UNIVERSITEIT GENT

FACULTEIT POLITIEKE EN SOCIALE WETENSCHAPPEN

CITIZENS OR JOURNALISTS?
A Study of Online Journalism in Palestine

Wetenschappelijk artikel

aantal woorden: 12.034

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MASTERPROEF MANAMA CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT

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ACADEMIEJAAR 2014 – 2015

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ABSTRACT

The past few years have seen online media soar in the Arab world. This is no different in the Palestinian territories, where there are about two million Facebook users. However, in a context where everyday life and mobility are highly restricted by an ongoing occupation, these new media take on a different meaning and purpose. This study aims to understand the role online journalism (in the broadest sense) plays in Palestine today, by looking at the reasons for which online media are used and the context in which they are used. The paper is divided into four main parts. The first examines the relationship between (online) journalism and activism, since the difference between both tends to blur in Palestine. The second part looks at the effect that the lack of a strong legal and institutional framework has on online journalists. This part focuses on copyright, press cards and alternative forms of journalistic organization. The third part goes into significant aspects of Internet access and usage that influence online journalism, specifically the 3G-affair and the popularity of Facebook. The final section discusses whether external pressure is an issue for online journalists, as it is for mainstream journalists. The conclusion of the paper is twofold. On the one hand, online journalism in Palestine is determined by existing societal and political realities and fits into a broader tradition of using media as (and for) resistance against the Israeli occupation. On the other hand, online media offer new platforms and new ways to both fight and escape the occupation. They transcend physical barriers and, to a certain extent, real-life limitations. That way, these new media offer a unique way for Palestinians to create a collective identity that challenges existing stereotypes and thus forms part of a mental decolonization process.

PREFACE

This paper is in many ways the conclusion of a journey.

A physical journey, to places and even worlds that were unknown and, for a long time, unimaginable to me. An intellectual journey, which challenged me to stretch my beliefs and powers of analysis beyond my perceived abilities. However, most of all, this paper results from a moral journey.

Before I started the Conflict & Development Master's program, I studied History for four years. There is something wonderfully soothing in being detached, at the very least in time, of your study field. This all changes when the subjects you write about in a sterile academic context, become living things that breathe, laugh and suffer. The question of how to turn their day-to-day lives into my study objects, was part of an intense moral struggle.

Therefore, I would firstly like to thank all the people who gave me their time and trust and told me their stories. Even if this paper only knows a very limited audience, I feel very strongly that I have an obligation towards them to write as truthfully as possible. More than anything else, I hope this study does them justice.

I would also like to thank my promoter, professor Christopher Parker, whose inexhaustible knowledge inspired me to become the best researcher I can be. I'm still not sure whether I deserve his faith in my abilities, but I'm nonetheless incredibly thankful for it and I hope the end result does his trust in me credit.

Many thanks to Dorien Vanden Boer, who offered me clues when I was still very clueless. Thank you for taking the time to give me such helpful advice and lending me your expertise.

Special thanks also go to professor Mohammed Abualrob at Birzeit University, for giving me valuable help and information.

Thanks to everyone at Hostel In Ramallah, quite possibly the best hostel in the world.

My time in Palestine would not have been the same without the great company I had during the first part of my stay. I feel privileged to have been part of such an amazing and talented group. So: my heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in the Fieldwork trip to Israel and Palestine, I hope we go on many more adventures. Thank you specifically, Nele Bauwens and Laurens Janssens, for making such a great team. Your help and trust was priceless.

I came back from Palestine a different person, or at least it felt like that. Seeing and experiencing so many baffling things, shook me to my core. I would not have been

able to process these experiences without having such a great and loving home front. Your intelligence, humor and patience meant the world to me. Thank you, mama and papa, for encouraging me to follow my dreams and having such unconditional faith in me. Thank you, Edith, for being your wise and amazing self: you helped me more than you can possibly imagine. Thank you Andrew, for keeping the world Zombie-free (no, really).

Lastly, I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude for the Department of Conflict and Development Studies at the University of Ghent, where I learnt so much the past year. This is exemplified in a quote by the poet and general word artist W. H. Auden:

> *History is, strictly speaking, the study of questions.*
> *The study of answers belongs to anthropology and sociology.*

My personal quest for answers is the final journey that led to the completion of this paper.

Margot Cassiers
Herenthout, August 2015

1. SHOOT AS YOU WALK: AN INTRODUCTION

On the fifth of March 2012 young Palestinians across Jerusalem got the following request on their Facebook page:

> *Are you from Jerusalem? Do you have access to Jerusalem? Do you want to do something for Jerusalem? Do you have a camera and like taking photos? Would you like to take part in an event? Don't hesitate to contact us, we're waiting for you! [1]* (Nairuz18, June 15, 2012)

The message was posted on a Facebook page called 'Events in Palestine' and ended with the sentence "Because we love Al-Quds." It was a project organized by Sabreen Hadawi[2], a Palestinian Jerusalemite journalist, who got the idea from a Lebanese friend and journalist. The initiative in the Lebanese city Tripoli was organized by the NGO *We Love Tripoli* and took off in November 2009. *Shoot As You Walk* consisted of a series of photo excursions to different parts of the city to discover and record the everyday life in a lesser known part of Lebanon. The goal of the project was to learn about the city and to change the bad reputation that it had and still has (the title of the project is a reference to Tripoli's violent image) (Shoot As You Walk, About, 2009) (Anderson, 2012).

The project spread to different cities in countries such as Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia. Hadawi learnt about it and decided to bring the project to Jerusalem. It was quite rainy that first evening, but still a few people showed up and *Shoot As You Walk in Jerusalem* was a fact. From then on, every week, a group of Palestinian Jerusalemites came together on different locations to record day-to-day life in the eternal city, based on different themes and focusing on different locations. That was the initial goal, however something changed along the way. The young photographers started noticing that the city was a bit different every week, whether it was about changes in the population of the city or places whose meaning and outlook were altered. This process, also known as the 'Judaization of Jerusalem', describes the Israeli efforts to change the demographic and physical appearances of the city in accordance with its Zionist ideal (Zink, 2009). Organiser Hadawi describes it as follows:

> *Some things that were happening were forcing the people to forget. We started documenting what was happening. Our goal became to track changes and keep the memory of the people, or loose it forever (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015)*

The project is no longer running, but its story gives an interesting view into the experience of an online journalistic venture in Jerusalem. Why is it that a project like

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[1] The original message was in Arabic, translation by organizer Sabreen Hadawi.
[2] Certain names in this paper were altered, at the request of the interviewees.

Shoot As You Walk had a very different outcome in a Palestinian context than elsewhere in the Arab world?

1.1. Online media in Palestine

The past few years have seen online media soar in the Arab world. These communication tools represent an independent and highly democratized source of information, which is open to all to consult or participate in. It is therefore not surprising that these types of online media have, for better or for worse, played a vital role in societal changes throughout the Middle East the past few years. The protests in Iran in 2009 against the results of the presidential elections were dubbed "the first Twitter revolution" (Newman, 2009, 8). In 2011 the world watched in amazement as the Arab World, which had "lacked not only democracy, but even large popular movements pressing for it", began experiencing large-scale civil unrest and protests demanding for political change (Howard & Hussain, 2011, 35). Most recently, the remarkable usage of social media by Islamic State or Daesh made it clear that digital media can be used for various ends.

Initially, the Internet was lauded as a bringer of democracy to parts of the world that had previously seemed unwelcoming towards it. Authors such as Philip Seib emphasized the democratizing effects of online information flows in the Middle East or "empowerment through information" as he calls it (Seib, 2007, 1). Seib claims that new media can have a crucial "role in progressive political change" (Seib, 2007, 15), but nuances this by stating that it will remain to be seen who will benefit mostly from these new media's potential to take hold of public opinion and take power away from existing powers that be. In *New Media, New Audience, New Topics, and New Forms of Censorship in the Middle East* Ahmed El Gody (2009) states that new media simply gave rise to new forms of censorship by authoritarian regimes. The issue of whether online media have a democratizing effect or not, therefore remains crucial in research about Internet usage in the Arab world. (See also Hamdy 2009, Hamdy 2010, Howard & Hussain 2011)

In Palestine, the situation is somewhat dissimilar because there isn't just one authoritarian source of power. In studies about online media in Palestine, the relationship with Israel is always present, yet the analyses of the effects of this relationship tend to differ.

First of all, there are texts that focus on online media as an activist tool, aiming to reach a foreign (Western) audience.

In *The Palestinian-Israeli Web War,* Chanan Naveh studies the "manifestation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in cyberspace" (Naveh, 2007, 171). Naveh talks about a new form of diplomacy, called 'Netpolitik', which is mostly aimed at gaining moral legitimacy by winning hearts and minds of people across the globe. In this context,

online media have become a propaganda-tool, in which the Israeli narrative is dominated by security issues and the dangers of terrorism, while the Palestinian side focuses on the life conditions under Israeli occupation and human rights violations committed against them.

Heba Zayyan and Cynthia Carter also create an image of a type of citizen journalism that mostly aims at humanizing Palestinians towards an international audience. They claim that the Palestinian blogosphere and other areas of online journalism are currently growing much stronger than elsewhere in the Arab world. This is caused by the lack of governmental control over Internet access and usage, which means there is little or no censorship on websites and blogs (Zayyan & Carter, 2009).

In *Blogging for Sovereignty* (2012) Justin D. Martin and Sherine El-Toukhy analyze 127 Palestinian blogs. They primarily look at the authors and the content of these blogs. They concluded that most blogs were primarily focused on criticizing Israel, though the English blogs tended to be less fierce.

A second group of studies primarily looks at the effects of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian IT sector. These tend to focus more on the role online media play in Palestinian societies themselves.

In *New Palestinian Media and Democratization from Below*, Orayb Aref Najjar states that

> *the story of Palestinian technology use is ultimately related to their relations with Israel as an occupying power and is mostly driven by those relations* (Najjar, 2009, 192).

