

Media Landscape in Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Summary

By: Nabil Khatib

The writer last updated this summary report August 2002, never the less the data and analysis were from the surveys conducted in the pre "confrontation / Intifada" situation, as stated in the box above.

This is a summary, which contains quotes on the major results of a special study done by the Birzeit Media Institute in cooperation with Jerusalem Media and Communication Center. It is neither for publishing or online publishing, nor for reproduction and has exclusively been done for judgment making on training purposes. It was presented in a special workshop that was organized at Birzeit University, April 2001.

Remarks in RED, done by the writer in August 2002

A General overview on Palestinian Media (the Map and main characteristics)

Pre "Confrontation" situation

- The Print Media (periodic publications):
 - According to the official figures of the Ministry of Information in Palestine, stating July 1994 until September 2000, there has been a 148 licenses given to different individuals, political parties, non governmental organization for Daily, biweekly, monthly and quarterly newspapers and magazines.
 - Not all of the licenses are active (not all of them were used by the recipients).
 - Generally the newspapers and magazines are produced in Palestinian controlled territories (under Palestinian Press Law) and in occupied East Jerusalem (Under Israeli special military orders).
 - In the above mentioned areas , the Palestinian have:
 1. Three Daily newspapers. (All of them influenced in one way or another by PNA - to be explained below).
 2. Three weekly newspapers (all are party organs of Palestinian opposition parties - to be explained below) (most of them stopped functioning starting winter 2001).
 3. Seven Palestinian monthly magazines (entertainment, pro-opposition and governmental - to be explained below). (Most of them stopped functioning starting winter 2001).
 4. Four specialized supplements which are distributed on monthly or biweekly basis with Al-Ayyam newspaper, but edited and organized by several Palestinian NGO's - to be explained below). (Most of them stopped functioning starting March 2002).

What are these newspapers about?

In general, it is being estimated by the newspapers that after imposing the Israeli siege on Palestinian areas "A", six months after the start of confrontation (6 months after September 28th 2000), the distribution have dropped 40%.

1. Three Daily newspapers:

“Al-Quds”:

“Al-Quds” The “oldest” Palestinian Daily newspaper, re-established in 1968 and owned by the Palestinian publisher “Mahmoud Abu Zalat”, directed by his son Dr. Marwan, and edited by his younger son Walid.

This newspaper is produced in the West Bank and a maximum of 25 thousand copies are distributed daily in the West Bank, Gaza, Israel and most recently in Jordan.

The total number of its employees is 170 people and 70 of them are journalists (editors and reporters).

Advertisements make up 60-65% of its content; 8-10% of its content is made up of different opinion and analysis from other published sources like the Pan Arab newspapers in London and Paris and from Hebrew Newspapers.

25-30% comprises news from its own reporters, International agencies (mainly Reuters, AFP and DPA) and the Palestinian Governmental news agency (WAFA) “Al-Quds” has five permanent analysis and opinion writers. It has two permanent cartoons.

Since its establishment, “Al-Quds has followed different policies. Firstly it was pro -Jordanian 1968-1982, then pro PLO and mainly Fatah (1983-1991). After the Madrid Peace Conference it held a more neutral position (1991-1994) and then had a more pro PNA policy (1995-now). Different PNA sources claim that “Al-Quds” gets some subsidy from the PNA, while it is profit making company/newspaper.

The newspaper has a weekly supplement for the weekend.

“Al-Ayyam”:

“Al-Ayyam”, the “youngest and second biggest” Palestinian Daily newspaper, established at the end of 1995 is owned by “The Al-Ayyam establishment for publishing, press and distribution”. This establishment is owned by a group of Palestinian business people who are pro-PNA oriented.

The “Al-Ayyam” Editor in Chief is Mr. Akram Hanieh, who is a political advisor to the Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and was the founder of the Palestinian Journalist Syndicate in 1978 and it’s first Head. He is a Fatah veteran, was Editor in Chief of “Alshaab” daily (1973-1990) and was deported to Tunisia by the Israeli occupation regime, in 1984.

Mr. Hanieh started work on the establishment of “Al-Ayyam” after returning to his homeland in 1994.

This newspaper produced in the West Bank distributes a maximum of 15 thousand copies daily in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel.

Its employee's total 120 people, 70 of them are journalists (editors and reporters).

