Message from the Editor

Over the last decade, there has been a transformation in how individuals across the globe receive and process news and information. Palestine is certainly no exception. The airwaves and screens are flooded with dozens of radio, TV, and print media sources based in or broadcast from various West Bank cities, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Whether at home or abroad, Palestinians are just a click away from access to a plethora of platforms and sources that cater to all their views and interests.

As media reach has grown and expanded in this digital age, new concerns and challenges have been pushed to the forefront. This month’s issue focuses on revisiting media in Palestine and covers many thought-provoking topics, including the relationship between information and knowledge; digital rights and fake news; the transition from black and white TV to virtual reality; 3-D virtual reality; and the Palestinian media scene, in general.

TWiP is grateful to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO Office in Ramallah, for acquiring the bronze sponsorship of this issue. UNESCO supports programs that focus on freedom of expression and media information literacy. In this issue, Noha Bawazir, Head of the UNESCO Office in Ramallah and its Representative to Palestine, contributes a piece on fake news, disinformation, and freedom of expression; Bawazir and Alton Grizzle, UNESCO’s Communication and Information Programme Specialist at the Paris Headquarters, address the issue of promoting media and information literacy; and Hala B. Tannous, the Communication and Information focal point at the UNESCO Ramallah Office, writes about community radio media in Palestine.

Special thanks go to this month’s authors: Nadim Nashif, a social entrepreneur and digital rights defender; Dr. Nader Salha, assistant professor at Al-Quds University; Hani Alami, a telecom expert; Eyad Al Araj, a co-founder of Jerusalem High Tech Foundry; Maysoun Gangat, head of Radio Nisaa FM; and Sam Husseini, CEO of LionHeart. This issue also highlights five Palestinian women journalists who have made their mark in the field of media: Hana Mahamid, Nisreen Awwad, Shireen Abu Aqleh, Givara Budeiri, and Ruba Shabit.

Ahlan Palestine takes us on a picnic in Wadi Qana. The Artist of the Month is Gaza native, Mohamed Harb. Our Book of the Month is The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire, and Where to Go takes us to the Walajeh tree.

The entire team at TWiP is grateful for your continued friendship and support.
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“W”ould you trust news from any source? How can we ensure that “fake(d)” news does not overtake the flow of information?

Journalism plays a vital role in society, bringing verifiable news and informed commentary to the public. Every day, the news provides a basis for dialogue, debate, and informed decision-making on the issues that affect us. It helps us build our identity and, as global citizens, better understand the world around us; it contributes to meaningful changes towards a better future.

Today, however, news producers face many challenges. In-depth and fact-checked news is being overshadowed by shared media content that is all too often far from this standard. On social media, in particular, collecting clicks and being first reign supreme over properly verified news and comment. All these factors further compound long-existing problems of unjustifiable curbs on press freedom in many parts of the world.

In these circumstances, where does the responsibility lie for ensuring that fact-based debate is not stifled? Whose duty is it to strengthen the media’s potential to foster a better future for all? And how do we protect the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of information, which are the preconditions for independent and free journalism?

The answer is that we must look to ourselves as agents of change – whether we are government actors, civil society members, businesspeople, academics, or members of the media. Each of us has a role to play because each has a stake in press freedom, which facilitates our ability to seek, receive, and impart information.

What happens to journalists and to journalism is a symbol of how society respects the fundamental freedoms of expression and access to information. Society suffers whenever a journalist falls victim to threats, harassment, or murder. It affects us all when press freedom is curbed by censorship or political interference or is contaminated by manipulation and fabricated content. When the free flow of information is hampered, the void is more easily filled by disinformation, undermining the ability of communities to make informed choices. In today’s context of disinformation and misinformation, the ultimate jeopardy.

The National Mechanism for Monitoring Safety of Journalists was established in Palestine to reinforce member capacities and expand the scope of coverage, which includes capacity-building sessions. It is worth mentioning that this mechanism was formulated and established to ensure the contribution of the State of Palestine to the UNESCO Director General-Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity.

Photo by Mohammad Silwadi ©UNESCO.
is not unjustifiable regulation of journalism but that publics may come to disbelieve all content – including journalism. In this scenario, people are likely to believe whatever content is endorsed by their social networks if it corresponds with their hearts, but they neglect to engage with their heads. We can already see the negative impacts of this phenomenon on public beliefs about health, science, intercultural understanding, and the status of authentic expertise.