Najjar believes that the extensive rise of new media in Palestine occurred because the state power of the Palestinian Authority is so weak. By using Pierre Bourdieu's Field theory, Najjar tries to contextualize journalism by looking at its relationship with other fields in society. This methodological orientation makes it possible to see the Palestinian online media landscape as "an arena of struggle" embedded in Palestinian society, with political, social, cultural and economic links to different parts of it (Najjar, 2009, 192-193).

The importance of online media in Palestine seems to be multi-sided. In a documentary by the London-based news agency Middle East Monitor about citizen journalists in Gaza, several reasons are mentioned for why online news media are currently so popular in Palestine. These include the arguments that were mentioned in the studies mentioned above. First of all, these online media provide Palestinians with a new and independent medium (as opposed to mainstream media) to talk about what is happening to and around them. The Middle East Monitor documentary also states that these websites provide a way for Palestinians to reconnect in a context where they are literally unable to get to each other in real life. Lastly, they are part of what

journalist Yousef Alhelou calls "a battle for narratives": Palestinian bloggers write to tell the world stories of Palestinian suffering, in order to present an alternative to the Israeli dominated narrative (Middle East Monitor, 2013).

However, the importance of online media as a means to create an independent collective identity goes even further than a propaganda war. In *Palestine Online*, Miriyam Aouragh studies the role of Internet in Palestine and Palestinian diaspora's. Her primary thesis is that online media play a crucial part in creating and maintaining a Palestinian national identity. The works of Benedict Anderson are referred to more than once: "It (the Internet) is a mediating space through which the Palestinian nation is globally 'imagined' and shaped" (Aouragh, 2012, 4).

The importance of Internet usage in Palestine comes from the lack of mobility caused by the physical constraints in real life. In that way, online media become a tool for empowerment and solidarity. Aouragh firmly believes that "(…) new technological developments should be seen as a continuation of, rather than a break from, older types of social interaction" (Aouragh, 2012, 45).

So in order to study and understand the role of online journalism in Palestine today, we need to look at the political and societal realities from which it originated and in which it functions. Firstly, however, the specific goals and study field of this research need to be determined.

1.2. Terminology and Research outline

Journalism has changed dramatically since the widespread emergence of the Internet began.[3] As a result, the days are long gone when this discipline had a clear-cut definition and working area. The discussion of what does and does not count as journalism in the era of social media is ever ongoing. Allan concludes that "what counts as journalism (…) is in a state of flux" (Allan, 2009, 31). Eugenia Siapera and Andreas Veglis study the relationship between traditional and online journalism, and mostly see the former as the online variant of print journalism. The authors discuss three ways of viewing online journalism: the first looks at online journalism as the result of traditional journalism adapting to a new environment, the second defines online journalism as a completely new form of journalism and the third sees it as a

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[3] The impact of online media is hard to underestimate in today's newsrooms: mainstream media use online media more and more both to find sources and to publish material. However, there is also a vast array of online practices that take on journalism-like characteristics. This has given rise to various concepts to denote different activities that are similar to classical journalism, but aren't quite the same thing. Scholars have developed a long list of different terminologies to name these, including: social media journalism, open source journalism, participatory journalism, citizen journalism, grassroots journalism, hyperlocal journalism, user-generated content, DIY reporting, networked journalism, citizen-produced coverage, personal journalism, distributed journalism and so forth (Allan, 2009, 18, 24 & Siapera & Veglis, 2012, 3). The prevailing term is 'citizen journalism', which Stuart Allan describes as "the ordinary person's capacity to bear witness, thereby providing commentators with a useful label to characterize an ostensibly new genre of reporting" (Allan, 2009, 18).

mutation of existing journalistic traditions. The authors link these three possibilities to different phases of the evolution journalism experienced in the past twenty years. The first relates to the application of existing journalistic norms and criteria on online media, the second to the acceptance and usage of techniques such as interactivity, multimediality and hypertext, and the third relates to the development of new kinds of journalism such as citizen journalism (Siapera & Veglis, 2012, 4-5).

I would argue that all these mechanisms could exist at once within the same context, without a distinction in time. To apply this, I will use an extensive interpretation of the subject. Peter Dahlgren wields a very broad conception of what constitutes as online journalism:

> *This sprawling domain is comprised of mainstream online media, alternative journalism sites, the blogosphere, social media, individual and group productions, including efforts by social movements and other activists and groups of every imaginable persuasion political, religious, and lifestyle advocates, hobbyists, and much more* (Dahlgren, 2013, 160).

I will follow this comprehensive description in my research, because it allows me to look at the wide spectrum of online alternatives to mainstream journalism in Palestine. So far, existing studies on the subject have been limited to specific platforms or goals. Accordingly, I conducted interviews with various players in the field of Palestinian online journalism: social media activists, bloggers, academics specialized in this field, professional journalists (both for print and digital media) and government officials, as well as representatives of online press agencies, (online) media development NGO's and activist organizations. I completed a total of 22 interviews in April and May 2015.[4] For practical reasons, the interviews for this research were only conducted in Jerusalem and the West Bank. While I also studied literature and material on online media usage by Palestinians in Gaza and in the diaspora (Jordan, Lebanon or further away), I only have direct sources from the two areas mentioned above. While I do not claim completeness, I hope the conclusions of this study might be indicative for further research.

This research is an ethnographic study of Palestinian online journalism (Hoey, 2014). With the example of Miriyam Aouragh, it was realized by doing "multi-sited fieldwork" and thus studying the subject both online and offline (Aouragh, 2012, 32-33). The study is conducted by what Siapera and Veglis refer to as "the sociology of journalism", which "looks at the ways in which journalism is created as a product of distinct historical, social, cultural, political and economic circumstances" (Siapera & Veglis, 2012, 10). In their overview of existing research about online journalism, Siapera and Veglis discuss three areas that research has tended to focus on: technology, production and consumption of online news. While all three aspects are

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[4] See attachment I for an overview.

mentioned, I mainly look at the *production* of online journalism: at the context in which it is created and the goals of its creators.[5]

The primary goal of this study is to understand the role online journalism plays in Palestine today. To achieve this objective, I look at the goals with which online media are used and I try to identify different aspects that determine the context in which they are used. While several research structures would have been justifiable, I decided to organize this paper as follows.

In the first part, I will examine the relationship between online journalism and activism. All the studies mentioned above, somehow relate Palestinian online journalism to resistance against the occupation. In this first part I will go into different motivations to use online media and try to discover whether and how these motivations really determine how and why Palestinians publish on online media.

In the second part I look at the role of weak governmental institutions on (professional) online journalism in Palestine. According to Najjar (2009) and Zayyan and Carter (2009), this has contributed to the boom of online media usage. Is this really the case, or does the lack of a strong structural framework for online journalists to work and publish in, in contrast actually have negative effects on them? I will discuss themes on this subject that were recurring during the interviews and I will look at the potential of online media to overcome these limitations.

The third section will focus on two aspects of Internet access and usage that are particularly significant for online journalists. Firstly, I will start from Najjar's (2009) earlier statement that access to new technologies in Palestine is determined by its relationship with Israel. I will apply this notion to a topic that is very important for online journalism today: Internet access on a mobile phone. After that, I will shortly go into the question of what online platform(s) Palestinians prefer to use.[6]

The final part of this paper takes a look at the matters of censorship and political affiliation and the ways in which these affect online media in Palestine. Do online media truly transcend political realities, or should we look at them as a continuation of existing societal traditions, like Aouragh (2012) suggests? Have online media indeed been able to transcend the political nature of print media? Is it true that, like Zayyan and Carter (2009) suggest, there is no censorship on online media in Palestine? Or are there simply new forms of censorship, like El Gody (2009) suggests?

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[5] For practical reasons (the primary being that I can't speak or read Arabic), this research doesn't go into content analysis.

[6] This part is quite short, given the difficulty of finding (recent) data about online media usage in Palestine.

At the end of this study, I hope to have an understanding of the role online journalism plays in Palestine and the factors that shape(d) this. This will help us understand why a project like *Shoot As You Walk* took on a different meaning when it came to Jerusalem.

2. "MY CAMERA IS MY WEAPON".
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTIVISM AND ONLINE JOURNALISM

2.1. Online journalism as activism

> *I believe that my camera is my weapon, and the articles of journalists are their weapons.* (Mohammed Abbas, personal communication, April 20, 2015)

The statement above is from Mohammed Abbas, a Palestinian photographer and journalist in Ramallah. Apart from his work as a freelancer, Abbas volunteers in Al'Amari refugee camp to give photography classes to children. Growing up here, the young photographer never saw reporters as a kid. This is a shame because, as Abbas tells us, sharing your story with the rest of the world is incredibly important in a place like Al'Amari. To illustrate this, he tells the tale of his cousin, who was killed by Israeli soldiers twenty days before his wedding. This story got shared around the globe on Facebook and was consequently picked up by some print media. The Israeli government responded by claiming that Abbas' cousin was a terrorist carrying a bomb when he was shot, and according to Abbas, social media networks were instrumental in ultimately setting the story straight by denouncing Israel's claim as being false.

By giving photography classes to young people from the camp, Mohammed feels like he is giving them opportunities. Posting things online makes news go around very quickly, even when there are obstacles. "Many people, not only people who studied journalism, are active on the Internet as journalists or activists. This is really helpful in periods like the last war in Gaza in order to get information across when that isn't physically possible" (Mohammed Abbas, personal communication, April 20, 2015).[7]

Abbas' fundamental belief in the power of (online) journalism as a form of resistance against the occupation corresponds with what Najjar says about Palestinian technology and the new media that go along side it. According to the author, it is

> *a source of empowerment because it defies the Israeli occupation's physical restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in their own* country (Najjar, 2009, 192).