Advertisements make up 35-40% of the newspapers content; 8-10% contains published material such as opinion and analysis from other sources like the Pan Arab newspapers in London and Paris and from Hebrew Newspapers. 50-55% to the content is made up of news from its own reporters, International agencies (mainly Reuters, AFP and DPA) and the Palestinian Governmental news agency (WAFA).

“Al-Ayyam” has more than 10 of its own permanent analysis and opinion writers. It has one permanent cartoon. Since its establishment in 1995, “Al-Ayyam”, has followed a more open policy than “Al-Quds”. May be this is due to the high ranking position of it’s Editor in Chief, thus allowing it to avoid a certain amount of self censorship. But this said, generally, it has pro PNA policy.

It is known as the newspaper of intellectuals and the elite as it is socially more open to new ideas and more progressives than “Al-Quds”.

The newspaper has a weekly supplement for the weekend.

“Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida”

“Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida”

The first “new” newspaper that was established after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority according to Oslo accords.

“Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida” was established as a weekly newspaper in 1994 and then transformed into a daily newspaper (in 1996).

The chief mover in the establishment of this newspaper was Mr. Nabil Amro who was a political advisor to the Palestinian President at the time (now he is the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs), and by a veteran of Arab Gulf newspapers, well known journalist, Mr. Hafez Barghouti.

The “Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida” is a semi-official newspaper, owned by the authority and the employees of it are officially employees of the Authority.

This newspaper is produced in the West Bank and maximum of 10 thousand copies are distributed daily in the West Bank and Gaza.

Its total number of employees is 82 people, 40 of them are journalists (editors and reporters).

Advertisements comprise 30-35% of its content; 8-10% is made up of published material consisting of opinion and analysis from other sources like the Pan Arab newspapers in London and Paris and from Hebrew Newspapers. 55-60% of its content comprises news from its own reporters, International agencies (mainly Reuters, AFP and DPA) and the Palestinian Governmental news agency (WAFA).

“Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida” has 8 of its own permanent analysis and opinion writers. It has one permanent cartoon.

Since its establishment in 1994, “Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida”, has followed a more open policy than “Al-Quds”. This is also due to the high ranking position of Mr. Nabil Amro. This helps to avoid a certain amount of self-censorship. But, this said, it generally has a pro PNA policy.

It is known as the authority newspaper.

The newspaper has a weekly supplement for the weekend.

2. Three weekly newspapers:

“Al-Istiqlal” – Al-Jihad Al-Islami Organization’s Organ/Official newspaper. This has low distribution, mainly in the Mosques. Its main task is: propaganda against the Authority’s policy towards the Peace Process and internal Policy. It has been closed several times.

“Al-Masar” – Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine’s Organ / Official newspaper in the Palestinian Areas. It has low distribution. Its main task is: propaganda against the Authority’s policy towards the Peace Process and internal Policy.

“Al-Resale” – Hamas / Islamic Party’s Organ. It has low distribution (Mainly in Gaza and mainly in the Mosques. Its main task is: propaganda against the Authority’s policy towards the Peace Process and internal Policy. It has been closed several times.

The total distribution of the ALL three Weekly newspapers does not exceed 7-10 thousand copies per week.

"Al-Masar" and "Al-Resale" are not functioning any more, while "Al-Istiqlal" is working only in Gaza, and being distributed ONLY in Gaza, starting the October 2000.

3. 7 Palestinian monthly magazines:

- “Hukouk Al-Nas” (People’s rights): by the Human Rights organization “LAW”. (terminated starting Summer 2001)
- “Sawt Al-Watan” (Voice of the Homeland): by the Palestinian People’s Party. (terminated starting March 2002)
- “Al-Milad” (The birth): the Authority’s magazine on local issues. It also monitors the performance of different governmental and non-governmental organizations. (Terminated starting summer 2001).
- “Fosta”: A “Popular “Entertainment magazine.
- “Nidal Al-Shaab” (People’s struggle) published by the Front for People’s Struggle to Liberate Palestine. (terminated starting March 2002)
- “Al-Awda” (The return): published by the Pro Fatah “Palestinian Press Office in Jerusalem. (with very low distribution of 100 copies)
- “Al-Hakikah” (The truth): published by Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – from Gaza). (terminated starting Summer 2000 and the PFLP had "Al-Hadaf" monthly instead, witch was terminated starting March 2002)

In Palestine there are some other magazines produced by the Military (National Security Police/Army).