World Press Freedom Day on May 3, with this year’s theme “Information as a Public Good,” came at a difficult time that was characterized by ongoing attacks on journalists, the viral spread of false information online, and the weakening of the media – all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It serves as a call to affirm the importance of cherishing information as a public good and exploring what can be done in the production, distribution, and reception of content to strengthen journalism and to advance transparency and empowerment while leaving no one behind.

Similarly, the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI), celebrated every September 28, offers a moment to highlight the role of access-to-information laws and their implementation in order to build back strong institutions for the public good and sustainable development, as well as to strengthen the right to information and international cooperation in the field of implementing this human right. It is worth noting that both WPFD and IDUAI are celebrated here in Palestine by UNESCO and its many partners. Being a well-informed citizen means being knowledgeable, having a critical mind, and being able to play an active part in community and national life. It means having the educational resources that make it possible to enjoy lifelong learning and adapt to an ever-changing socioeconomic environment. It means unlocking one’s creative and innovative potential.

UNESCO and its intergovernmental programs, such as the International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC) – provide a platform and frame for all stakeholders to participate in international discussions on policy and guidelines in the area of access to information. It is within this framework that UNESCO in Palestine has been implementing a number of activities that lead towards change and make a difference in good practices, professionalism, and guidance, thereby contributing to developing the media landscape and paving the way for a democratic and safe environment.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental element of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is widely seen as underpinning other democratic freedoms, such as the right to form political parties, the right to share political ideas, the right to study the actions of public officials, and so on. In this sense, it also supports good governance and democratic accountability. For this reason, it is believed that media require special protections to enable them to operate freely.

UNESCO therefore recognizes that in the Palestinian context, safety is clearly one of the major challenges that face journalists and media workers. UNESCO fully acknowledges the extent of these challenges and, as a result, has made the safety of journalists one of its priority areas of intervention in the past few years, within the framework...
of the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012, coordinated by UNESCO at the global level.

In this context the Journalists’ Safety Indicators were developed to pinpoint significant matters. Relative to this, a study on JSI is currently still ongoing in Palestine, its findings and recommendations will be published at the end of 2021.

UNESCO has consequently developed the capacities of journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting and safety, in collaboration with partner organizations, as well as developed the safety model course on Safety of Journalists with the International Federation of Journalists. UNESCO also supported the establishment of Safety Officers Network from the various media outlets and built their capacities in the field of safety management. The establishment of the national mechanism is another achievement as part of reinforcing safety protocols and ensuring the proper reporting and acknowledgement of violations and cases to be registered, reported, and monitored using the UNESCO guidelines.

UNESCO developed a model curriculum – Journalism, ‘Fake News,’ and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training – as an essential addition to teaching syllabi for all journalism educators, as well as practicing journalists and editors who are interested in information. Several training workshops that targeted young professional journalists took place during the past year to teach how to use this curriculum and how to share it. A number of topics were addressed, from media coverage during elections to coordinating electoral media campaigns and other topics related to civil peace, international law, code of conducts and methods of fact-checking, disinformation, and combating fake news.

Journalists are not supposed to fear for their lives as they carry out their work, which is essential to democracy and the rule of law. Promoting the safety of journalists and combating the impunity of those who attack them are central elements within UNESCO’s support for press freedom on all media platforms, through global awareness-raising, capacity-building, and a range of other key actions.

In order to achieve a lasting peace and ensure a sustainable development, it is essential to respect basic human rights. Everyone must be free to seek, receive, and impart knowledge and information on all media, online and offline. Quality journalism enables citizens to make informed decisions about their society’s development and, by contributing to effective governance and rule of law, also builds effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Noha Bawazir has been the Head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Office and Representative to Palestine since 2020. She holds a master’s degree in political history from Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle, and an MPhil in international relations from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Internationales (EHEI, Paris). Noha has extensive experience at UNESCO. Prior to being appointed in Palestine, she was the Chief of the Arab States Unit within the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations at UNESCO Headquarters, in charge of relations with the Member States of the Arab region.

1 World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a Recommendation adopted at the twenty-sixth session of UNESCO’s General Conference in 1991. This in turn was a response to a call by African journalists who in 1991 produced the landmark Windhoek Declaration on media pluralism and independence.

