Global and Local Forces for a Nation-State Yet to be Born: The Paradoxes of Palestinian Television Policies

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Abstract
Tracing the history of Palestinian television industry from its birth in 1993 to the mid-2000's, this paper analyzes changing television policies and discusses the influences of the Palestinian Authority and Israel in hijacking media policy for their own political purposes. Palestinian broadcasting regulations have been caught in a bind: reflecting the geographic, political and economic conditions of the Territories – fragmented, isolated and in a state of arrested development; and responding to regional cultural changes, such as the rise of pan-Arab satellite television, and political challenges stemming from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Introduction
When the State of Israel was created in 1948 and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were occupied (first by Jordan and Egypt, and by Israel after 1967), Palestinians were forbidden from creating an indigenous broadcasting industry. For decades the population could only view television from Israel, Jordan and/or Egypt. Only when the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in late 1993 were Palestinians allowed their own television and radio stations. Practically overnight Palestinians were connected to each other – through a national channel – and to the world around them – through pan-Arab satellite stations.

Since 1993, Palestinian media has proliferated at a startling rate, resulting in 41 private TV stations and one national broadcaster, 46 local radio stations and one national station, more than 60 locally published magazines and 35 local newspapers (which unlike TV and radio existed throughout the various political systems), along with a dozen production companies, more than forty publishing houses and over seventy press offices[1]. Today, Palestinians are still receiving Israeli, Jordanian and Egyptian TV stations, along with their own channels and hundreds of foreign

satellite stations. A lot of this growth occurred during the 'peace years,' themselves defined by the Oslo agreements.

The Oslo process – Oslo I signed in 1993 in Washington, DC, and Oslo II signed in 1995 in Egypt – shaped the state-building process, and by extension the media industry, in at least three ways: first, the agreements made the possibility of statehood more likely; second, the process focused exclusively on interim arrangements; and third, it revived a politically ailing Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and put in power in the Territories a political elite removed from the realities of modern Palestine (Robinson 1997). Although these new stations would not have existed without the peace process, their status is directly related to how the Accords failed to address important factors in long-term state-building, and how the texts of the agreements set limits on the media industry that have played a restrictive role. Moreover, governmental patterns within the PA and its various institutions have influenced the shape of the industry.

In the following sections, I chronologically trace the development of the Palestinian television industry, and address policies introduced by Israel through the Oslo agreements and those established by the various PA institutions. I question to what extent these players have curbed the potential of the Palestinian media sector by analyzing some of the strategies they have employed – Israel in maintaining ultimate control over physical space and airwaves; the PA in maintaining its political hegemony. I show how these dynamics have shaped the TV industry into what it is today: a chaotic, albeit vibrant, landscape of many small, and rather unprofessional, channels competing with one another over a relatively small audience. The result has been a paradoxical outcome: an extremely 'localized' industry (channels barely reach audiences within their own cities), and a very 'globalized' one (channels rely on foreign outlets for programming). I argue that the impact on the broadcasting industry, as well as on the Palestinian nation and national unity, has been detrimental.

Observing Policies
Media research in the Palestinian Territories is practically non-existent (whether audience status for marketing needs, ownership statistics for political economy analyses, or archives of official documents for a historiography of policies). Statistics, such as those published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) about media ownership and use, are dubious. Only one, rather mediocre, academic research has been conducted on Palestinian broadcasting post-Oslo (Batrawi 2001). While an ethnographic approach is unusual in research on broadcasting policy, the unique context of the Territories, made it the only form of research possible to yield reliable results.

When I arrived in the Territories in 2002, per chance I met an executive at Al-Quds TV who put me in touch with media professionals. It was a quick 'snowball effect' of meeting professionals and government officials. Media professionals were unguarded about providing information, often sharing 'secret' financial data. Many of them also shared their own research: on the number of stations that had existed over time, copies of their programs, interviews with audience members, logs of audience telephone calls, etc. Similarly, government officials readily gave me copies of working drafts, actual policies, or 'confidential' paperwork. What I learned about television history and policy, the roles of Ministries, or the role of advertising, I gathered through time spent with media professionals, as well as through recurring interviews with numerous people, from government officials to cameramen, from station owners to audience members. These were conducted between 2002 and 2006, as part of a larger academic project on Palestinian media during the Second Intifada. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of interviewees are not disclosed here.

Frequently, stories and numbers conflicted; did a station begin in 1996 or 1998? Were there twenty or twenty-three stations? It was only through continual cross-referencing of data gathered (including much 'channel-surfing' and media use of my own), and constant re-interviewing, that a clearer picture would emerge. I also carried out my own textual analyses of media content by gathering an 'archive' of programming between January 1998 and January 2003 from all the stations that broadcasted in that timeframe. I relied on interviews to gather information about what kinds of shows each station produced and/or aired, how often shows were broadcasted, how long each show lasted, where news footage originated from, which pan-Arab channels were most relied on, during what times of day, and so on. Additionally, I conducted interviews and observations with audience members to gather further information. For example, pan-Arab stations' popularity across gender, religious, class and political lines in part was reflected in PCBS' official census, media professionals' market research, as well as my own time spent 'hanging out' with families and individuals. Often times I would learn about a current or previous show from audience members, then would return to the stations to ask about it. By no means do I assume that my data is completely factual – especially that on audience preferences. Nor do I assume that any part of my data gathering was unproblematic. Conducting this research was easy, in that people were friendly and willing to share information, but it was difficult, time-consuming and frustrating. It took me three years to understand the relationship between different Ministries – those relationships are not officially documented, stated in any policy, not even agreed upon between the participating members. And by the time I understood it, it changed again.