This close relationship between online journalism and activism goes back to an existing tradition in mainstream Palestinian journalism:

> *After the creation of the Palestinian Authority, when the first media organizations saw the light of day, professional journalists were scarce. Given the national history, the first journalists were, above all, activists working for*

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[7] Online media also allow people to get (back) into contact with one another. Mohammed Abbas gives the example of an App called INakba, that helped him to get into contact with family (he didn't even know he had) in Gaza, Jordan, the US and so on.

partisan media. Most of them saw their journalism as a means to fight Israel and liberate Palestine (RWB, 2014, 7).[8]

There are many similar examples to be found. The comparison is striking between Mohammed Abbas of Al'Amari and Mohammed Alazza, a journalist and photographer who grew up in Aïda refugee camp in Bethlehem. Alazza is the director of the Arts & Media department at Lajee Center, the cultural center at Aïda, where he teaches photography classes. Alazza says that before 2005 no one in the camp knew anything about Facebook or other social media. In that period, no one could tell anyone on the outside about life in a Palestinian refugee camp. Everything was "more covered". Alazza started photographing life in the camp to show people on the outside what it's like. He states that this is very important as a Palestinian refugee, because "everyone thinks Palestinians are bad people". Alazza felt responsible and even obliged to try to change this stereotype: "I had a chance to do it and it keeps me going, although it's not easy". Interestingly, Alazza compares his activities with stone throwing:

> *Before I became a photographer, I used to throw stones at the soldiers who came into the camp every day. People think we're stupid for doing it, but to us it makes sense. We have the right to resist. We need to resist. That's why I started documenting and that's why (online) media are important: otherwise no one would know* (Mohammed Alazza, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

Alazza explains that online media like Facebook are very powerful tools because anyone can participate in them and contribute to the resistance. Posting photos and films of violations in the camp on Facebook is "stronger than any news page", because that way people get them on their own pages and share it. "It is one of the tools to show (that) we can do resistance" (Mohammed Alazza, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

Alazza also states that social media offer a way to unify resistance. The camp has its own Facebook page, called 'Aïda Camp 24h News', on which people post updates about what is going on in the camp. For instance, if soldiers are spotted somewhere in the camp, it's immediately posted on the page and gives people the time to escape or hide. The Facebook page has effectively become what Alazza calls "the watchdog of

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[8] A great example of this is given in *Journalism as Resistance* (2014), in which Somdeep Sen contextualizes the media culture in the Gaza strip. During hostilities, most (Hamas-controlled) media organizations were (and are) condemned as being manifestations of terrorism. Sen tries to go beyond this simplifying categorization. She states that it is obvious that the traditional requirements of objectivity and professionalism do not apply to journalism in such a situation of war and occupation. Sen concludes that

> the culture of journalism in the Gaza Strip often transcends specific professional affiliations (pro-Hamas or otherwise) and reflects a general ideological-moral commitment to making the story of a suffering Palestinian populace under occupation, accessible to the outside world (Sen, 2014, 487).

the camp" (Mohammed Alazza, personal communication, May 5, 2015). Alazza tells me that every refugee camp has its own Facebook page like this and according to journalist Sabreen Hadawi, every city or locality has it too – yet it seems to take on a different role in the refugee camps. Here it has become a type of resistance, but also a coping device that transcends the physical constraints of everyday life in some of the most heavily guarded living areas in Palestine, like Najjar's earlier quote suggested.

In *Palestine Online,* Miriyam Aouragh divides Palestinian websites into two categories: localizing and globalizing. The first one focuses on local communities and grassroots organizations with the goal of increasing solidarity and unity, while the second is mostly aimed at reaching an international audience. This nuances the idea that Palestinian websites are mostly aimed at reaching foreign audiences (Aouragh, 2012, 176). 'Aïda Camp 24h News' is a good example of the first category, a localizing Internet site.

However, journalists aren't the only ones who use online media as a form of resistance: there is a wide specter of online and social media activists who specifically focus on this.

Birzeit University student and blogger Lama Rabah recalls a distinct moment that defined her as a social media activist. When she was 16, Rabah participated in what she calls a "political normalization camp" in Italy with Palestinian and Israeli young people. Because her brother and father spent a long time in prison for their work as activists, Rabah still feels very guilty about having participated in that camp. For that reason she decided to "dedicate my citizen journalism to this". Because, she says, "I really believe that this way I can make a change". Rabah has several social media accounts and mostly writes in Arabic, though she posts things in English on Twitter. For instance, she wrote a lot during the last war on Gaza on Twitter. However, her audience is mostly from Arabic countries and she mostly targets Palestinians and other Arabs. She takes her online work very seriously: "It comes with a big responsibility that I am not up to enough. I need to spend more time and effort to be given the honor of being an activist". This way she criticizes life in Ramallah: "I can pretend every day that there is no occupation. I can live in a bubble: get up, go to (Birzeit) University, have lunch and go to a party at night. In Jerusalem there are more confrontations" (Lama Rabah, personal communication, May 4, 2015).

In more than one way, activism has been instrumental to the birth and growth of online journalism in Palestine. Naila Hamdy has done much research about the emergence of citizen journalism in the Arab world. She argues that the 2008-2009 war in Gaza played a huge role in the explosion of grassroots journalism in the region. This was, firstly, a result of the meaning the events carried in the region. A second reason was that access to the conflict was largely prohibited for traditional journalists. Thirdly, Hamdy states that the conflict was in many ways a public opinion war, in which social media played a big part (Hamdy, 2010).

When asked whether information carries a different meaning in the Palestinian-Israeli context than elsewhere, journalist and photographer Fadi Arouri states that this region is "one of the hottest places in the world". He states that even during the Arab Spring most press offices in the region stayed open, while media organizations are often deliberately targeted in Palestine. Journalism and especially online media, offer the crucial possibility of telling the world your story. Arouri says that because of social media, everything has become connected: "The audience has become much wider". He started using social media himself in 2007 and he believes "that each one of us is a journalist". According to Arouri, social media have given an enormous boost to both journalism and activism in Palestine. As an example, he states that if a local newspaper used to have an audience of 20.000, it will be read much more today, even if it is printed the same amount of times. "The new media changed everything", he convincingly states (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

2.2. Online journalism as a tool for activism

Social media shortened the distance between us and the people . They offer a bridge to reach people from all over the world (Mahmoud Zwahre, personal communication, May 3, 2015).

Interestingly, several activist groups have taken on journalism-like practices in their work. The *Popular Struggle Coordinance Committee* (PSCC) is a Palestinian organization based in Ramallah. It's aimed at strengthening grassroots resistance against the occupation by bringing together different popular committees of communities (such as in the villages of al-Ma'asara, Ni'ilin and Bi'ilin) who organize protests. The PSCC's website looks almost like a news site and the organization is likewise a fervent user of social media. Mahmoud Zwahre, member of the al-Ma'sara Popular Committee and head of the PSCC, confirms that social media have become one of the most important tactics of activists. The benefit of social media is that they provide a good way to perform non-violent resistance as well as make it easier to recruit people. In particular for popular resistance they offer many advantages, as they are the main way in Palestine to contact others (Mahmoud Zwahre, personal communication, May 3, 2015).

Another example of a non-violent activist group that takes on journalistic practices is *Youth Against Settlements* (YAS). YAS is an activist group based in Hebron that organizes campaigns like *Open Shuhada Street* to raise awareness of the detrimental consequences of living near settlements. In 2006 YAS started with a project that consisted of giving camera's to Palestinians in Hebron in order to film violations by Israeli settlers. The main idea was to give everyone the power to resist in a non-violent way. They posted these films online and continue, to this day, to publish things on YouTube or Facebook. YAS is connected to Israeli NGO *Breaking the Silence* and used to work together with Israeli human rights organization *B'Tselem*, which does very similar work (founder and coordinator Issa Amro says they started

with the idea of filming violations). Amro says that they send their posts to mainstream media (in Palestine and elsewhere), who sometimes publish what they sent (Issa Amro, personal communication, May 1, 2015).

When it comes to the importance (and the political nature) of information in the Palestinian-Israeli context, the *Alternative Information Center* (AIC) in Jerusalem is particularly interesting. The AIC was founded in 1984 and is a joint Palestinian-Israeli NGO based in Jerusalem. The organization advocates for three main goals: the occupation must end, the right of return must be granted to the Palestinians and there must be full democracy. The primary method of the organization to promote these objectives is to challenge the physical barriers that exist by spreading information 'to the other side': AIC employees write about Israeli society in Arabic and about Palestinian society in Hebrew. Although the organization only started working online about five years ago, it's crucial in overcoming physical barriers. The AIC can't get press cards from Israel because of its political views and the organization doesn't have a legal status in the West Bank because it's situated in Jerusalem. This makes it very difficult to send out reporters. Editor Connie Hackbarth therefore states that online media offer a good way of reaching people quickly and effectively (Connie Hackbarth, personal communication, April 23, 2015).

International Solidarity Movement (ISM) is also aimed at supporting non-violent popular struggle in Palestine, but does this by organizing international participation. It was established in 2001 and it's strongly linked to the PSCC and the *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement* (BDS). The goal of this international involvement is reaching foreign media and having 'internationals' bear witness and document Israeli violations. Karam, coordinator for international activists at ISM, tells me that the presence of a foreign audience is also helpful because then the violence is less and more high profile: "they (internationals) use their privilege to reduce risk". Similar to the PSCC, the ISM website looks like a news site (Karam, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

It's remarkable that all these activist organizations have taken to journalism-like practices as their main occupation. This says something about the close relationship between activism and journalism, whether for print or online media, and the importance of (sharing) information. The organizations seem to focus primarily on reaching a foreign audience, a practice that shall receive more attention in the next part of this paper.

2.3. Changing the fight: the Palestinian-Israeli web war

On the fourteenth of November 2012, the IDF (Israel Defense Forces, via (@IDFSpokesperson) posted the following message on Twitter:

> *The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #Gaza Strip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets* (Biddle, 2012).

This tweet officially made the 2012 war on Gaza the first war ever to be announced on a social media site. Several other tweets would follow, detailing the reasons for the operation and further developments in its course.