4. Four specialized supplement distributed on a monthly or biweekly basis with Al-Ayyam:

They are specialized supplements dealing with the environment, women, education, and non-governmental organizations.

The General Character of Palestinian Print Media:

- 1- The main daily newspapers are pro-Authority.
- 2- The Political issues related to foreign policy and the Peace Process dominates the daily and weekly press, while they are very weak in their coverage of social and internal policy issues.
- 3- The main news and analysis content of the newspapers relies on International and National News Agencies and not on their respective newspaper reporters.
- 4- The proportion of commercials is high compared to news, especially in the largest newspaper, "Al-Quds".
- 5- The total distribution is around 50,000 copies a day, while the Palestinian population in West Bank and Gaza is three million people, 1.4 of them are older than 18 years old (adults). This means that the circulation is around 23 copies per thousand potential readers. This is a very low rate in comparison to international standards.
- 6- According to a special study-survey conducted by BZUMI and JMCC in October 1999, on 1200 people, with a range of error of 03%, we have found that: ONLY 13% of Palestinians use the Palestinian newspapers as their main source of information on ongoing events in the country, region and the world.
- 7- A Press Law approved by the Authority in May 1995 regulates the Palestinian Press. In it, direct censorship by the authority became forbidden. But mainly the law has two major problems: a) it gives very *prods* ** definitions so making a good environment for self-censorship, b) the PNA has never relied on the above- mentioned Law when it takes measures against the Press or Journalists (the law is bypassed).
The BZMI team, in cooperation with some other individuals, has worked out a new draft of a "Media Law" in Palestine, and has succeeded in presenting it to a group of Palestinian Legislative Counsel Members to present it for discussion in the PLC. A group of liberal oriented legislators have accepted the "draft".
- 8- There is a very weak professional union of Palestinian journalists in Palestine. There have been no elections since 1993. In January 2000, a group of journalists had a meeting and elected a committee to prepare for a new union and a new bylaw and new elections. Two of the BZMI team are in this committee and the committee is using the Media Institute as a temporarily center for its activities.
The BZMI team has succeeded in drafting a new bylaw which has been discussed and approved by tens of journalist. The process is still on going.
- 9- The actual regulator from the Palestinian Press (when the Authority is not happy with its performance, *becomes* ** the President's Office through the intelligence organs and not through the court.

A survey was conducted especially for this research, in June 1999, on a sample of 228 Palestinian journalists. They were aged between 20 and 60 years old, 54.5% of them were from the West Bank, 27.6% from Jerusalem and 17.9% from Gaza. 83% were male and 17% female.

What results has the survey showed?

- 17.8% had never had a training course in Journalism.
- 31.7% had once trained for less than 3 months.

41.8% had training courses for a period of more than 6 months, or for more than one year.

- 80% of the Palestinian journalists that were questioned in the survey feel the need to take more training courses, against 11.3% who feel that they have enough experience and do not need training and 7% are not sure.
- It is interesting to note that majority of Palestinian journalists have no journalistic background. That is to say, before this profession, they were working in totally different professions and jobs. This could show why there is a great need for training. It also shows that journalism is not a profession as much as a way of earning a living. 54% of these Palestinian journalists were working in other places and jobs such as commerce, education, hotels, accounting, tourism, research, hospitals...etc before entering the field of journalism. In an other related question about the reasons why the journalist chose the profession, we found that a very small number of them see journalism as a way of achieving good social status or a good salary (only 0.09% thought that being journalist in Palestine, could give good social status and only 1.3% thought that it was worth being journalist to get a good salary.

Yet a good number of journalists thought that the profession is kind of national patriotic task for them, to play a role in the struggle for freedom through the press (25.7% thought it is a national task to be a journalist).