In time, I realized that the history of Palestinian media and its policy battles told a significant story. Caught between a political project of state-building, an economic

commitment to liberalization, and cultural shifts of media globalization, the short history of Palestinian television symbolizes the hope of Palestinian society after the peace agreements and simultaneously the agreements' failures in providing the context for state-building. Broadcasting rights are part of the political battle *among* Palestinians and *between* Palestinians and Israelis, and thus, inform our understanding of contemporary Palestinian life and the on-going conflict. Moreover, as I was confronted with the dire information available on the industry, it became apparent that little of this story was known, whether by Palestinian audiences, or academics in the West. This paper aims to fill this research gap, as well as share a story which symbolizes the relationships between media and nation-building, policy-making and political conflicts, globalization and the nation-state.

Restricting Frequencies
Given the political and economic difficulties faced by Palestinians vis-à-vis their relations with Israel, when the time came for negotiations and the establishment of a proto-state, broadcasting was not considered the most important aspect of state-building. The Palestinian negotiators' lack of foresight did not only stem from deeming political negotiations more important. The new PA government, headed by Yasir Arafat, was largely made up of 'outsiders' (exiles who had not lived in the Territories since 1967 or 1948) who channelled their energies towards controlling and governing a population they had had little contact with. In the realm of broadcasting this translated into the establishment of a national system the PA could control: the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) was created as one of the first PA institutional entities, with radio broadcasts beaming from Jericho in July 1994 and television from Gaza in December 1995.

While a number of scholars have studied Palestinian media, they have analyzed the PA's role concerning freedom of expression and censorship, and its use of the PBC as a means to secure PA hegemony (Rubin 1994; Jamal 2000; Reuter and Zeebold 2000; Batrawi 2001, 2002). For others, the PA's early attention to the creation of a national media system and establishment of press regulations was symbolic of its commitment to a communication network. Amal Jamal writes that 'the mere fact that the Press Law was among the first laws issued by the PA reflects the sensitivity of freedom of expression and the attention paid to it by Palestinian officials. Although the spirit of the law illustrates the importance the PA gives to the freedom of the press, reality proves to be much more complex than theoretical intentions' (2001, 269). Reality has been nuanced, in great part because of political tensions with Israel.

One critical issue that has not been considered is the technical limitations placed on Palestinians through the Oslo agreements. In them, Israel set many conditions on the non-existent Palestinian media industry that were stultifying. I argue that

the negotiators' agreement to Israel's demands in the realm of telecommunications and broadcasting resulted in a chaotic landscape due to broadcasters working around these limitations.

According to one of the Palestinian negotiators of the Oslo Accords, Palestinians entered the negotiations with little media expertise and little attention to the importance of broadcasting needs:

> The Israelis entered the agreements with far better knowledge [and] American-trained lawyers speaking a language none of us were familiar with… they had … demands that they thought about beforehand and we were not even thinking about those things: telecommunications, media, water, sewage, digging for roads, all these kinds of things. For us the important issues were the big symbolic political ones, you know, borders, Jerusalem, refugees, which we never agreed on. We focused our energies on the wrong issues, and in so doing, we forgot the little issues which later down the road we realized were important… By the time we understood what we had agreed to, I mean the size of [broadcast] towers was even specified, the limits on how many megahertz, can you imagine! By the time we understood, it was too late… The [PA] got permission for six stations, and that was enough. Why would we think about more? And remember, there was no media or technical person on the negotiation team; or even someone as a consultant to tell us, 'no, no, you have to pay attention to these details [sic]' (Personal Interview, January 30, 2003).

Indeed, regulations were specific down to every detail imaginable. The Accords stated that 'Israel recognizes that the Palestinian side has the right to build and operate separate and independent communication systems and infrastructures including telecommunication networks, a television network and a radio network' (*Oslo Accords*, Annex III, Article 36, Section B1). However, Palestinians were not to be granted sovereignty either over the allocation of frequencies or the establishment of needed infrastructure. For example, the Accords stipulated that 'any digging or building regarding telecommunications and any installation of telecommunication equipment, will be subject to prior confirmation of the Israeli side' (Ibid, Section A2a). Moreover, Palestinians were given limitations on the frequencies and the number of channels the PBC could use: 'Specifically, the Palestinians shall ensure that only those frequencies and channels specified […] shall be used and that it shall not disturb or interfere with Israeli radio communication activity [sic]:… [Those channels are] Jericho: Channel 24; Nablus (Mt. Gerizim): Channel 5; Jenin: Channel 31; Ramallah: Channel 25; Hebron: Channel 30; Gaza: Channel 31' (*Oslo Accords*, Annex III, Article 36, Section B5 and Annex III, Schedule 6). There would be no room for other stations. The Accords further specified precise locations of broadcasting towers, tower heights and signal strengths so that no Israeli signals would be interfered with – whether radio signals

for military needs or commercial cellular use in the settlements. As one TV executive complained, 'our wins were symbolic, not real' (Personal Interview, June 22, 2005). From the onset of the industry, Palestinians were to be constrained by Israeli directives. This immediately meant that the creation of private channels was to be restricted.