The anecdote shows that online media play a significant role in the relationship between Israel and Palestine, and particularly the international perception of this relationship. Chanan Naveh calls it the 'Palestinian-Israeli web war' and describes it as the online manifestation of the conflict between both sides. This mostly translates itself into a battle of narratives, in which the Israeli side focuses on the dangers of terrorism and the Palestinian on the effects of the occupation. This 'Netpolitik' is aimed at gaining international support for either one of the sides (Naveh, 2009).

This motivation is definitely present in Palestinian online journalism. The work of the activist organizations discussed earlier, fits into this: by publishing images of settler violations or violence towards Palestinian protesters online, they hope to raise awareness of Palestinian life under occupation. Mostly, however, these efforts are aimed at changing Western stereotypes of Palestinians as violent, rock-throwing fundamentalists.

IT specialist and activist Sam Bahour is very active online: he has a blog called EPalestine, he has a newsletter and various social media accounts. Bahour says he posts "things that don't get enough attention". (Sam Bahour, personal communication, May 2, 2015) He's very clear about his audience: from his personal background he feels like he can write in a way that foreign (particularly North-American) audiences can relate to. This is why he tends to focus on personal and individual stories. Bahour also states that there is no credible English media outlet in Palestine, a vacuum he tries to fill.[9] For Bahour, his online posts are a form of activism, just like the public speaking events and lectures he does: he tries to challenge existing stereotypes, especially with a Western audience.

Elia Ghorbiah works at the Journalism Department at Birzeit University and is also very active online. She keeps a blog and has various social media accounts, such as

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[9] Bahour puts this in contrast to Israel, where a lot of money is spent on what Ilan Papé calls "the idea of Israel". This is made possible by the existence of an extensive "propaganda machine" that defends the Israeli cause online (Sam Bahour, personal communication, May 2, 2015) (see also Aouragh, 2012, 89 and Naveh, 2009).

Facebook and Twitter. When asked about the so-called Palestinian-Israeli web war, Ghorbiah confirms that such a war of narratives is ongoing. She gives an example that took place in the summer of 2014, when three Israeli settler boys disappeared. Israeli's started using the Twitter hashtag '#bringbackourboys', to which Palestinians responded by using the same hashtag as a tribute to all the young Palestinians that get shot or arrested on a regular basis. Ghorbiah states that online media definitely are a way "to tell the world that Palestinians have dreams" (Eliah Ghorbiah, personal communication, April 20, 2015) and to challenge the idea that all Palestinians are terrorists, by humanizing them in contrast to what Israeli lobbyists want people to believe. Nevertheless, Ghorbiah feels like Palestinians are still behind in this area, though it is starting to change. For example, Palestinian universities and schools have recently begun paying attention to the importance of social media. Journalism departments, such as the one at Birzeit, now give specific courses on the topic.

What language online journalists write in, says a good deal about their audience and the message they're trying to spread. Palestine News Network (PNN) is an online news agency based in Bethlehem that was established in 2002. Particularly interesting is the fact that PNN publishes news on its website in three languages: Arabic, English and French. Director Monjed Jadou says that they also offer news in German and Russian and will soon start publishing in Spanish. Jadou states that publishing in so many languages is important because they need to reach people and tell them what is really going on in Palestine.[10] As the website states:

> *We report from a Palestinian perspective as we see that the media is rife with Israeli sources. We strive to empower the Palestinian people and their cause, particularly that of nonviolent resistance to occupation.* (PNN, About Us, 2015)

The idea of online journalism as part of a Palestinian Netpolitik, aimed at legitimizing its cause toward an international level, is definitely present. However, the battle of narratives can also be interpreted on a different level. Thinking of Palestinian online journalism as a form of resistance against an occupier brings us to the writings of postcolonial thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Edward Said, who state that:

> *(…) the most difficult form of decolonisation consists in decolonising the mind; in developing a self, and an identity, and a self-consciousness which is not based on the categories of the colonisers* (Eriksen, 2005, 31).

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[10] Similarly, Mohammed Abbas says that he tends to tell "big stories" in English, because these need to be spread and because people in the rest of the Arab world already know the stories. Blogger Elia Ghorbiah also writes both in English and Arabic. She says that the languages she chooses to write in depend on her topic, although she mostly writes in Arabic. When she writes in English she reaches a bigger audience and when she writes in Arabic it's mostly about local Palestinian topics. This is similar to what other interviewees say.

In this sense, Palestinian online journalism becomes part of an identity project, in which Palestinians try to construct a collective identity that differs from the one determined by their colonizer, namely Israel. This relates to Aouragh's perception of the internet as a mediating space for the creation of a national identity: "anti-colonial nationalism (…) forms the premise of a Palestine Online". (Aouragh, 2012, 111) We can thus interpret the personal quests of online journalists to change stereotypes of Palestinians as terrorists, as part of a (mental) decolonization process. In the following section, more attention is given to the way online journalists view who they are and what they do.

2.4. Mirror, mirror: how online journalists perceive themselves

> *Western media decribe Palestinians as terrorists, Palestinian media describe them as victims* (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015).

Sabreen Hadawi, the journalist who started *Shoot as You Walk in Jerusalem*, also keeps a blog. She says that she doesn't see herself as a journalist when working on the blog, but "just a person who loves the city and wants to show it to people". With Jerusalemite Palestinians, the importance of showing Jerusalem as a Palestinian city is very much present. Hadawi tells me her blog is mostly personal, but even in that way always related to occupation. Her goal in writing it is to "deliver the Palestinian version of the story". Hadawi also states that her language is different when she's a blogger and when she's a journalist. For instance, when a Palestinian dies, he or she is described as a martyr on her blog (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015).

When asked to situate the importance of social media for mainstream journalism, Hadawi states that citizen journalism is mostly important as a tool for journalists to stay up-to-date. However, it remains a tool, and it's up to professional journalists to verify the information they get this way. There is a very close relationship between journalists and activists, but the latter have a filter on what they can or cannot publish, while activists can do what they want. Journalists need social media to build up their story, but the difference remains. However, online media have been a valuable addition to Palestinian newsgathering (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015).

Given the close relationship between journalism and activism, the distinction between both tends to blur. During each interview that was conducted, I asked my conversation partners whether they saw themselves as activists or journalists. Interestingly, out of 22 interviews, almost everyone said: 'both'. For example, Said Ayyad, a journalism professor at Bethlehem University, believes that you can be both an activist and a journalist: you must stick to the facts as a journalist, but by publishing certain stories you can also advocate Palestine's cause (Said Ayyad, personal communication, April 22, 2015).

Fadi Arouri, a photographer and journalist who does activist work as well, was one of the few interviewees who made a clear distinction between those two aspects of his life. In 2007 Arouri became injured and spent ten months in an Israeli hospital, after which he became more activist and started doing advocacy. Arouri focuses on Israeli boycotts, including Israeli media, because "we are banned from working as Palestinians". He clarifies that the rights of Palestinian journalists aren't respected, so they should do the same towards Israeli journalists. The former includes access: "Israeli media can reach places that Palestinian (and foreign) journalists can't". Even though he tries to keep his work as an activist absolutely separated from his work as a journalist, he often gets in trouble for his (strictly non-violent) activist work. For that reason, he is not a member of any political or military organization (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).[11]

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[11] When asked about his online audience, Arouri states that his Facebook audience looks like this: 65 percent is international, 15 percent is Israeli and the rest is Palestinian. A month before the interview, Arouri's Facebook page was elected the second most influential page by a journalist in Palestine (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

3. OUTSIDE THE BOX.
THE LACK OF A STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR PALESTINIAN ONLINE JOURNALISTS

Media outlets in Palestine need to go through an extensive license process and have to adhere to the Palestinian Publishing and Licensing Law.[12] This is in stark contrast to online publishing: Internet is free, anyone can open a website or a page on a social media network. There is no government administration required and, more importantly, there is no control over adherence to a certain law.

In fact, there is no law whatsoever on the subject of Internet in Palestine. Sabri Saidam was the Minister of Telecommunications and IT for the PA from February 2005 until March 2006 and for years he was president Mahmoud Abbas' advisor about telecommunications, IT and technical education. Saidam talks about what he calls "telecom chaos" and the necessity to regulate it: "We urgently need an internet law". He states it should be the first priority in Palestinian legislation today (Sabri Saidam, personal communication, May 6, 2015).

What effect does this lack of a structural framework have on online journalism? In *New Palestinian Media and Democratization from Below*, Orayb Aref Najjar claims that the extensive rise of new media in Palestine occurred precisely because the state power of the Palestinian Authority is so weak (Najjar, 2009). Zayyan and Carter (2009) also claim that the lack of governmental interference strengthened the rise of online media in Palestine. Yet this lack of a clear legal and institutional framework for online journalists to work in was a recurring theme during interviews. Several aspects deserve specific mention.

3.1. Copyright

An often-mentioned frustration was the fact that there is no copyright law in Palestine. Monjed Jadou, director of Palestine News Network (PNN), a news agency in Bethlehem, complained about the fact that if PNN published an article, this would immediately appear on different websites, without references to the original source or author (Monjed Jadou, personal communication, April 19, 2015).

According to journalist and photographer Fadi Arouri, some don't mind about the lack of a copyright law, because they are simply happy that their story gets out there (these are mostly activists). Others, like him, aren't at all happy about this, because someone else gets credit for their hard work. However, this is mostly about small

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[12] There are three ministries responsible for licensing media outlets in Palestine. The Ministry of Information gives out licenses and checks whether the media organizations who get these respect the Palestinian Publishing and Licensing Law. The Ministry of Telecommunication is responsible for organizing the broadcasting process. Finally, the Ministry of Interior affairs is a member in the Licensing committee (Alaa Yaghi, personal communication, April 21, 2015).

local issues. When asked whether there are initiatives to change this, Arouri explains that organizations that should take the lead in this are all politically linked, such as the Palestinian Journalism Syndicate, which is mostly controlled by Fatah (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

3.2. Press cards

There are different institutions that give out press cards in Palestine. The two major ones are the Palestinian Ministry of Information and the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate. At the Ministry of Information, I talked to Thabet El Hirsch (IT Department Head) and Alaa Yaghi (Public Relations Office). When asked about press cards, Yaghi says that there are certain requirements to obtain them. For instance, you need to have a Bachelor's degree, although you don't need a specific diploma. Someone who is linked to a press agency is also more likely to get one. These press cards have to be renewed every year and are useful since they can get you into press conferences and may sometimes help at the checkpoints. According to El Hirsch, the recognition of Palestinian press cards by Israeli soldiers is often very arbitrary (Thabet El Hirsch & Alaa Yaghi, personal communication, April 21, 2015).