- The average level of experience is low for the majority of Palestinian journalists: 64.8% of Palestinian journalists have less than 10 years experience (between one and ten years).
- At the same time the majority of Palestinian journalists are critical of Palestinian Media: 60% of them disclosed that they are not satisfied with the professional level of Palestinian Media, but 53,9% are optimistic of its future in the country (!).
- One of the problems with Palestinian Press is management problems, where 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, when the reporter is not in touch with his supervisor. It is important to note here that only 11.3% of the events journalists are cover are usually in coordination with their supervisor/editor or will generally be assigned to specific coverage. If he otherwise just covers a story independently and sends it to the newsroom, the editor may, if it is not in depth or balanced for example, be forced to go to his preferable option, to get the coverage through a news agency.
- Some other figures:
 - a- 59.1% of journalists feel that they have RED LINES that they can not cross in their coverage. This is especially so with issues related to Security and politics, corruption, Palestinian Authority VIPs and the Sex.
 - b- 53.5% have had the experience of his material censored by the editor for political or security reasons.
 - c- 62.6% feels that he subjects himself to self-censorship while he is writing.
 - d- 64.3% of journalists questioned commented that the main subject they cover is Israeli policy against Palestinians (settlement activities, *closure* **) or activities of governmental

institutions or the peace process against 3.6% who cover problems facing people in their daily life and 6% who cover human rights issues.

Five- The majority of Palestinian journalists believe that they have direct political role to play while they are active as journalists. This, I think, has to do with how Palestinians came to understand the role of Press and Media in general during direct Israeli occupation. And it demonstrates that still a lot needs to be done to try to help those journalists to develop a more sophisticated understanding the role of media as it is not within their remit attempt to directly manipulate the reading public: 59.6% of journalists questioned believe that there is some kind of contradiction in duty between the "National-patriotic" and the "professional" in Media. They would prefer to give priority to the National- patriotic side. At the same time 71.3% of them thought that the Journalists should play a direct role in political manipulation through their work.

- *The audiovisual Media (TV and Radio):*

- During the re occupation of West Bank (April 2002), the largest stations with nation wide transmission were mostly destroyed by the IDF (especially "Amwaj Radio and TV" & "Radio Peace & Love").
- The private stations had to limit themselves with 20-30% of the staff / personnel, they had before September 2000, due to lack of income from advertisement.
- Some small 5-7 are working with interruption.

- a- In Palestine there are 30 Private TV stations and 11 private Radio Stations. Most of these stations are local ones, transmitting in the city areas.
- b- In Palestine there are 2 fully controlled governmental TV stations (One for the local community and one satellite station). They are based in Gaza (at President's headquarters); and there is one national government Radio Station (on AM) and one local Radio on Fm in Gaza.
(The FM Radio in Gaza, and the AM Radio in Ramallah and the TV station in Ramallah were fully destroyed / bombed, in the end of 2001)
- c- In the local private TV stations, there is 85-90% of entertainment programming and the rest comprises talk shows on local issues. There are almost no news bulletins.
- d- More than 60-70% of the entertainment is stolen (pirates) from the Pan Arab satellite stations (songs, music, films, drama series...etc.)
- e- All the private stations use S VHS video systems or VHS home video systems.
- f- 03% of personnel in the private TV stations have a background in Media or video production.
- g- All of the stations are profit making stations, but 90% of them are family businesses and not companies with a professional structure.

- h- All the above characteristics also apply to the private Radio sector, except for the re-transmission of programs, the Radio stations programming consist, at an average of 85%, of Music.
- The reasons for the above mentioned are:
 1. A weak business market, with low prices charged for commercials. (Low profit)
 2. There is no law regulating the work of the private TV and radio stations, all of them have only an annual temporary license, because the Palestinian Authority has yet no frequencies to give in rent, according to International regulations,
 3. Lack of professionalism.

Is it important to note though, that TV is the most popular media in Palestine? 79% of Palestinians questioned commented that TV is a major source of obtaining information, and the preferred medium used by media consumers. But only 24% rely on the Palestinian National TV stations or the private TV stations for news, compared with 55% who rely on the Pan Arab Satellite stations and Israeli TV in Arabic. Of course this leads to another problem. Palestinians can not get the information they need on local and internal politics on the satellite stations (because Palestinians are not the only consumers).

May be this is why 64% of Palestinians said in a survey, undertaken in October 1999, that they suffer from a lack of information on social and local issues in the Palestinian Media, and that more than 16% rely on rumors to get information on what is going on in the country. This means a lack of information flow, which could endanger the emerging democracy in the country.

As for Radio, 20% of Palestinian consumers think that the Israeli government-controlled Radio in Arabic is more independent than the Palestinian government Radio.