Although the agreements left open future possibility for further channels, stating that 'frequencies … will be assigned upon specific requests' (*Oslo Accords*, Annex III, Article 36, Section 7); by mid-2007, Palestinians have yet to legally gain more. This means that all private stations use wavelengths not assigned for Palestinian television – or other – use. In effect, most stations function on decreased broadcasting ranges, competing with each other for those same signals, resulting in an over-crowded landscape. These technical challenges plague Palestinian broadcasters to this day.

Television Boom

Launched by an ex-Reuters cameraman-turned-entrepreneur, the first private channel began broadcasting in Nablus in April 1994. For its first year, the station had a reach of 60 square meters – a few city blocks – through a private transmission tower on top of a downtown building. The thought was that an alternative to state-run TV would be profitable. In fact, the rush to launch television stations in the 1990s was driven by profit incentives, not political or cultural ones. Most of the programming was made up of pirated Egyptian movies, Syrian sitcoms, and satellite links to pan-Arab stations illegally rebroadcasted. It did not take long for other entrepreneurs to replicate this model and launch their own stations.

By the end of 1996, there were seventeen other 'illegal stations'. As one television executive explained, 'any idiot with five hundred dollars, a VCR and a satellite hook-up [could] start his own TV station' (Personal Interview, November 17, 2002). Another TV executive explained it as reflective of the political climate: 'There was a sense of hope politically and otherwise… [There was] lots of activity and action in the domain of media' (Personal Interview, February 22, 2003). Since transmission was (relatively) technically easy and financially cheap, many were able to buy or build transmitters and beam signals to the public.

Stations were established in every major West Bank city[2]. In Summer 2000, a few months before the Second Intifada, thirty stations of various sizes and reach were in operation. By the time the violence erupted in September, 'the Palestinian territories turned into a free-for-all for both domestic and foreign news organizations. Palestinian businessmen began to finance their own networks as their national cause drew international attention' (Salama 2006). Despite the political and economic destitution suffered during the worst years of the Second

Intifada, from 2000 to 2003³, the television industry kept growing. By 2005, the West Bank boasted over forty private stations.

The Chaos and Politics of Broadcasting Policies

The Palestinian Authority knew that these stations were operating in violation of Israeli restrictions. While many of the PA's policies had to fall within the purviews of Israeli ones, they were often ignored. In general this shrugging off was not just a denial of Israeli demands. When it became clear to the PA (and the population at large) that the peace process was a stalemate, the issue of television 'rights' became a means of opposition to Israel on the part of the Palestinian government.

The PA saw the stations' presence as a tool of self-defence in the political struggle with Israel. As the Ministry of Interior's Director General in 2002, explained 'the Palestinian Authority has allowed private media in Palestine, especially in the broadcast media, firstly because it wanted to create facts on the ground for future negotiations with Israel in terms of occupying as [many…] frequencies as possible' (Batrawi 2002). The term 'facts on the ground' has an important history in the conflict: coined in the mid-1970s by then-Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon it refers to the establishment of settlements throughout the Occupied Territories as 'permanent' creations that Israel could not give up should negotiations ever happen (Kimmerling 2003). The term started being used by both sides to refer to concrete manifestations of Israel's manipulation and annexation of Palestinian territory, from military installations and checkpoints to by-pass roads and the security fence/ wall (see Segal and Weizman 2003). The PA posited the existence of the illegal channels (and their concrete manifestations in the form of antennas and transmission towers) similarly: 'permanent' objects that could not be removed should peace talks resume. The stations would serve as bargaining chips; shutting them down would weaken the PA's negotiating power. Moreover, the PA was aware of the stations' limited reach and figured they wouldn't play an important role in the dissemination of oppositional views – because few people received the signals – and if they did, the PA would have no qualms shutting stations down or threatening reporters, as it did in the realm of the press.

Allowing stations to broadcast, and consequently giving an image of authorizing a plurality of voices, also served internal PA strategies. As Jamal explains it, 'the stations' varied characters provide good spaces for discussion and debate. The plurality of stations enabled different political, cultural and social streams to express themselves and influence the public space' (2001, 270). This is partially true: plurality did exist, but to say that the stations influenced public space gives them much more power than they really had. The issue of pluralism is misleading, because channels' content was primarily entertainment, not political; and when political, often subject to self-censorship rarely disseminating views in opposition

to the PA. As Jamal notes in a later analysis: 'the emerging Palestinian media regime did not change the hegemonic political culture in Palestinian society and as a result did not seriously influence the conservative cultural discourse that characterized the media previous to the establishment of the PA' (Ibid, 130). A Palestinian-NGO study concluded much the same: 'the Palestinian media do not enhance critical thinking in the public sphere; rather, they reflect the dominant culture' (MIFTAH 2005, 7).

There was clear structural pluralism, reflecting 'a certain amount of tolerance toward the aspirations and needs of the Palestinian population to express itself in different manners and with different means' (Jamal 2000, 499). However this was a tolerated plurality – officially illegal but permissible – used by the PA as an example of how 'democratic' and open its rule was, even though the plethora of stations was not reflective of the spectrum of political parties and opinions. Equally important, this form of tolerated plurality was indication of the PA's political strategy to 'divide and control' the population. The Palestinian leadership maintained neopatrimonial control by ensuring political fragmentation, limiting oppositional voices, and diminishing threat to itself. This was the case in media and other institutions. Pluralism and diffusion were used as balancing mechanisms by the PA to subordinate oppositional segments and continuously fragment institution-building (Robinson 1997; Frisch 1998).