Some media organizations, like Ma'an News agency give out press cards of their own. The director of AMIN (Arab Media Internet Network), Khaled Abu Aker, states that his organization doesn't even bother with press cards, because having them doesn't make a difference (Khaled Abu Aker, personal communication, April 21, 2015). The problem with these press cards is that they aren't recognized by Israel and thus that Palestinian journalists don't have access to certain places or events, such as during the past wars in Gaza. Belgian journalist Nicky Aerts, the correspondent for the VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisie-maatschappij) in Jerusalem, confirmed this. She has both an Israeli and a Palestinian press card, but she only uses the Israeli one because this one gives her more access (Nicky Aerts, personal communication, April 27, 2015). This is why journalist Fadi Arouri says he calls for a boycott against Israeli media: according to the International Journalism Syndicate (IJS) Palestinian press cards should be recognized and the journalists who have them shouldn't be denied access to the places that contain news (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

3.3. Alternative forms of organization

A 2014 Reporters Without Borders report about the Palestinian media landscape, states that the national journalist's union is deeply influenced by the Fatah-Hamas divide: "The split in the Palestinian journalists' union is emblematic of the general condition of the media, and of Palestinian society as a whole" (RWB, 2014, 5). The disappointment in the political biasness of mainstream media, thus relates to the union as well. During interviews, it is felt that this Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate doesn't do the work it's supposed to do.

The lack of protection and organization for Palestinian journalists makes it difficult to work, especially independently. However, with the help of online media, alternative forms of organization are emerging. Journalist and photographer Fadi Arouri was one of the founders and administrators of a closed Facebook group for Palestinian journalists, roughly translated as 'Journalistic Gathering'. The group was created in 2011 by fifteen Palestinian journalists and now has about 800 members. These are all Palestinian journalists who work for (local) media organizations. Interestingly, this Facebook group indicates just how important social media have become in Palestine, even for mainstream media (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

Arouri explains that the group has taken on a sort of watchdog role of Palestinian media. Membership of this group has become very prestigious; according to Arouri the group gets about ten membership requests every day. There are two conditions to becoming a member: a candidate has to work in a media agency and has to have one of the two Palestinian press cards (of the Palestinian Ministry of Information or of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (Palestinian Journalist's Syndicate (PJS). The benefits of becoming a member include connections, networking and access. In more than one way the group influences the news: according to Arouri, the group can raise an issue in five minutes. If, for example, 50 out of 800 journalists write something about a certain topic, that topic will literally become front-page news. However, the main goal of the group is to bring about a certain standard of ethics in Palestinian media. The group also watches over the journalistic rights of its members and, as Arouri tells me, the group has even been able to bring certain cases to court (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

Online (professional) journalists are subject to the same challenges as their print media colleagues. The lack of a strong structural framework means that their rights aren't protected (copyright) and that they don't have the freedom they should have (press cards). At the same time, online media have also given rise to alternative means of organization and protection for online journalists. Fadi Arouri's 'Journalistic Gathering' Facebook group seems much more successful in going around Palestinian politics than the official journalist union.

4. CONNECT TO DISCONNECT.
ONLINE JOURNALISM AND INTERNET IN PALESTINE

4.1. The quest for 3G

> *In the exceptional circumstances of Palestine today, where citizens remain subject to externally imposed restrictions on their movement, there is an even greater social and business need for advanced communications* (Ministry of Telecommunications, Policy Statement 2010, 2).

According to Miriyam Aouragh, Internet was introduced in Palestine in 1996 (Aouragh, 2012). The telecommunications sector in Palestine was and still is very much shaped and determined by the Oslo accords. Article 36 of Annexe 3 of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement that was concluded on the 28th of September 1995 regulates telecommunications in Palestine, particularly in relationship to Israel. As Sam Bahour thought when he first read this part of the document: "This is bullshit. They're setting us up for failure" (Sam Bahour, personal communication, May 2, 2015). Bahour is a Palestinian-American activist and 'post-Oslo IT returnee', as Aouragh calls it (Aouragh, 2012, 53). He played a big part in the privatization of the Palestinian telecommunications sector after the Accords, as he was one of the creators of the Palestine Telecommunications Company or Paltel.

On the one hand, the article in question explicitly states that

> *The Palestinian side has the right to establish its own telecommunications policies, systems and infrastructures* (OA, Annexe 3, Article 36, 1996, B1).

Yet at the same time it gives a list of limitations and conditions that should be met, with the Israeli approval that has to be given at every single step:

> *In Area C, although powers and responsibilities are transferred to the Palestinian side, any digging or building regarding telecommunications and any installation of telecommunication equipment, will be subject to prior confirmation of the Israeli side, through the CAC* (OA, Annexe 3, Article 36, 1996, A2a).

The article also determines that the frequencies that Palestinian companies or services can use are fixed and that they must go via Israel. Miriyam Aouragh emphasizes the colonial nature of these regulations and the damage they do:

> *The infrastructure of the Palestinian IT sector could only be partly realized because the underlying colonialist logic in Palestine dictates that ISPs* (Internet Service Providers, author) *must provide bandwidth and connectivity through Israeli companies* (Aouragh, 2012, 51).

A contemporary expression of this situation is the 3G-affair. 3G refers to third generation mobile telecommunications technologies. This technology allows users, among other things, to use Internet on their mobile phones. The problem is that Israeli companies won't give enough bandwidth for Palestinian telephones to be able to use Internet. This means that most Palestinians are forced to stick to 2G telephones, which tremendously limits their virtual mobility. This has a huge impact on (online) journalism in Palestine. Paradoxically, even though many Palestinians walk around with modern smartphones, their providers (the most popular of which are Jawwal and Wataniya) can't provide Internet. Palestinians deal with this is various ways. Most use WiFi where possible, others call or send messages to people who do have internet-access, like Tasneem Al Qadi did to get news of her brother when he was arrested (Tasneem Al Qadi, personal communication, May 4, 2015). Another possibility is getting a Jordanian or an Israeli telephone, like journalist Fadi Arouri did. Despite his very fierce objection against Israeli products, Arouri says he's forced to use an Israeli telephone, because Palestinian networks can't offer 3G cellphones and having constant access to Internet is crucial for journalists (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).[13] When asked about the fact that Palestinians can't use 3G-mobiles, journalist Sabreen Hadawi's answer is short but to-the-point: "Being frustrated is a lifestyle". She states that the 3G-story is a big problem, especially for (online) journalists (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Given these technical impediments, the importance of the Internet and online media in Palestine is even more remarkable.

4.2. A note on Facebook

In the same interview, journalist Sabreen Hadawi mentioned that she uses no less than fifteen online media.[14] However, several interviewees (Hadawi, Ghorbiah, Arouri, Abbas) emphasize that Facebook is the most popular online platform in Palestine, especially to stay into contact with one another. Blogs aren't that popular, or not anymore in any case. Other social media are also less used. A report about social media in Palestine by NGO Taghyeer states that in 2013 there were 1.987.000 Facebook users, as opposed to only 36.800 Twitter users (on a population of about 4.5 million (in 2013)) (Karzoun, 2014).[15]

Hadawi states that Palestinian online media are very event-oriented. There is always a basic amount of communication, but social media are especially important and people use them most when something happens. She explains that there's a hierarchy in

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[13] The problem is that, according to Saed Karzoun, this isn't always possible: you need to be Israeli or an Israeli citizen needs to give you permission to get an Israeli card. For Karzoun this isn't a problem, since his wife is a Palestinian Israeli.

[14] Blog, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Templar, Storify, Pinterest, Google, Soundcloud, Gmail, Linked In, Quora, Snapchat, Vine.

[15] Taghyeer is a pioneer in its work of mapping social media usage in Palestine. See attachment III for more numbers on (online) media in Palestine.

information usage and verification on Facebook: *chatting* is the fastest way to stay up-to-date, while *groups* are for discussions and *pages* are more serious and are used to verify things (Sabreen Hadawi, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Online media are moving every day, as Fadi Arouri stated earlier, but the past few years the presence of social media has increased tremendously in Palestine and people have come to rely on them more than on mainstream media as a source of news.

5. TRUTH EQUALS TROUBLE.
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURE

5.1. The issue of (in)dependence

> *We are a group of independent Palestinian journalists and editors who work on a strictly professional level without favoring one political party over another or any religion over another* (PNN, 2015, About)

The statement above is the very first sentence in the 'About Us' section of the website of the Bethlehem based news agency Palestine News Network (PNN). From the onset of the interview with Monjed Jadou (executive director and editor-in-chief) and Nour Qudeimat (translator/editor and head of the English department), it is clear that profiling PNN as an independent organization is very important. Most of the interview is spent on elaborating PNN's finances and external donors. Jadou states that in the past PNN got most of its funding from organizations such as the Holy Land Trust, but that PNN had been independent since 2014 and mostly gets its financing via advertisements (Monjed Jadou & Nour Qudeimat, personal communication, April 21, 2015).

Interestingly, all the representatives of news organizations that were interviewed made a big point of emphasizing their own independence (financial and/or content wise) and the dependence of their competitors on external actors. Khaled Abu Aker, director of the media development NGO Arab Media Internet Network (AMIN) says that AMIN completely relies on foreign funding and is deeply constrained by this. For example, AMIN is not working within refugee camps because a lot of Western governments do not want to get in the political hassle of working with Palestinian refugees. This would imply that they recognize their political status, including their 'right of return' and could lead to frictions with Israel. The director also states that PNN is seen as "pro-American" and Ma'an (a media network based in Ramallah and supposedly the biggest news organization in Palestine today) is very closely tied to Fatah (Khaled Abu Aker, personal communication, April 21, 2015).