2 The day had been proclaimed by the UNESCO General Conference in 2015, following the adoption of the 38 C/Resolution 57, declaring September 28 of every year as International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUA). Recognizing the significance of access to information, the 74th UN General Assembly proclaimed September 28 as the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUA) at the UN level in October 2019.

3 The UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy, and development worldwide.

4 Journalism, ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, a new publication by UNESCO, is a timely resource and highly topical subject for all those who practice or teach journalism in this Digital Age.
Digital Rights in Palestine

By Nadim Nashif

Last May, through Instagram stories and Twitter hashtags, Palestinian youth were able to make their voices heard throughout the world and mobilize an uprising across the fragmented parts of occupied Palestine. The uprising started with a call for support by Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd, through their personal social media accounts, to stop the forced displacement taking place in their Jerusalemite neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Soon the twin siblings made headlines in international media and brought hundreds of thousands around the globe to march for their cause in some of the largest demonstrations in history in support of Palestine.

Palestinians have long been turning to digital tools to combat the hardships imposed on their lives by the occupation. They have used the internet since the 1990s to connect with each other and with the world, in spite of territorial fragmentation. Palestinian officials have referred to Palestine’s growing presence in the digital world as part of “establishing an independent state” and even “liberation.” On the other hand, Israeli officials have continued to take issue with the Palestinian presence and narrative in the digital realm. In 2009, the Israeli prime minister explicitly stated that any future Palestinian state “should not have control over its electromagnetic field.”

In Palestine, the grave human rights violations committed under Israeli occupation are largely mirrored in the virtual world. This is especially evident in Israel’s dominance over infrastructure. In the same manner, Israel maintains control over natural resources and unequally distributes them in favor of Israeli citizens. Nearly all information and communications technology infrastructure across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) exists under Israeli control. All domestic and international connections made on telephones, cell phones, and the internet in Palestine must at some point pass through the Israeli backbone. This has made services for Palestinians significantly more costly and lower in quality than those on the Israeli side. As a result, these limitations present a serious threat to the Palestinians’ right to access the internet.

In addition to Israel’s use of the digital realm as a space of control, it has also used it as a means to control Palestinians. First, Israel has repeatedly arrested Palestinians for practicing their right to freedom of expression on social media. These arrests were backed by Israeli legislation that vaguely defines “terror” and “incitement” and arbitrarily equates words with real-life actions. One of the most recent cases is perhaps the arrest of Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem, under charges of “threatening national security,” for advocating on social media against forced displacement.

In addition to the Israeli government, Israeli private companies also threaten the digital rights of Palestinians. In a 2019 investigation, for instance, it was revealed that the Israeli surveillance tech company AnyVision had used the facial data of Palestinians, without their consent, in the development of its facial-recognition technologies. Further, a group of international civil society organizations recently revealed the use of Israeli manufactured spyware known as “Pegasus” in targeting over 50,000 activists and public figures across the globe.

Such violations are also committed by international tech companies. Facebook, for example, continues to work with the Cyber Unit of the Israeli Ministry of Justice to censor alleged “incitement” and “hate” speech by Palestinians. Ironically, very little has been done by Facebook to combat hate speech in Hebrew against Palestinians. Other examples include Google’s refusal to end discrimination against Palestinian users through its maps, Airbnb’s listing of properties in illegal settlements, and PayPal’s refusal to extend its services to Palestine, whereas it functions normally in Israeli areas, including in illegal settlements.

In the internal arena, the Palestinian Authority has used its cybercrime law to silence critical and oppositional Palestinian voices through arrests and website-blocking. Similarly, Hamas uses its own “misuse of technology” penal code to crack down on activists and journalists. Such
ongoing violations can further result in the chilling phenomenon of users beginning to censor their own voices as a result of fear. This is more likely to happen to the most vulnerable in Palestinian society, those for whom the internet is often an essential avenue for communication, expression, and support-seeking.

In spite of violations by multiple parties, the digital realm has continued to represent an active and valuable space for Palestinians to make their voices heard by the authorities, the international community, and the world. This was most evident in May 2021, as we saw Palestinian youth utilize social media in creative ways to advocate for Palestinian human rights and mobilize support on the local and international levels.

Digital rights refer to the same human rights that all persons enjoy in the offline world, but extended into the digital realm. These include the right to privacy, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. Many countries have further recognized access to the internet as a fundamental human right.iii

Users shared art, videos, statements, and infographics to raise awareness about the incident, and mobilized large protests that took place across the oPt and even in the diaspora.