National media regulations were established to coexist alongside those in the Oslo Accords. Along with the slew of PA-run state institutions established since 1993 were the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Culture, which were all assigned jurisdiction over media (by the early 2000s, the Ministry of Interior relinquished its power, and was replaced by the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology). The Ministry of Information was charged with regulating all aspects of the media, focusing more on print than broadcasting and electronic media – because of the first's more expansive use – while the others helped in its decision-making capacities. In time, each Ministry would stake out its role; by the mid-2000s the 'management' of frequencies fell under the Minister of Telecommunications; raising funds for historical programs would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, and so on. This 'Tripartite Ministerial Commission' as it came to be called, would often get bogged down in disagreements about media regulations. The Ministries were used by often-corrupt Ministers to jockey for political power, slow to institute acceptable regulations. In fact, broadcasting regulations would continue to be disagreed upon until well after the industry burgeoned, and 'regulated' as if in a permanent 'state of emergency.'

A Palestinian Press Law was issued in June 1995 to replace Israeli military regulations. While the Press Law would make no mention of broadcasting it would become the *de facto* law for all media companies. It gave journalists substantial

freedom of expression, but it was also deliberately ambiguous and contradictory. The law stated that media companies had to: '[present…] press material in an objective, integrated, and balanced form… [and] refrain from publishing whatever may flare up violence, fanaticism, and hatred or invites to racism and sectarianism [sic]' (Palestinian Press Law, Clause 8). Further, Clause 37 forbade the publication of any material that 'could cause harm to national unity,' without a clear explanation of what that meant. This allowed the PA to crack down on press and media institutions it disagreed with. As one scholar explains, 'the Palestinian Press Law […was] an ambiguous law that could be used to advance democratic life or could form a hard whip to suppress dissidents' (Jamal 2000, 503). In many ways, it was both. Definitely freedom of expression granted to the PBC was limited since it was the party's official mouthpiece – Arafat meddled in programming and organizational decisions. The margin of freedom was wider in the private media, especially because of limited reach and relatively small audience size (see Boyd 1999; Jamal 2000; Jayyusi 2002; Reuter and Zeebold 2000).

The various legal attempts to assimilate broadcasting under the control of PA Ministries was mired in larger political strategies, many of which originated back to the PA's need to appease the population's growing disagreement about negotiations with Israel. For example, when drafting a new regulation in 1996, the PA was careful to use language as if Israeli limitations were non-existent. Not only that, it often assumed the Palestinian state actually existed, rather than admitting its proto-status over which Israel would maintain much control. The 1996 Audio-Visual Palestinian Law Project reads: 'TV channels and radio waves and various frequencies are exclusive rights to the state of Palestine and can't be sold or given up by any means' (The Audio/Visual Palestinian Law Project, Part Two, Article 6) – omitting reference to the limitations in the Oslo Agreements, never mind the assumption that there was an agreed upon entity called the 'state of Palestine.' When the PA *did* recognize the limitations put forth by Israel, it used obscure language to refer to it, as in the following article: 'when determining frequencies for a licensee in Palestine, the international agreements related to channels and waves put for Palestine must be taken into consideration' (Ibid., Article 8). The draft did not do away with the ambiguousness of what kind of content was permissible; for example, 'the audiovisual institution has to be committed not to encourage incitement for violence or calling for war, and has to support the policy of the national leadership' (Ibid, Article 10, Section 7). Finally, given that the PA was attempting to intimidate the population to agree with its political strategies vis-à-vis peace agreements with Israel, the draft also specified that 'the audiovisual institution has to be committed not to broadcast any thing that might affect the peace process and Oslo accord made in 1993 [sic]' (Ibid, Article 10, Section 11). In the words of a government official, the PA 'was playing a careful game, keeping a balance between its promises for the Palestinian people – to bring them freedom, justice, sovereignty, etc. – and its promises to the outside world – the Israelis, the

Americans – to make sure the [Palestinian] people accepted the terms of Oslo… [The PA] had to be careful because there was a lot in the [Oslo] agreements that the [Palestinian] people, had they found out, would have been upset about right away… so [the PA] had to hide, or mask, things [sic]' (Personal Interview, March 3, 2003). The PA played a careful balancing act in the realm of the media too. A Palestinian media professor explained media control in the following way: 'we had to implicitly agree with [the PA's] position, our broadcasts had to show support for negotiations [with Israel]… No, we were never told to do so, but the entire mood at the time was one of agreement with negotiations; … maybe, it was a kind of self-censorship among us [media professionals]… in a way these agreements [between media companies and PA policies of negotiations with Israel] did not have to be written down for anyone to follow' (Personal Interview, July 7, 2005).

Although this draft was to include every detail needed to be turned into a law, it never passed – partly because Ministries could not agree as to which one would become solely responsible for the media, partly because the PA was too busy with other things to bother with broadcasting regulations, and mainly because the *status quo* was to the PA's benefit. It was not until May 2002 that broadcast media would be mentioned, when the Palestinian Basic Law was ratified. In it, Article 27 granted freedom of expression to *all* media: 'freedom of audio, visual, and written media, as well as freedom to print, publish, distribute, transmit, together with the freedom of individuals working in this field, is guaranteed by this Basic Law, and other related laws' (quoted in Batrawi 2002). But this was not a law dedicated to broadcasting. Instead a 'state of emergency' continued to define PA control and regulation over TV and radio. PA and Ministry officials often blamed this on the 'double-challenge of state building and occupation. Only when you are completely free, can you have a sustainable model [for regulations], until then you have to function on an *ad hoc* basis' in the words of the Deputy Minister of Information (Personal Interview, June 28, 2005). This argument was advocated for problems faced in all state-building institutions, not just the media, and as scholars have noted, was part of a PA strategy to ensure that it, not the people, benefited in state-building (Frisch 1998).