The majority of Palestinians rely on other Arabic and International Radio stations to get news (30%) + 20% are permanent listeners to Israeli Radio (this means 50% of Palestinians get there information from non-Palestinian sources which are lacking in information on local issues.

Why does this situation in the Press, TV and Radio exist?

1- Historical reasons:

The Palestinian Press was re-established after the 1967 occupation, with the pre-conditions if operating under tough Israeli military censorship. The major newspapers at the time were "Al-Fajr" and "Al-Shaab" (both were established in 1972). They were pro- PLO newspapers. This meant they faced military censor every day and were involved in continual confrontations. With time, the journalists learnt to operate so as to avoid trouble with the censor:

- a- A major factor for self-censorship was that journalists would avoid writing anything that the censor could later strikeout.
- b- Journalists would try to pass some information to the Israeli colleagues. If it was published in an Israeli newspaper, then, the Palestinian newspaper had the right to re-publish the

information without censorship (this led to the habit of republishing a lot of news from Israeli newspapers and relying on them instead of Palestinian sources.

Self-censorship also took place, as the majority of Palestinian journalists were activists in parties under PLO umbrella, who censored themselves "while serving the ideals of revolution" believing political ideals had to be a priority when compared with professional ones.

This would explain the fact that until now, over 70% of journalists believe that priority should be given to political principles rather than professional ones (it will be useful to keep in mind that they are in contradiction in the eyes of the Palestinian journalists).

2- Economic reasons: (figures are from 2000)

A- The average advertisement of 2"x6" in a prime spot of a newspaper will cost around US \$ 50. This is a low price compared to the prices in Israel (next door). The cost of printing, papers, (cassettes, equipment and shooting, if TV) is the same in PNA areas and Israel, while the income in Israel is 6-10 times higher from advertisements and commercials, and sales in Print and TV.

This factor makes it difficult for Palestinian Media Institutions to finance what is needed to pay for good reporters, or even for enough reporters and editors (assuming the administration had the know how – which is not necessarily the case).

This has to do with the over all economic situation whereby in Israel, the annual income per capita is around 15000 US \$ against less than 900 per annum in the PNA areas, while the prices for materials ...etc. is the same on both sides.

B- The contribution of the private sector to commercials is low in Palestine in general. (Understanding the importance of advertising for companies has still not developed to a sophisticated degree.).

C- The lack of private production.

D- The fact that the private sector is not investing actively in the Media business

3- Professional reasons:

As mentioned above:

a- The average experience is low for the majority of Palestinian Journalists.

b- The majority of Palestinian journalists give a negative assessment of Palestinian Media: 60% of them say that they are not satisfied with the professional level of the Palestinian Media, but 53.9% are optimistic about the future of it in the country (!)

c- There are management problems

4- Political reasons:

a- Lack of a modern understanding of freedom of the press by the Palestinian Authority.

b- Interference in the day to day activity of the Palestinian newspapers, TV and Radio stations by the authority.

c- The opposition political parties have not succeeded in having daily newspapers that would encourage competition and openness in the pro-authority Media Institutions.

- 5- Legal reasons:
- a- There is no order of Law. None of the action taken by the authority against the Media institutions or Palestinian Journalists was based on the Press Law or went through the courts but was dealt with by the Intelligence Unit of the PNA.
 - b- The Press Law itself is weak in its wording. It did not succeed in preventing self-censorship but has encouraged it.
 - c- There are still no legal bylaws or laws regulating the activities of the Audio-Visual Media Institutions.
- 6- Social reasons
- a- Lack of social democratic traditions. By this we mean the patriarchal structure of Palestinian society.
 - b- Palestinian society is still reticent about direct openness in the press and other media of social issues, sensitive to the Palestinian conservative public (Crime, Sex, Religion...etc).

How the Palestinian Journalists think about these problems:

The Palestinian Journalists as mentioned above (in the section on The Print Media (periodic publications), do realize the major problems in the:

- Lack of professionalism.
- Economic problems (Low salaries, intensive work...etc.)
- Political pressure.
- Ethical problems (not necessarily realized)

It is obvious that there are several major problems that could be solved by:

- 1- Political activists, parties and legislators.
- 2- The Private sector.
- 3- Having time to emphasize good practice in the professional traditions.
- 4- Having the management of the media institutions actively deciding to improve their institutions OR being forced to do so by competition and open market practice.
- 5- Better training and obtaining better know how.