This issue of (in)dependence also translates itself in the competition between different media organizations. There was some difficulty in arranging an appointment at Ma'an, but this quickly changed once the interview with PNN was mentioned. Like with the PNN-interview, Abed Alaziz Al-Aydi (marketing manager at Ma'an) put a lot of emphasis on Ma'an's funding and the fact that the organization is searching for new and inventive ways to be completely self-sustainable (Abed Alaziz Al-Aydi, personal communication, April 22, 2015).[16]

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[16] On a side note, Abed Alaziz Al-Aydi said that Ma'an doesn't get any funding from USAID, because the organization refused to sign an anti-terrorist policy agreement, which would influence the vernacular Ma'an can use. According to the interviewee, PNN did sign this agreement.

The basis of all this is the fact that Palestinian media are highly politically affiliated. Most media outlets or journalists follow the societal divide between Fatah and Hamas and are loyal to one of the two. A 2014 report by Reporters Without Borders situates the origins of this divide in 2007, when Hamas went to power in Gaza. This has resulted in the almost complete absence of independent media organizations in Palestine and a deep distrust by people in the West Bank or Gaza towards them.[17]

This issue of (in)dependence also influences individual journalists. When asked why she likes publishing her writings online, Elia Ghorbiah firstly mentioned that she feels like she can write more freely on her blog, since all mainstream media are politically affiliated (Elia Ghorbiah, personal communication, April 20, 2015).[18] Similarly, journalist and photographer Mohammed Abbas says he likes platforms like blogs, because "the main media are all politically connected and most activist bloggers are not connected to any political party" (Mohammed Abbas, personal communication, April 20, 2015). He gave the example of Al Quds newspaper in Jerusalem, which is under Israeli control and thus can't publish whatever it wants. However, in most cases the independence of journalists is compromised by affiliation with a Palestinian political party or a foreign investor. British-Palestinian journalist Jonathan Cook also states that journalists don't have a good name in Palestine, people have the idea that what journalists write is "not in their name" (Jonathan Cook, personal communication, April 10, 2015). As Fadi Arouri states: "People look at each other from a political point of view. (…) They (media organizations and journalists, ed.) are fighting to show that they are independent". Arouri himself states that when he posts things on Facebook, he constantly thinks: "How to convince Hamas that I am not Fatah and how to convince Fatah that I am not Hamas" (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

The issue of (in)dependence, that greatly influences the mainstream media landscape in Palestine, is also very important in online journalism. Even though the power of online media comes from their (perceived) distinction of politically biased mainstream media, the relationship between both types of media is very close. Fadi Arouri explains that the distinction tends to blur: "They are sharing the same tool. They are sharing the same audience. There is no red line" (Fadi Arouri, personal communication, April 30, 2015). This is particularly true for news agencies, such as PNN and Ma'an and even AMIN. However, individual online journalists are also influenced by it. They are very conscious of what they write, which tends to take on the form of self-censorship, as shall be discussed further in the next section.

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[17] The result is that organizations aimed at protecting journalists, such as the national syndicate, follow this divide (the union is very close to Fatah), as was indicated previously.
[18] Another aspect Ghorbiah likes about blogs is that they give her the opportunity to publish at all, since she feels that mainstream media didn't take her seriously when she wanted to start working there after she graduated.

5.2. Censorship

> *We're not only pressured by the Israelis but also by the PA. That's why many people turn to the Internet. The situation here is: if you tell the truth, you expect to be in trouble* (Mohammed Abbas, personal communication, April 20, 2015).

Journalist and photographer Mohammed Abbas says that everyone who writes is scared. When asked whether his family is concerned when he's working as a photographer/journalist, he says that they certainly are, but that he feels like this is what needs to be done.

There is a long tradition of censorship in Palestine. In existing literature on the post-Oslo Palestinian media landscape, an image is created of an expanding media landscape that is nevertheless plagued by censorship. This censorship is usually not organized externally. Journalists who work for mainstream Palestinian media are caught between wanting a free and independent press on the one hand and being pressured not to write anything to harm the new and fragile Palestinian political institutions. The result is an internalized form of censorship, whereby mainstream media become tools of a political project (Jamal, 2000, Nossek & Rinnawi, 2003). Hillel Nossek and Khalil Rinnawi made a comparison between press freedom and censorship in Palestine before and after the Oslo accords. They concluded that under Israeli rule (1967-1993) there was censorship in the most literal sense, while the period after that was mostly determined by self-censorship. Similarly, Amal Jamal concluded in his research that so far Palestinian media don't seem to be able to bring democratization, but rather strengthen the rule of existing political powers.

To this day, censorship remains an issue in Palestine. However, online media aren't as above that reality as Internet idealists want to believe. The West Bank provides an interesting case for this, given the fact that there are two sides that are pressuring and influencing what both mainstream and online media produce. When asked whether censorship is still an issue, Monjed Jadou of PNN states that things aren't as bad as they used to be under Israeli occupation (prior to the Oslo Accords in 1993), but that it still exists. Jadou gives the example of the difficulty for PNN to get access to news from Gaza, because Hamas suspects the organization of being controlled by Fatah (Monjed Jadou, personal communication, April 19, 2015). Journalism professor Said Ayyad had a long career as a journalist for mainstream media and saw the Palestinian media landscape change dramatically over the past few years. According to Ayyad there is no censorship under the PA like there was under Israeli rule (prior to 1993), but there is self-censorship, which he considers to be just as dangerous. The media still aren't independent, even if they claim to be so (Said Ayyad, personal communication, April 22, 2015).[19] Mohammed Abbas confirms that journalists and photographers are often deliberate targets for Israeli soldiers, especially during

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[19] He specifically accused Ma'an of being controlled by the PA.

protests. This strengthens the importance of online communication, especially in the form of citizen journalism.[20]

Ahmed El Gody identifies nine different forms of censorship when it comes to Internet in the Arab world. Those include: applying laws and licenses, content filtering, tapping and surveillance, pricing and taxation policies, infrastructure, telecommunications manipulation, hardware manipulation, software manipulation and self-censorship (El Gody, 2009, 223-229). We can find many of these censorship types in the Palestinian case, several of which have already been discussed.

To the (very meaningful) frustration of former minister of Telecommunications Sabri Saidam, there is no Internet law and thus there are little or no legal constraints on Palestinian online journalism. The filtering or blocking of online content doesn't seem to happen. Tapping and surveillance wasn't mentioned during this research, but does seem to be an issue in Palestine. El Gody writes that more than once, PA officials have complained of Israeli surveillance programs targeting Palestinian government sites. (El Gody, 2009, 227) Pricing and taxation policies as a means to control Internet access were also not very present in this study. Infrastructure is definitely an object of censorship, whether in the form of deliberate targeting of telecommunications infrastructure by Israeli troops (El Gody, 2009, 227), or by control over the construction of new infrastructure, as is determined in the Oslo Accords. Telecommunications is a major issue, specifically in reference to the stipulations in Article 36 of Annex 3 of the Oslo Accords, as discussed earlier.[21] Hardware and software manipulation are again less evident. Self-censorship, as an internalized form of censorship aimed both at reducing risk of external threats and as a way to not harm the Palestinian cause (Jamal, 2000, Nossek & Rinnawi, 2003), was exemplified in the previous section by Fadi Arouri, Mohammed Abbas and others.

More 'typical' forms of censorship, in the form of physical harassment, are also a major issue in Palestine.[22] This is also true for online journalists. Journalist and photographer Mohammed Alazza made it a habit of filming Israeli soldiers whenever they were in the camp, which didn't make him popular with them. He started being harassed more and more, for instance by taking his camera away or becoming violent towards him and his family. This eventually led to him being shot in 2013. In the last two years he's been arrested and beaten several other times and continues to be harassed and pressured in different ways. However, what happened to him also reaffirms the importance of publishing on online media. "When that soldier shot me", Alazzo says, "he gave me lots of power to continue" (Mohammed Alazza, personal

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[20] Foreign journalists are also targets. Journalist Jonathan Cook, states that a lot of (foreign) journalists were killed during the Second Intifada, which began in 2000. He says that online media provided the opportunity to talk about what was going on in Palestine in a period when no-one could enter the region without risk (Jonathan Cook, personal communication, April 10, 2015).

[21] See attachment II for the complete text of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, Annex III, Article 3: Telecommunications (September 28, 1995).

[22] See attachment IV on data of media freedoms violations in Palestine.

communication, May 5, 2015). He states that before he didn't realize that what he's doing is so important. Even though the people at Lajee Center don't want him to continue, Alazza is unwavering:

> *It's my job; I can't live of anything else. I have to continue. (…) And it's my life, it's very important. I have to do this* (Mohammed Alazza, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

However, online journalists aren't just harassed by Israel. A report published in June 2014 by the NGO Reporters Without Borders about press freedom in Palestine, states that journalists in the Palestinian territories suffer external pressure and censorship on three sides: by Israel, Hamas and the PA.

Bara Al Qadi, a student at Birzeit University and former head of the BZU Media Club, is an example of the latter. Al Qadi has been harassed and arrested several times for what he posted on Facebook. His postings are usually jokes about or critiques against members of the PA, which is where the harassment comes from. This fits into what an article on the Middle East Monitor calls: "the Palestinian Authority's broader crackdown on social media activists" (MEMO, 2015). When asked whether social media are more important in Palestine than elsewhere, Al Qadi states that "Palestinians use them in a special way. (…) Everyone writes about their lives (on social media), here that means talking about the occupation" (Bara Al Qadi, personal communication, May 4, 2015). According to Al Qadi the PA arrests a lot of people, but focusing on social media activists is quite new.

Remarkably, when Al Qadi's name was mentioned during interviews where the correspondent had a certain link with the PA, like Sabri Saidam (former Minister of Telecommunications and advisor to president Abbas), Saed Karzoun (whose organization is funded by the Ministry of Economy) or even Ma'an (Ma'an was accused more than once of being the PA's unofficial mouthpiece), his arrests were justified by stating that "some people don't use social media in the right way" (Sabri Saidam, personal communication, May 6, 2015).