In the meantime private Palestinian TV (and radio) stations sprung up, many of which did not obtain any PA permits until well after their establishment. In order to handle their creation and growth, the various Ministries would govern them *ex post facto*. The Ministry of Interior, followed by the Ministry of Information, would issue annual permits and set content and ownership conditions – without any written parameters specifying in what capacity. The Ministries were lax in issuing permits: a station only had to do obtain a 'no objection' permit from the Ministry of Interior; if a station was already in existence its content would have to be deemed acceptable according to the (subjective) standards of the Ministries. Different conditions were set, haphazardly, over the years: station owners had to

receive a 'good conduct certification' from the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Information stipulated that 25% of programming be locally produced, advertisements could not be created in-house; the Ministry of Culture would oversee that certain programming was in line with an elusively-defined 'national culture.'

Not a single ministry would ever obtain jurisdiction over the use of frequencies (although the PA charged the Ministry of Telecommunications in 2004 to 'manage' them), as Israel was uncompromising on the use of airwaves. As a result annual permits were temporary arrangements that would placate stations' needs without raising concern on the part of Israel. It helped that none of the stations were explicitly political or anti-Israeli, or indeed anti-PA.

This temporariness – based on frequency control by Israel, the issue of annual licenses, the various Ministries vying for control over media regulations, combined with a fear of Israeli reprisals against stations and a measure of self-censorship present in all media in the Territories – would come to define broadcasting. Stations found it hard to justify financial or technical investments. It was difficult to obtain outside funding (from foreign media firms or NGOs) because of the sense of impermanence. Stations were left to fend on their own. Consequently, most stations were small and unprofessional. Run by a handful of employees, many were a family business, with the children helping out, or the owner's distant family members making up the entirety of the (unpaid) staff. Some of the larger stations took advantage of the high numbers of unemployed teenagers or students to 'intern' for free at the stations.

With the exception of Al-Quds Educational Television which received funding from USAID and American and European NGOs, private station revenues came from commercials, and to a minimal extent NGO-funded programs. Against the background of increasing privatization and liberalization in the Territories (Hammami and Tamari 2001; Hanieh 2000; Samara 2000), television entrepreneurs would follow the American model of commercial television driven by advertising. But the advertising structure itself was chaotic. Considerable differences existed among stations, from ad rates to the types of commercials they aired. Although there were regulations that limited advertising (commercials could not be longer than 60 seconds, could not exceed 8 minutes per hour, stations and advertisers had to be separate business entities) many were ignored by the stations, and overlooked by the Ministries. Most stations obtained 'illegal funding' for the production and broadcast of commercials and programs in return for favours, commercial goods or services. It was not uncommon for stations to receive free Internet access from a local provider in return for advertisements in excess of 8 minutes per hour. Many stations bartered for food or office supplies. One station in Ramallah ran three one-hour 'shows' on detergent every day for a week, and in return the stations'

employees (along with their family and friends) obtained enough soap to last each household a year.

Enforced Localization

The level of nationalism, patriotism or indeed 'propaganda' in programming changed according to the political climate. Programming content fell in two general categories, local and foreign. I address the local first. In order to appeal to audiences and differentiate themselves, stations focused local content on daily issues. As one Palestinian media professor lamented, 'many [stations] see themselves as storefronts (and I hope they disappear). They [are] community TV stations … addressing people's mundane concerns' (Personal Interview, July 7, 2005). Stations opted for the cheapest type of programming: a talk-show (a number of guests are invited to debate a topic), a call-in show (an anchor fields telephone questions from viewers), a news hour (most often with video from other media sources and a local anchor providing the audio content) or scrolling text news (running during advertisements or other programming). Such shows were repetitive, providing little that was new or news worthy. The content was also very local: for example, a channel only hosted people from its own city. This was in large part due to the difficulty of movement, where people were confined due to Israeli policies of closures. The owner of a TV station in Tulkarem explained: 'we have checkpoints all over the city; there's the wall [or security fence] going up... People can't get in, people can't get out… How are we supposed to invite guests on our shows from anywhere else?' (Personal Interview, April 18, 2003). As such there was no coverage that was truly national. Palestinians on the whole had a plethora of TV channels in their midst, yet few could watch the same channel or experience the same show.

This trend of localization has been detrimental on two fronts. First, 'enforced localization' bolstered PA power by keeping citizens away from each other, and in a sense unaware of each other, making it difficult to form associations that would collectively challenge its rule. This strategy, here specifically in the media, was a long-standing one of the PA: using pluralism and diffusion as balancing mechanisms in order to subordinate oppositional groups (Robinson 1997; Frisch 1998). As long as the PA could ensure its hegemony in state-building, it could hold on to its political power. This was a strategy that was also pursued economically: despite policies of closures, PA- and/or Minister-owned companies were often the only ones able to transfer goods between different areas (whether cigarettes, milk, concrete or petrol). Media localization then must be seen as just one aspect of the PA's tactic of balancing ('tolerated') pluralism and diffusion.