Similarly, Palestinian youth continued to mobilize through social media and digital tools, even to combat internal social injustices, such as gender-based violence, through building community, raising awareness locally and internationally, and organizing action online and offline. This was evident, for example, in the Palestinian feminist movement Tal3at, which first began through online posts on a variety of social media platforms in response to the “honor killing” of Isra’ Ghrayib in 2019.

Under the umbrella of the #SaveSheikhJarrah social media campaign, for example, which was launched by the now-well-known twin siblings Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd through their private social media accounts, Palestinian youth were able to advocate internationally for their right to be protected against forced displacement, as hundreds of thousands of people across the globe marched in support of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

Palestinians once again used social media and digital tools to advocate for their right to freedom of expression in response to the Palestinian Authority’s killing of social media activist Nizar Banat.

Nadim Nashif is a social entrepreneur and digital rights defender. He is also the founder and executive director of 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, Palestinian digital rights organization, and co-founder of Wusul Digital Academy, a digital marketing educational center. Nadim is also a senior policy analyst for Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. For the past 20 years, he has worked on youth and community development issues, including founding and directing Baladna, The Association for Arab Youth.

Do we know what we know? When society doesn’t know something, it’s often because some power has worked hard and smart to create confusion. People assume that we don’t figure things out because we haven’t paid attention or because there is no information. Robert Proctor, a historian of science at Stanford, points out: “When it comes to many contentious subjects, our usual relationship to information is reversed: Ignorance increases.” The classical relationship between amount of information and depth of knowledge was usually proportional, until the information revolution where info-flooding became epidemic. The term “infodemic” itself rose and flourished all of a sudden in the COVID-19 era. The most outstanding language that crowned this phenomenon came from the WHO Director-General in February of 2020: “We are not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus and is just as dangerous.”

In the last digital decade, ignorance came from a suppressing power that surpasses truth – or drowns it out – “trying to make it so confusing that people stop caring about what’s true and what’s not.” Rather than what we are exposed to, is it not about how we are being exposed to info-flooding? This has become a core question in the cognitive, social, and psychological research environment.

The term infodemic is highly metaphorical. And a more disciplined and scientific (sort of) term has been coined: infodemiology. The term has entered public consciousness and become the new buzz word in media, scientific research, politics, and social media. The terms fake news, misinformation, and disinformation are all associated with the infodemic, and they characterize today’s digital culture, which is to a great extent a visual culture, more precisely an interface culture. We have heavily invested in developing and employing digital technologies in our societies, but much less investment is spent on the understanding of what and how such pervasive penetration affects us. The nature of digital media behavior has many blind spots on the metaphorical and conceptional levels, e.g., influencers, social engagement, mediation, social listening, attention, the controversial trade-offs between the rights and responsibilities in digital rights, and viral behavior of digital media.

Until the end of 2019, the total number of articles on Google Scholar containing the term “infodemic” amounted to 54. As of September 22, 2021, this number has increased to 9,860. While these numbers cannot claim to be representative, they do provide some indication of the general salience of the term and its use in academia as well as in media publications.
The entire digital universe reached 44 zettabytes at the end of 2020, meaning that there are 40 times more bytes than there are stars in the observable universe, resulting in double the amount of data in the digital universe every 2 years. It is estimated that for every person on earth, 1.7 MB of data is being created or secreted every second. The Palestinian community produces 4.6 TB/s and 396 PB a day. As a result of such an unprecedented flow of information, we are all revolving around data, information, and being online in one digital space; the infosphere. There’s a huge divide. People have been learning to trade privacy for convenience. It’s just another currency.

I don’t have official statistics on what kinds of media we consume in such an immersive medium, but many research findings point out that celebrity news and stories, strange news, scandals, entertainment videos, gaming, and provocative info-spots take up most of the bandwidth that we consume. Notice the term “news feed” in social media platforms! We literally consume, not read. Reading is a decision-making process according to Marshall McLuhan, a digestion process, while we often swallow digital media content. Youngsters and teenagers are the major social capital in this huge industry. Excessive social media usage shows what has become known as social media fatigue. “In other words, there is a tendency to back away from media consumption when there is too much content in their social media feeds.” This tendency is referred to as “distraction sickness,” where our brain has never been so occupied, so insistently, by so many different subjects. Just look around you.