Online media cause an additional problem with regard to censorship: people publish individually, which makes them more vulnerable for external pressure. This is especially true for activists who publish on social media, as is the case with Birzeit University student Bara Al Qadi.

6. BEING JOURNALISTS TO BECOME CITIZENS.
TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

> *I am Palestinian before I am a journalist* (Said Ayyad, personal communication,
> April 22, 2015).

Palestinians living in Jerusalem, the West Bank or Gaza aren't citizens. Not really anyway: their citizenship is limited by external restrictions and is highly conditional. Several elements of what defines citizenship according to international law aren't present or are denied. The strive to become full members of a completely independent Palestinian state is always present and shapes many things people in the West Bank do. This ideological commitment to the Palestinian case also greatly influences online journalism. As Miriyam Aouragh states:

> *Being denied civil rights and citizenship, yet claiming and disseminating national identity via an 'electronic passport' on the internet, signifies a fusion of politics and mass-mediated practices in concrete ways* (Aouragh, 2012, 109).

There are many similarities between the online journalism experience in Palestine and elsewhere in the Arab world: there are authoritarian regimes, there is censorship and online journalists operate without a protective framework. Yet at the same time the context of a continuing occupation poses very specific goals and challenges to the Palestinian field of online journalism. There isn't just one authoritarian source of power that controls mainstream media - there are three. The lack of mobility in real life is crucial in understanding the appeal of online media for Palestinians. And above all, online media provide a unique platform for pro-Palestinian activism. These political and societal realities determine the Palestinian online experience.

The importance of online journalism in Palestine, and therefore the conclusion of this study, is twofold. On the one hand, online journalism in Palestine is part of a broader tradition of using media as (and for) resistance against the Israeli occupation. Existing societal problems and phenomena have therefore been translated to fit into these new media. Yet on the other hand, online media offer new platforms and new ways to both fight and escape the occupation. It transcends physical barriers and, to a certain extent, real-life limitations. Via blogs, websites and, most of all, social media accounts, Palestinians can share their stories with each other and with the rest of the world. That way, these new media offer a unique way for Palestinians to create a collective identity that challenges existing categorizations and stereotypes. In this sense, online media offer empowerment tools in a mental decolonization process.

Shoot As You Walk in Jerusalem is indicative of this process: what started as a tribute to a beloved city, became a form of resistance against an occupational strategy and a way to establish and preserve the identity of Palestinian Jerusalemites.

The fascinating realm of Palestinian online journalism needs further investigation. This research aimed to understand the role of online journalism in Palestine today by conducting an ethnographic study of its production process. However, many different angles and methodologies are possible. A systematic content analysis might lead to new insights, as well as research into the audience of online journalism. Further research will be necessary, as online journalism will likely remain very important in Palestine. As photographer Mohammed Alazza says about the importance of recording and publishing violations by Israeli soldiers in Aïda refugee camp:

> *We don't have the power in our hands. We have no choice. We live for hope.*
> *If we don't tell, no one will know* (Mohammed Alazza, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

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ATTACHMENTS

I. Overview interviews

This is a chronological overview of the interviews that were conducted in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Israel in April and May of 2015. The list contains practical information about the appointments and the interviewees, as well as a brief summary of what was discussed during each interview.

1.   **Jonathan Cook**
   - Friday, 10/04/2015, 15h, Nazareth
   - British-Palestinian Journalist (formerly with The Guardian)

Jonathan Cook gave some initial information about the Palestinian media landscape and challenges for (international) journalists who work in it.

2.   **Palestine News Network (PNN)**
   - Sunday, 19/04/2015, 12h, Bethlehem
   - Monjed Jadou (executive director/editor-in-chief)
   - Nour Qudeimat (translator/editor, head of English department)

Monjed Jadou and Nour Qudeimat talked about the work PNN does and the challenges of being an online news network in the West Bank.

3.   **Elia Ghorbiah**
   - Monday, 20/04/2015, 11h, Birzeit University
   - Birzeit University, journalist and blogger

Elia Ghorbiah works at the media department at Birzeit University and she is a journalist herself. Ghorbiah talked about her work online and the possibilities and restrictions this carries.

4.   **Mohammed Abbas**
   - Monday, 20/04/2015, 18h, Ramallah
   - journalist/photographer and online activist

Mohammed Abbas, a photographer and a former resident of Al'Amari refugee camp in Ramallah, talked about journalism in Palestine as a form of activism and the role online media play in strengthening that relationship.

5.   **Ministery of Information (PA)**
   - Tuesday, 21/04/2015, 11h, Ramallah
   - Thabet El Hirsh (IT Department Head)
   - Alaa Yaghi (PR)

At the Ministry of Information, I received information about the institutional and legal framework in which Palestinian journalists operate, as well as about internet usage in Palestine in general.

6.   Arab Media Internet Network (AMIN)
- Tuesday, 21/04/2015, 13h30, Ramallah
- Khaled Abu Aker, Director - General

Director Khaled Abu Aker talked about the work NGO AMIN does and gave an insight into (the history of) Internet access and online media usage in Palestine.

7.   Ma'an
- Wednesday, 22/04/2015, 9h, Ramallah
- Abed Alaziz Al-Aydi, Marketing Manager

Abed Alaziz Al-Aydi talked about news network Ma'an and the (online) work it does. It was particularly interesting to compare what he said to what was said at PNN and AMIN.

8.   Professor Said Ayyad
- Wednesday, 22/04/2015, 15h, Bethlehem University
- Journalist (mainstream media), media professor

Said Ayyad is a professor at Bethlehem University who has had a long career as a journalist, including working for Reuters for ten years. Professor Ayyad talked about the evolution Palestinian journalism went through the past decades.

9.   Alternative Information Center (AIC)
- Thursday, 23/04/2015, 14h, Jerusalem
- Connie Hackbarth, Editor

Connie Hackbarth told me about the work AIC does and the significance of information in the Palestinian-Israeli context.

10.   Nicky Aerts
- Monday, 27/04/2015, 14h, Jerusalem
- Journalist, correspondent in Jerusalem for VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisiemaatschappij)

Nicky Aerts talked about her work as a foreign journalist in Jerusalem and her own experiences with the media landscape in the West Bank.

11.   Sabreen Hadawi
- Monday, 27/04/2015, 17h, Jerusalem

- Producer, journalist, online activist

Sabreen Hadawi is both a journalist and an activist. She talked about the important role online media play in both aspects of her life.

12.   Fadi Arrouri
- Thursday, 30/04/2015, 14h, Ramallah
- Journalist and photographer

Journalist Fadi Arrouri told me about alternative forms of organization and protection for Palestinian journalists that were made possible by the rise of online media. He also talked about the peculiar relationship between journalism and activism as portrayed on online media.

13.   Youth Against Settlement (YAS)
- Friday, 01/05/2015, 16h
- Issa Amro, director

Issa Amro gave an overview of the goals and work process of the NGO *Youth Against Settlements* and the role online media play in realizing those.

14.   Mohammed Abualrob
- Saturday, 02/05/2015, 10h, Birzeit University
- Professor, specialized in social media studies

Dr. Mohammed Abualrob is a professor at the Journalism Department at Birzeit University, who specializes in social media studies and courses. He stated that we shouldn't call the social media experience in Palestine 'citizen journalism', but rather 'social media activism' or 'online media activism'. He argued that the experience in Palestine is different from the ones in Europe and the US, since there is no middle phase. He also thinks that online media are pushing people in Palestine further apart, rather than unifying them.

15.   Sam Bahour
- Saturday, 02/05/2015, 16h, Ramallah
- IT specialist and activist

Sam Bahour is an expert when it comes to the Palestinian IT sector and its history. He told me about the infrastructural difficulties that emanated from the Oslo Accords and that continue to determine Palestinian IT technologies.

16.   Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC)
- Friday, 01/05/2015, 11h, Al Maasara
- Sunday, 03/05/2015, 14u, Ramallah

- Mahmoud Zwahre, member of PSCC for Al Maasara village

Mahmoud Zwahre explained the work the PSCC does and the importance of online media in realizing that.

17.   Saïd Karzoun
- Sunday, 03/05/2015, 10h
- CEO and founder of NGO Taghyeer, which specializes in social media

Taghyeer is a non-profit organization, established and registered in the Ministry of Economic in March 2014, that focuses on strengthening social media usage and multimedia innovation in Palestine. Saed Karzoun, the CEO and founder of Taghyeer, is also a social media and communication trainer (among other things, he used to work for AMIN). Karzoun mostly talked about social media in Palestine.

18.   Lama Rabah
- Monday, 04/05/2015, 13h, Birzeit University
- Social media activist

Media student Lama Rabah explicitly called herself a 'social media activist' and elaborated on why she doesn't see herself as a journalist. She also told me what her motivations are to do what she does and the role she thinks online media play in Palestine today.

19.   Tasneem & Bara Al Qadi
- Monday, 04/05/2015, 18h, Ramallah
- Social media activists

Tasneem and Bara Al Qadi are both very active online and consider themselves activists. Bara was arrested and harassed several times for his criticism against PA officials. Our talk focused on censorship on social media writings as a new trend in Palestine.

20.   Mohammed Alazza
- Tuesday, 05/05/2015, 14h, Aïda Refugee Camp, Bethlehem
- Journalist and photographer and head of Media & Arts Department at Lajee Center (Aïda Refugee Camp

Mohammed Alazza is a journalist and photographer. Alazza is the director of the Arts & Media department at Lajee Center, the cultural centre at Aïda refugee camp in Bethlehem, where he teaches photography classes. Alazza works for PNN, among other things, and has won awards for documentaries such as 'Everyday Nakba', a film about water distribution in the Occupied Territories.

21.   International Solidarity Movement (ISM)

- Tuesday, 05/05/2015, 20h, Ramallah
- Karam, coordinator for international volunteers

Karam explained the work of ISM and the importance of online media in realizing it, especially when it comes to reaching a foreign audience.