Second, keeping the stations from broadcasting nationally also has to be critiqued as a measure by Israel to maintain localization among Palestinians. Such a strategy

dovetails with Israel's geographic and territorial segregation of Palestinians (sectioning off the Territories into Areas A, B and C combined with the measures of closures, curfews, checkpoints, roadblocks, by-pass roads, settlements, walls, etc.), as a means to 'divide and control' the Palestinian nation by fragmenting it (see Segal and Weizman 2003). Such 'localization' (in the media, physical, political, and economic realms) has been a means of 'preserving' localism, provincialism and isolation, resulting in weakening the populace – symbolically, politically, economically, geographically, as well as culturally. It prevents, or at best hinders, national unity, forbids Palestinians to reproduce themselves collectively (here specifically in the cultural realm) and feel part of a unified whole. Segregating and fragmenting Palestinians inhibits them from sharing the same history, sharing a present space of existence, or feeling like they can share a collective future. Palestinians who were becoming more and more separated from each other through checkpoints, roadblocks and security fences, would also become separated in their media diets: both measures to keep the actualization of a nation-state distant.

Politically and culturally, media and physical segregation forces Palestinian identity to narrow itself. Not only has fragmentation made a 'national' sense of Palestinianness more difficult to achieve, since those in Jenin for example have less in common with (and know less about) those in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Gaza. It has also excluded other Palestinians (refugees in exile or others in the diaspora) so that a trans-global Palestinian identity becomes difficult to manifest. Keeping media forcibly local aggravates the fragmentation that exists among the (national and global) Palestinian population.

Broadcast media is important in both national identity formation and institutional development. It plays a number of critical roles: reporting events to the 'nation' and in turn shaping them; satisfying individual and community needs for information, integration, cultural continuity and psychological escape. Media is also vital to the creation and strength of civil society and to the foundation of democratic rule, in fostering a public sphere for political and cultural debates. As a public sphere, it helps shape and (re)create an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) – whether as an entertainment or educational resource, as part of cultural production or self-expression. Moreover, the effectiveness of any communications system depends on its institutional, political and cultural linkages in a particular society. Given the policy limitations explained above, Palestinian broadcasting cannot fulfil any of these potentials. Rather, the broadcasting sector represents the prevention of unity. The reality is that of a delayed formation of a pluralistic media, arresting the emergence of a viable broadcasting industry – itself a necessary feature of a viable state.

Furthermore, given these limitations, television cannot serve its role as a public watchdog or 'fourth estate.' As Jamal concludes, 'it seems that the Palestinian media do not view themselves as integral players in the Palestinian political game and are happy to sit on the fence' (2000, 504). It is important to recognize that much of this is not by choice, but forced on the industry by PA and Israeli policies and political strategies. If anything, Palestinian broadcasting is the cultural parallel to the isolation, separation and fragmentation experienced in the 'spatial' realm.

The Impact of the Second Intifada
Between 1993 and 2005, programming has been reflective of the political mood. In the years when peace still seemed possible, content consisted largely of entertainment-oriented programs; what little news or political programming existed exhibited an implicit support for the PA and its peace efforts. That would change drastically during the Second Intifada, when programming became highly jingoistic. Shows dealt with nothing but the violence at hand: footage from foreign sources of Palestinians being shot and harassed were played *ad nauseum*, talk shows focused on the effects of the re-occupation such as the difficulties of unemployment or dwindling foreign assistance, children's shows dealt with issues such as bed-wetting due to fear of Israeli soldiers, women's shows concentrated on the psychological hardships of being under curfew. News spotlighted Israeli aggressions and Palestinian martyrdom, often in the form of 'news alerts' combined with graphic images of violence and death. Overall, such programming had an exaggerated emphasis on conflict and drama.

A few months into the Second Intifada, Israel started paying attention to Palestinian media and charged it with inciting violence against the Israeli population. In December 2000, the Israeli military (IDF) bombed the PBC headquarters and transmission tower in Ramallah, in the interest of 'Israeli national security' (Jayyusi 2002). Overnight, the policy of tolerated plurality benefited the PA in another way: when PBC signals were blacked-out for more than a month, many private stations helped the PBC by offering it use of their signals, cameras, VCRs, and other equipment. While the PBC had been their arch-nemesis, stations provided help out of political solidarity and future guarantee. One TV station owner explained, 'we let them use our facilities. Of course part of that was a strategy of a thank-you in advance, yes maybe even a blackmail you can call it… that we helped you when you needed it, maybe you will help us when the time comes' (Personal Interview, July 14, 2005).

The fear of being bombed led stations to tone down their patriotic rhetoric and mute criticism of Israel. Although no other stations were bombed, the renewed presence of the IDF brought with it an onslaught of destruction. Between January and April 2002, the IDF destroyed or damaged much of whatever infrastructure

the PA and public and private institutions had built over the past nine years (see Ajluni 2003). The IDF's foray into the West Bank included the destruction and vandalism of most private media firms. Television stations (including local offices of pan-Arab stations), radio stations and IT companies were ransacked: telephone lines were cut; computers were thrown out of windows; archives were stolen or destroyed (Abdullah 2002; Jayyusi 2002).