Van Dijk, a famous theorist in digital sociology (who initiated the term “Network Society”) argued that the more information that is available may actually leave individuals with less knowledge all together. There is not enough time for an individual to process info-flooding in digital networks. Having access to that quantity of information in our close reach may not necessarily increase the quality of what we know. Van Dijk notes: “It may result in individuals knowing little about much and not truly understand and question their existing knowledge.”

We have predicted a luminous Information Age. But it appears that what we’ve got is a disturbing Misinformation Age. Fake news detection on social media has become a real concern; noticed by a burst in emerging research that focuses mainly on detecting and confronting methods, including AI-driven technologies and Big Data Analysis techniques. The existing detection of simple algorithms from traditional news media is ineffective — and sometimes not applicable — in dealing with evolving faking mechanisms. Again, taking it as a general indicator, Google Scholar shows 115K results on “fake news,” 300K on “misinformation,” and 117K results on “disinformation.” The post-digital does not describe a situation, condition, or event after the digital. It is NOT a chronological term but rather a critical attitude and philosophy that inquires into the digital world, examining and critiquing its constitution, its theoretical orientation, and its consequences. In particular, it addresses the conditions of digitality and the ideology of digitalism.

Most of the infosphere content is processed and manipulated by apps. This, in itself, for the majority of the community is a blind spot, a black box — the highly esteemed and “holy” algorithms and software taking the “God-Mode” situation. Tech firms regularly sue geeks who reverse-engineer their code to look for flaws. They want their customers to be ignorant of how their apps work. Knowledge is being diluted on a mass scale. This is mainly driven by what has become known as the post-facts societies. We are arguing about what a fact means. Debates are heavily loaded with scientific research findings; Google is doing very well here. “If we argue about what the facts are, it’s agnotological! Armageddon, where reality dies screaming,” as Mango.

**Footnotes:**

1. This term was coined in a conference hosted by the WHO in July 2020, which aimed to advance and “define the scientific discipline of infodemiology and establish a community of practice and research” around “infodemics.”
5. Agnotology: The study of deliberate, culturally induced ignorance or doubt, typically to sell a product or win favor, particularly through the publication of inaccurate or misleading scientific data.
Recent decades have been marked by rapid technological transformations that have completely upended the ways people interact, communicate, and access information about the world. Online citizens now possess the entirety of human knowledge in the palms of their hands, and news and information can ricochet around the world in seconds. There are vast new opportunities to educate, inform, and organize.

The defining challenge is how to ensure that societies and individuals benefit more from this evolving information ecosystem while they navigate the challenges. UNESCO is committed to supporting every community and individual across the globe to acquire media and information literacy competencies. Why? To empower people to best access, understand, critically evaluate, use, and create information. As the world witnesses great advances in media and information literacy and the pivotal role it plays, ensuring that citizens have the skills needed to think critically about media and information in the digital age is no doubt one of the defining challenges of our time.

Over the past few years, UNESCO and partners have put in place several key initiatives to build momentum and support for media and information literacy. UNESCO’s 193 Member States underlined the importance of media and information literacy by proclaiming Global Media and Information Literacy Week (24–31 October) in 40 C/Resolution 56. This was further affirmed by over 200 countries when the United Nations General Assembly endorsed media and information literacy as an imperative public matter through Resolution A/RES/75/267.*

UNESCO, together with many of our partners, has supported training on media and information literacy in over 100 countries, reaching hundreds of thousands of citizens, including teachers. Stakeholders are coming together to sustain media and information literacy. The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance has expanded, with members in 110 countries, including Palestine.

Social media is more and more central to people’s lives. People learn socially as they connect, browse, and play. We must find strategies to penetrate social media with media and information-literacy learning in a nontraditional and organic manner. The UNESCO MIL CLICKS social media initiative helps people acquire media and information literacy in the daily use of the internet. Through MIL CLICKS, over 20,000 young people engage in peer education (#ThinkBeforeSharing and #ThinkBeforeClicking). This includes social media content as well as ready-to-broadcast audio messages to counter the COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation in 12 languages, which were distributed by radio stations having 47,000,000 listeners and 42,000,000 social media users. The audio messages for radio stations have been adapted and translated into 45 languages.