22.   Sabri Saidam

- Wednesday, 06/05/2015, 11h, Ramallah
- Former minister of Telecommunications (March 2005 – April 2006) and Telecommunications advisor for president Abbas
- Executive chairman at NGO Partners for Sustainable Development
- Professor at Birzeit University

Sabri Saidam was the Minister of Telecommunications and IT for the PA from February 2005 until March 2006 and for years he was president Mahmoud Abbas' advisor about telecommunications, IT and technical education. Saidam now teaches at Birzeit University and he's the chairman of Partners for Sustainable Development, a Palestinian NGO that focuses on promoting IT technologies in the West Bank. Our talk focused on the history of Internet in Palestine and the legal and institutional framework in which online journalists operate.

II. The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, Annex III, Article 3: Telecommunications (September 28, 1995)

ARTICLE 36

Telecommunications

A. General

1. This sphere includes, inter alia, the management and monitoring of the use of the radio frequency spectrum, the use of the geostationary satellite orbit, the planning, formulation and implementation of telecommunications policies, regulations and legal frameworks. The above shall be in accordance with, and subject to, the following provisions:

2. a. In Area C, although powers and responsibilities are transferred to the Palestinian side, any digging or building regarding telecommunications and any installation of telecommunication equipment, will be subject to prior confirmation of the Israeli side, through the CAC.

b. Notwithstanding paragraph a. above, the supply of telecommunications services in Area C to the Settlements and military locations, and the activities regarding the supply of such services, shall be under the powers and responsibilities of the Israeli side.

B. Principles

1. 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.

2. Without prejudice to subparagraph D.5.c of this section, the Palestinian side has the right to establish satellite networks for various services, excluding international services.

3. The Palestinian side has the right to establish its own telecommunications policies, systems and infrastructures. The Palestinian side also has the right to choose any and all kinds of communication systems (including broadcasting systems) and technologies, suitable for its future in, inter alia, basic and value added services (including cellular telephony).

4. Operators and providers of services, presently and in the future, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip shall be required to obtain the necessary approvals from the Palestinian side. In addition, all those operating and/or providing services, presently and in the future, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who wish to operate and/or provide services in Israel, are required to obtain the necessary approvals from the Israeli Ministry of Communications.

5. Both sides shall refrain from any action that interferes with the communication and broadcasting systems and infrastructures of the other side.

Specifically, the Palestinian side shall ensure that only those frequencies and channels specified in Schedule 5: List of Approved Frequencies (herein - "Schedule 5") and Schedule 6: List of Approved TV Channels and the Location of Transmitters (herein - "Schedule 6") shall be used and that it shall not disturb or interfere with

Israeli radio communication activity, and Israel shall ensure that there shall be no disturbance of or interference with the said frequencies and channels.

6. A joint committee of technical experts representing both sides shall be established to address any issue arising out of this section including the growing future needs of the Palestinian side (hereinafter referred to as "the Joint Technical Committee" or "JTC"). The JTC shall meet on a regular basis for the purpose of solving all relevant problems, and as necessary in order to solve urgent problems.

C. The Electromagnetic Sphere

1. The Palestinian side has the right to use the radio frequency spectrum in accordance with principles acceptable to both sides, for present and future needs, and frequencies assigned or reassigned within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip covering all its required services within the bands L.F., M.F., H.F., V.H.F., U.H.F., S.H.F. and E.H.F. In order to satisfy the present needs of the Palestinian side, the frequencies detailed in Schedule 5 are assigned for the use of the Palestinian side in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

2. Future needs for frequencies shall be agreed upon by the two sides. To that end, the Palestinian side shall present its requirements through the JTC which must fulfill these requirements within a period not exceeding one month.

Frequencies or sections of frequencies shall be assigned, or an alternative thereto providing the required service within the same band, or the best alternative thereto acceptable by the Palestinian side, and agreed upon by Israel in the JTC.

3. a. The frequencies specified in Schedule 5 shall serve, inter alia, for the transmission of a television network and a radio network.

b. The television channels and locations of transmitters to be used by the Palestinian side are specified in Schedule 6. The production studios and related broadcasting equipment shall be located in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

c. The radio transmitter shall be located in the area of Ramallah and Al-Bireh Cities, at the presently agreed site.

d. The Palestinian side has the right to change the location(s) of radio transmitters according to an agreement between the two sides through the JTC, to serve the Palestinian plans in achieving the best coverage.

D. Telecommunications

1. Pending the establishment of an independent Palestinian telephone network, the Palestinian side shall enter into a commercial agreement with Bezeq - The Israel Telecommunications Corp. Ltd. (herein, "Bezeq"), regarding supply of certain services in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the area of international telephony, commercial agreement(s) shall be concluded with Bezeq or other duly-licensed Israeli companies.

The above shall be without prejudice to subparagraph 5.c below.

2. As long as the Palestinian network is integrated with the Israeli network, the Palestinian side shall use such telephonic equipment as is compatible with the standards adopted and applied in Israel by the Ministry of Communications, and will coordinate with the Israeli side any changes to the structure and form of telephone exchanges and transmission equipment. The Palestinian side shall be permitted to

import and use any and all kinds of telephones, fax machines, answering machines, modems and data terminals, without having to comply with the above-mentioned standards (accordingly, lists Al and A2 of Annex V (Protocol on Economic Relations) will be updated). Israel recognizes and understands that for the purpose of building a separate network, the Palestinian side has the right to adopt its own standards and to import equipment which meets these standards (accordingly, lists Al and A2 of Annex V (Protocol on Economic Relations) will be updated). The equipment will be used only when the independent Palestinian network is operational.

3. a. The Palestinian side shall enable the supply of telecommunications services to the Settlements and the military installations by Bezeq, as well as the maintenance by Bezeq of the telecommunications infrastructure serving them and the infrastructure crossing the areas under the territorial jurisdiction of the Palestinian side.

b. The Israeli side shall enable the supply of telecommunications services to the geographically-dispersed areas within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This shall include provision, subject to the approval of the proper Israeli authorities, free of charge, of rights of way or sites in the West Bank for microwave repeater stations and cables to interlink the West Bank and to connect the West Bank with the Gaza Strip.

c. Israel recognizes the right of the Palestinian side to establish telecommunications links (microwave and physical) to connect the West Bank and the Gaza Strip through Israel. The modalities of establishing such telecommunications connections, and their maintenance, shall be agreed upon by the two sides. The protection of the said connections shall be under the responsibility of Israel.

4. Without prejudice to paragraph 3 above:

a. The Palestinian side shall take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the telecommunication infrastructures serving Israel, the Settlements and the military installations, which are located in the areas under the territorial jurisdiction of the Palestinian side.

b. The Israeli side shall take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the telecommunication infrastructures serving the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and which are located in areas under Israel's responsibility.

5. a. The Palestinian side has the right to collect revenue for all internal and international telecommunication services originating and terminating in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (except Settlements and military locations).

b. Details regarding payment by the Palestinian side to Bezeq or other duly-licensed Israeli companies, and compensation by Bezeq or the said companies to the Palestinian side, referred to in subparagraph a. above, shall be agreed upon in the commercial agreement(s) between them.

c. The provisions of subparagraphs a. and b. above will be applied between the sides until such time as the two sides agree upon installation and operation of an "international gateway", as well as the international code, for the Palestinian side and the actual commencement of operation of the said gateway.

d. The Palestinian side shall enter into a discussion with Bezeq for the purpose of coming to an agreement for the use of a separate area code and numbering plan, pending the establishment of a separate Palestinian network.

6. The Palestinian side has the right to collect taxes on all telecommunications services billed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, subject to the provisions of Annex V (Protocol on Economic Relations).

7. a The Israeli side shall provide the Palestinian side with all operating, maintenance and system manuals, information regarding billing systems and all operating and computer programming protocols of all the equipment that will be transferred to the Palestinian side, subject to protection of rights of commercial confidentiality.

b. The Israeli side shall also supply the Palestinian side with all contractual agreements between the Civil Administration and all domestic and international entities in the area of telecommunications.

The timing of the provision of the above mentioned materials will be as provided for in this Annex.

c. Bezeq, in accordance with the commercial agreement, will supply the Palestinian side with all legal verification of its purported ownership of any and all movable or immovable assets in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, that are not part of the Civil Administration's present network.

III. Some numbers on (online) media and Internet usage in Palestine

A report about (online) media in Palestine in 2014 published by Saed Karzoun, CEO of Taghyeer, states that:

- 49.9 percent of Palestinians youths (aged between 15 and 29) don't read newspapers or magazines at all
- 27.4 percent of people listen to the radio daily
- 87.4 percent of youths watch television daily
- 25 percent uses the internet daily
- 67.5 percent of young people use a computer daily
- 75.2 percent of young people own a mobile phone
- 43 percent of young people use e-mail
- There were 1.987.000 Facebook users in 2013.
- There were 36.800 Twitter users in 2013

According to Karzoun, the data for these reports come from the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. On Karzouns YouTube Channel there are visualizations of the changes in social media usage the past few years.

IV. Attacks on media freedoms in Palestine in the first half of 2015

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) publishes annual and semi-annual reports on media freedoms violations in Palestine. In its report of the first half of 2015, MADA registered a 20 percent increase in violations since the beginning of the year. The report details on the nature of these violations, the violators and the specific cases. The report mentions several attacks based on what people posted online (mostly on Facebook).

The following table gives an overview of the overall Israeli and Palestinian violations during the first half of the past years, in comparison to that of 2015.

The first half of	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total number of violations	112	108	112	186	224

(MADA, 2015, 2)

The report distinguishes violations by Israeli and Palestinian (Fatah or Hamas) sides, as is exemplified by the following table.

Month	Israeli Occupation	Palestinian sides	Total
January	8	23	31
February	16	10	26
March	36	22	58
April	16	15	31
May	18	13	31
June	20	27	47
Total	114	110	224

(MADA, 2015, 3)