Most of all, the Second Intifada was financially devastating on the stations. The economy of the Territories plummeted into a free-fall towards poverty (World Bank Group 2003; 2004). Advertisers became a thing of the past. Bartering dwindled since businesses were forced to deal with immediate needs, of which leaving aside capital or goods for advertising was not one. No one expected the stations to survive the economic hardship and political upheaval. Many stations lost their archives – dismal to begin with. They were also forced to function on destroyed and out-dated equipment and rely on a staff that substantially shrunk in size. Despite the setbacks, not a single station would go out of business.

But the difficulties faced during the Second Intifada set the stations back even further technically. As one TV-station owner complained in 2003, 'we are working with the same equipment we have had for seven years. And we have no choice but to function on what exists until it breaks down… We've gone back to levels of fifty years ago in other countries' (Personal Interview, April 14, 2003). Moreover, Israel's clampdown made it even more difficult for reporters, cameramen, journalists and others to move from one area to another. Palestinian reporters became the last to reach a site, well after those from international stations had left. The already large gap between the professionalization of Palestinian and foreign TV stations continued to widen.

Globalization through Re-Broadcasting

The growth of Palestinian media was occurring during a phase of expanding pan-Arab media. While pan-Arab satellite stations hit the airwaves in 1991, it was not until the mid-1990s that they gained popularity. Stations such as Al Jazeera and LBC (launched in 1996) created a buzz on Palestinian streets as much as other Arab nations (see Sakr 2001), and led to a growth in satellite purchases and use. The Palestinian population was enthralled to have access to news and entertainment like it had never seen before. Satellite channels quickly became the favourite for audiences: their popularity cut across gender, religious, class and political lines.

Palestinian station managers, program editors and reporters recognized that they could not compete, whether in the extent of professionalization, program quality, information access, investigative reports or high-profile guests. They couldn't send

reporters into the field, they had little financial means to improve their programs or technical abilities to create their own drama or game shows. The stations' response to the pan-Arab satellite onslaught was to co-opt the satellite programs into their own broadcasts.

Except for the two forms of talk shows and news described earlier, very little programming was created in the Territories. The remainder of the menu on local channels came from foreign sources. Initially, entertainment programming was made up of Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian and other Arab content such as situation comedies, dramas, soap operas, and movies played from pirated videotapes. News came from illegally plugging into and retransmitting satellite channels. Some stations differentiated themselves by rebroadcasting non-Arabic news like BBC, TV5, Fox News or CNN. Bethlehem TV prided itself on rebroadcasting Israeli news with live 'uncensored' translation – as the station manager boasted, 'whatever language the Israelis use, we translate it directly… If they call someone a suicide bomber, we do too. We don't call him a martyr' (Personal Interview, February 21, 2003). Rebroadcasting pan-Arab channels at first primarily drew on news, but it did not take long for local channels to include entertainment in their line-up. Music videos, sporting events (especially 'live' football matches) and game shows (Arab equivalents to 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire' and 'American Idol') gave way to include all kinds of genres.

The illegal rebroadcast of pan-Arab channels is not to be overlooked, for it has been by far the most dominant form of content on local channels. According to data gathered from interviews and content analysis on archives between 1998 and 2003, satellite rebroadcasts made up more than half of programming content, followed by about a quarter of content in the form of pirated videotapes. The replay of foreign programs, whether live or delayed, was also one the main reasons why viewers tuned in to the local channels. According to viewers I interviewed, many of them only tuned in to local stations when Al-Jazeera news was retransmitted; one man outside of Ramallah elaborated: 'we know that at 5[pm], Wattan [TV station broadcasting from Ramallah] has the French news. At 5:30, it has the BBC. At six, Al-Jazeera. So we only turn it on at six. Even my kids know the schedule! It's the same every day' (Personal Interview, March 1, 2003).[4]

The Palestinian audience came to rely on pan-Arab stations for global, regional and national news. In fact, most Palestinians came to know what was happening in the next town through pan-Arab news, especially during moments of heightened violence between Palestinians and Israel. For example, in reference to the Israeli military incursions into Jenin in Spring 2002, a local man explained, 'all of us in town watched Al Jazeera to know what was happening down the street… I think all the local channels, at some point they stopped sending their own reporters and just played Al Jazeera' (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003). While the events of the

Second Intifada were covered in detail on Al Jazeera (see El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002), the reliance on pan-Arab stations among the population to know what was going on 'down the street' continued well after the violence subdued. Pan-Arab stations became the primary source of news and information for international, national and local news.

This trend is as problematic as the 'enforced localization' described earlier. Arab satellite channels disseminate a similar ideological perspective, especially when it comes to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They reflect the dominant culture of Arab/Palestinian victimization, a two-state solution, Israeli aggressions happening first and thereby instigating violence by Palestinians as a (natural) response, suicide bombers as 'martyrs,' and so on. The channels are also commercial entities, and therefore, arguably, attempt to attract as many eye-balls and advertisers as possible, producing programs that appeal to the 'low-common denominator' and not necessarily of value in documenting and archiving Palestinian 'culture.' Moreover, pan-Arab channels operate in a virtual vacuum of political mobilization – political parties are not represented in the actual political landscape nor in media ownership (except for Hizbullah's Al Manar TV). They are not – and certainly do not have to be – reflective of the pluralism that exists in Palestinian society; nor are they 'responsible' to serve as a watchdog within the Palestinian context and thereby do not provide a national 'public sphere.' Thus, as pan-Arab channels (Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya) or as national channels available on satellite (LBC or Dubai TV), they do not serve the political or cultural needs of the Palestinian 'nation.'