UNESCO presses to ensure that young people become co-leaders and co-creators of media and information literacy. Over 300 youth organizations, 100 of which are in Africa, have been supported by UNESCO to integrate and strengthen media and information literacy in their policies and operations, reaching hundreds of thousands of
young people. There is also hopeful evidence of national level take-up of media and information literacy. Twenty-five countries are currently taking steps to develop national media and information literacy policy and strategy.

But there is much more to be done to achieve continued success. Developing and implementing national policies and strategies are urgent actions to achieve media and information literacy for all. Steps being taken in Palestine are promising.

In fact, in this regard, Palestine is considered one of the Arab countries that has made important achievements in media literacy in various fields, through the activities and programs of universities, civil and media institutions, training centers, and some relevant government institutions. There is a clear interest in media and digital safety, and there are university programs in this field. Yet, applying media literacy is focused for the most part on media education rather than on the critical and analytical thinking needed to build a knowledgeable society. Hence, there is a need to further emphasize the importance of media education and literacy as a key factor in developing critical and analytical thinking.

Stemming from this global umbrella, and from the local realities and needs, UNESCO in the Palestinian context has been spearheading the work in MIL through the development of a national strategy for media and information literacy, which has been initiated through a large participatory and consultative process. The document aims to provide policy guidance, on one hand, and to introduce the media education curriculum to schools and universities based on the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Policy Guidelines and Model (MIL) Curriculum, on the other hand. This work was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, the Government Information Office, and the Prime Minister’s Office.

To celebrate this year’s Global MIL week, UNESCO Ramallah is planning to invite all its partners to a reflection and open discussion on the future implementation of the MIL strategy and how this could be integrated as a public good. UNESCO, alongside its partners in the communication and information unit at the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University, the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA), Al-Quds Open University, and members of the various quality assurance groups at the Ministries of Education and Higher Education have also provided essential training for young Palestinians from different universities in the West Bank and Gaza to become MIL multipliers and trainers. This work will be pursued because the meaningful and structured participation of youth is key to success in this area.

Assessing Media Institutions Strategic Management and Extending Media Literacy in Palestinian Higher Education is yet another collaborative effort that UNESCO is coordinating with Al-Quds Open University, among other Palestinian universities, which aims to develop an MIL curriculum based on the Media and Information Literacy in Journalism: A Handbook for Journalists and Journalism Educators. In 2019, PYALARA won the UNESCO MIL Award for its extensive work in MIL, whose motivating slogan is “MIL is a way of life.” The MIL Alliance action promotes international cooperation among individuals, organizations, and several stakeholders that work to promote media and information literacy. The award aims to acknowledge the contribution of individuals and groups who creatively include media and information literacy in their work.

It is critical that in Palestine, citizens become media and information literate and equipped to navigate the challenges of the media landscape development and participate more meaningfully in their societies. If adequately trained, they will be able to differentiate between reliable information and misinformation, gain know-how, and learn where to locate trustworthy sources of facts and informed opinion and why it is crucial not to circulate unverified content. Women and men of all ages can exercise their full agency in the information ecology, whether or not they have access to digital technology.
Visit the UNESCO website to find out more about how UNESCO works with governments, individuals, and communities to foster media and information literacy. Download our many resources and get involved in our programs to help bring key media and information literacy competencies to life – https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy.

Organizations and individuals that work on media- and information-literacy-related issues are invited to join the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance NOW!

Noha Bawazir has been the Head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Office and Representative to Palestine since 2020. She holds a master’s degree in political history from Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle, and an MPhil in international relations from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Internationales (EHEI, Paris). Noha has extensive experience at UNESCO. Prior to being appointed in Palestine, she was the Chief of the Arab States Unit within the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations at UNESCO Headquarters, in charge of relations with the Member States of the Arab region.

Alton Grizzle is a happily married husband and father who loves and respects all peoples. He works at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris as a programme specialist in communication and information. He manages UNESCO’s global actions on media and information literacy (MIL). He has pioneered many initiatives and authored articles and books, including on MIL and gender and media. Prior to working with UNESCO, he was an educator in Jamaica for ten years. He holds various degrees including a PhD in communication and journalism from the Autonomous University of Barcelona.
I relived those feelings of anxiety and horror that we experienced every time we met an armed person in the camp. Mahmoud is one of the lucky ones; he was imprisoned and released, but the faces of many others have been turned into symbols or mere memories for the inhabitants of Jenin and for Palestinians in general.

During this visit, we did not face any difficulties in finding a place to stay, unlike ten years ago when we had to stay in the homes of people we did not know. At that time, people opened their homes to us since there were no hotels.

