologies, for example facilitating quickly organized protests (de Armond 2001; Rafael 2003; Rheingold 2002). They are among the crop of new media – most prominent among them satellite television and the Internet – upon which many media scholars and others have thrust their hopes for a more democratic future in the Arab world. New technologies are often caught up in popular fantasies of and mobilizations for democratization (Himpele 2002; Mazzarella 2006; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi 1994). But on this night and many others during the Intifada and after, cell phones served a more modest goal. Kareem and Rashid employed cell phones, within a network of friends and families, to make an immediate connection with others in the community: to find out who had been arrested, to make sure people were safe, and to figure out where soldiers and gunmen were. In a society that was beleaguered by attacks from without and political disengagement from within, people enacted a network of care that railed against a politics of isolation.

The morning after the shooting seemed ordinary, but in a sense this was what was most troubling. The devastation of stasis hung low over the refugee camp. I stopped by Rawia's small store and she recounted how the bullets had hit her house. They had broken her window and shattered the cabinet in her bathroom, where her teenage son had been bathing just hours before the

gunfire. The family was shaken, but after so many intrusions during the second Intifada, they could muster only an indignant air that fell short of fury. Rawia's eyes looked tired as they always did; she and her husband worked long hours in their store, which had only accumulated debt as the latest Palestinian economic crisis wore on. Her exhaustion, her impoverishment: neither was news. But her neighbors knew it was still a good idea to check in.

Later that day, a handful of visiting internationals (*ajaanib*, or foreigners, in popular Palestinian parlance) went up to Rawia's house to photograph the damage. These were primarily Europeans and North Americans who happened to be visiting the camp, some of whom knew Rawia well. Even if they could not carry out a lengthy conversation with Rawia, due to language differences, they may have played with her children or eaten a meal in her home. One wrote up a brief article about what had happened and circulated it as an email among his network of friends and fellow activists, as he regularly did on such occasions. There was no chance that this shooting would be taken up as an issue by a political party, advocacy group, or human rights organization. As with the cell phones, the benefit of these Internet mediated chronicles was that they made connections. They assembled networks of care, in this case, among people who knew Rawia, the camp, or at least the international who had witnessed the damage of the shooting.

I complete revisions on this article during Israel's winter 2008-2009 campaign against Gaza. From Boston, I have noticed new elaborations of these networks of care, this time occasionally extending out to Western journalistic institutions. Because Israel has prohibited Western journalists from entering Gaza, many news organizations have relied on producers, reporters, and other Palestinian contacts in Gaza to provide first-hand accounts. Radio hosts often inquire after the safety of their sources, but in one show, the network of care was more intricate, and it pointed to the perils of the day. The WBUR-produced show *Here and Now* drew upon the expert analysis of a Gazan journalist now living in North Carolina, Laila El-Haddad. Part way through the segment, producers also called up her father, Doctor Moussa El-Haddad, to speak from Gaza. At the end of a discussion in which host Robin Young enquired about allegations that Hamas stored rockets in mosques, Young bade farewell to her guests. She added, 'Dr. El-Haddad, I don't know if you want to say so long to Laila. You are in close touch, but I'll give you that opportunity now.' The father replied, 'Thank you. Ok *baba* [form of address for a daughter, literally, 'father'], take care, and don't worry about us. Allah is here with us.' Even after a probing journalistic exchange, a radio host made time for a gesture of concern between father and daughter, and her listeners were drawn into the moment as well.

## Conclusions

I hope this paper will encourage further study of the changing relationship between media and politics in the Palestinian context, where multiple kinds of authorities restrict media, despite new technologies and funding opportunities that seem on the surface to be creating more possibilities for political communication. Many would argue that the most prominent difference between the first and second Intifadas was the use of arms in the second. More fundamental than this, as I have argued, is the presence of the PA during the second Intifada. Given this presence, there was no way for Intifada activists to succeed in establishing the kind of alternative sovereignty that they produced in the first Intifada. Similarly, in terms of media, many would argue that the primary difference between the two Intifadas is a technical one, that in the second there were new media like satellite television and the Internet, and new local and national broadcast networks. In this estimation, the second Intifada offered a much more fertile media terrain. However, these forms of apparent progress must likewise be understood in their political context. The PA placed restrictions on Palestinian newspapers and television. The satellite news stations have been better at reporting on dramatic and violent crises than at serving as venues for debating new directions for Palestinian politics. The problems with satellite and Internet news, and even contemporary graffiti, are symptomatic of a broader predicament in contemporary Palestinian politics – that it is often oriented towards outside audiences rather than towards vital internal dialogs.

For decades, Palestinians have actively assembled their media world out of other states' media and out of a diverse collection of small and larger media. This act of assembly – of selecting some forms of media and rejecting others – has cemented Palestinian national identity and helped delineate Palestinians' relationship to ruling authorities. Still, in this political context, it may be that new media will have less spectacular results than some have hoped. At the very least, media like cell phones, local radio stations, and Internet missives can today be tools for the expansion of networks of care within communities facing violence, and between Palestinians and those around the world who seek to understand Palestinian experiences of political life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These networks of care and participation may themselves eventually help cultivate the conditions of possibility needed for political change, but we should not anticipate that the uprising will be emailed, spray painted, text messaged, or webcast in the absence of a major change in Palestinian political structures.



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