Although the availability and popularity of satellite channels has changed the role of state broadcasters in many Arab nations (see Sakr 2001; El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Zayani 2005; Miles 2005), in the Palestinian context, this has negated an indigenous media sector from becoming viable. It has served to marginalize Palestinian stations, or at least Palestinian programming, making it even harder for the stations to justify economic, technical or programmatic development. It has also made local TV less appealing for viewers. The popularity of satellite TV (retransmitted or legally obtained), combined with the policies described above, has kept local channels in a state of arrested development. Meanwhile the Palestinian television industry itself is unable to build a shared cultural identity or unity among Palestinians. Its role becomes one of increasingly political insignificance, not a public sphere, agent of change, or vanguard of democracy. Palestinian TV plays no role in 'imagining' the Palestinian 'community': neither setting the boundaries of the nation, nor disseminating cultural and political messages to Palestinians across the same space and time.

Thus, Palestinian broadcasting ends up reflecting the tensions between media globalization and localization. Palestinian viewers are exposed to a whole world outside their 'country' and to the details of everything happening within their city,

but seldom know what is going on in the next town – especially when there is no violence for pan-Arab stations report. This double-tension of globalization and localization results in further fragmenting Palestinians.

Conclusion

The history of Palestinian TV reflects how local media has been stifled by the combined political conditions of occupation, lack of sovereignty and a corrupt government – reflected in the policies instituted by Israel and by the PA through its various Ministries. Since 1993, the local and global dynamics that have shaped Palestinian TV have resulted in a contradiction: on the one hand, the 'enforced localization' of broadcasting signals and programs; on the other hand, an opening up to the outside through illegally rebroadcasted foreign programs. This local-global dichotomy has served to undermine the political battle of Palestinian nation-building. By drawing its attention either myopically or hyperopically from the 'nation,' it has served to fragment and narrow-cast the population, leaving both the Palestinian television industry and the Palestinian nation as dreams to be chased.

While the Second Intifada did not, or has not, officially ended, the political landscape has changed. By mid-2004 the Palestinian media toned down even further any messages of militancy and victimhood and aired programs that had nothing to do with the conflict. By 2005, most stations introduced new programs, anchors, reporters and logos – differentiating themselves by offering specific programming: sporting events, children's shows, international news, or music videos, the majority of which were rebroadcasted from satellite stations. A rebirth of the industry was taking place – still operating under *ad hoc* regulations. Eleven new channels came onto the scene. The PA was committed to work on more specific regulations in order to insure the professionalization and growth of the industry. As the Minister of Interior explained 'we have to clean [the television industry] up' (Personal Interview, July 10, 2005); echoed by a TV executive's comment, 'thirteen years of a 'state of emergency' is enough. It's time to get serious' (Personal Interview, June 29, 2005). Some of these regulations would specify the amount of invested capital each station was to have, the educational background of its editors and staff, increase the amount of indigenous programming to 40%, and crack down on retransmission of satellite channels. The Tripartite Ministerial Commission was to step down to a newly constituted 'National Council for Information in Palestine' made up of government officials, civil society leaders and media professionals. However changes went on hold when the political climate shifted again.

Violence between Israel and the Palestinians diminished, Arafat died, Mahmoud Abbas became President, Israel withdrew from Gaza, Ariel Sharon fell into a coma. And with each change, the broadcasting industry would wait in the political

limbo, holding its breath to see what policy changes would ensue. Finally, the landscape of Palestinian television would be altered forever when Hamas launched its own station, Al Aqsa TV, on January 9, 2006. This time, the PA would not attempt to shut it down[5]. The face of Palestinian politics and legislation was about to change too with the victory of Hamas in the national elections later that month. Ministers were replaced, media regulations were to be restudied, state-building efforts would take on a different form. Palestinian TV may have survived its first decade in surprising and tumultuous ways, but the next one promises to be just as mired in contradictions, filled with as much hope and chaos, if not more, than the first one.

Notes

[1] These numbers were gathered by cross-referencing information gathered from media professionals with official documents obtained from the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Interior.

[2] The Gaza Strip would lag behind significantly in the creation of private channels for a number of reasons: the PA's more established and feared apparatus in the Gaza Strip prevented oppositional voices such as Hamas from being institutionalized in the media; the PBC's signal strength allowed little room for other channels to broadcast (and the channel itself was popular among viewers); levels of income were significantly lower so that the advertising business was marginal and fewer entrepreneurs saw the benefits of owning a TV station; finally, the Strip's small geographic size also meant over-crowded frequency use due to Israeli settlements and military installations, and proximity to Israel proper.

[3] The economy of the Territories suffered significantly during the Second Intifada: unemployment reached as high as 65% of the population, poverty rates tripled, many businesses and industries came to a complete standstill (World Bank Group 2003; 2004).

[4] For their part, the satellite channels did not have a problem with being 'rebroadcasted.' One Al Jazeera executive explained as: 'they're watching us. So they don't pay. It's okay, they're still Al Jazeera fans. And at the end of the day that's more important' (Personal Interview, April 28, 2003).

[5] Al Aqsa TV illegally began broadcasting out of a private home in the Gaza Strip in late 2003. It took the PA less than a week to shut the station down.

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