At first sight, life in Jenin may appear normal, with restaurants, hotels, and shops that open their doors every morning. But in Jenin we have the feeling that we are in a small village that monitors every stranger that comes in. On every street, people ask the crew, “Are you from the Israeli press?” “No, we are from Al-Jazeera.” The yellow Israeli vehicle plates raise suspicion and fear. The car was photographed and the photograph was circulated several times before our movement in the city became familiar to inhabitants.

In Jenin, we met people who have never given up hope; they have not allowed fear to infiltrate their hearts and have not been broken by the Israeli occupation forces. It is probably not a coincidence that the six prisoners who managed to escape are all from the vicinity of Jenin and the camp.

To me, Jenin is not a one ephemeral story in my career or even in my personal life. It is the city that can raise my morale and help me fly. It embodies the Palestinian spirit that sometimes trembles and falls but, beyond all expectations, rises to pursue its flights and dreams.

And this has been my experience as a journalist; the moment I’m physically exhausted and mentally drained, I’m faced with a new, surprising legend. It might emerge from a small opening, or from a tunnel dug underground.

About Shireen Abu Aqleh
For 24 years I have been covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for Al Jazeera. In addition to the political issue, my concern has been and will always be the human story and the daily suffering of my people under occupation. Before joining my current channel, I was a co-founder of Sawt Falasteen Radio. Throughout my career, I have covered four wars against the Gaza Strip and the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2009, in addition to the incursions into the West Bank. Furthermore, I have covered events in the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Egypt.
From Black and White to Virtual Reality

The Evolution of Television

When I was born, the evolution of television was in its infancy in Palestine. As a child, I still remember the black and white big woody box that needed time to heat up only to receive two or three channels. To my parents, that was amazing as they barely got used to the radio revolution when suddenly, they had pictures in addition to sound.

Since then, huge strides have been made in the making of television. Long gone are the big bulky heavy glass screens whose biggest size was 32 inches. Even the technology used in the manufacturing process, which for a long while depended on CRTs (cathode ray tubes), morphed into something unthinkable when television was first introduced.

No other media evolution has created as much impact as the TV. In a relatively short time, TV reached almost every point on the globe. Obviously, the immense popularity of TV has resulted in the unprecedented growth of TV viewing as well as technology. Our simple TV today is not simple anymore in comparison to the models we used to have 20 or 30 years ago. Today it is called smart TV, with various features to satisfy almost everyone. Television has grown through several aspects of technology, such as the TV studio technology, the TV transmitter and broadcast technology, and the TV receiving device technology. Not only have the TV signals been converted from analog to digital, but today, we have high-definition TVs, Internet Protocol TV, mobile TV, and 3-D TV commercially available.

In the old days, in order to receive a clear signal, we had to be located near the broadcasting towers; within a few kilometers’ radius. Receiving channels through satellites was a huge jump. You can now watch channels from different continents or be connected to a cable network that can broadcast different channels around the globe.

With time, the internet boomed, and more and more users were connected to the net with a huge demand for media streaming. Local cable operators were thus made obsolete because one can be connected to any global provider such as Amazon, Netflix, and many other operators who invested in this new technology which in turn put traditional cable operators in danger. Netflix today has 185 million subscribers and generates profits in the millions. It is expected that by 2025, its profits will climb to US$25 billion, which only constitutes around 20 percent of the fees earned by free-to-air channels from commercials. No traditional media company has come anywhere close to retaining the same share of streaming revenue as Netflix. Potential competitors, such as Disney and other deep-pocketed players such as Amazon and Apple, are not generating large direct-streaming-video revenue yet, but could very well do that in the future. No one else is likely to do so.

Still, we are in the first steps of this war. The winner will certainly be the player that possesses more advanced and better technology. Music, newspapers, and magazines have all gone from growth to “ex-growth.” They’re smaller and fundamentally changed.

With the rapid growth of streaming, if traditional TV, both free-to-air and subscribed cable channels, want to survive, it is inevitable that they change their working model and go through a technological transition. However, we’re on the cusp of it now. With traditional TV fading, streaming profits will likely be big enough to make up the difference. Many of the hybrid models are difficult to predict, but one thing is clear, the TV business will change radically in the next few years.
been developing in the last decade and just recently started to boom and become popular – wearing glasses that take you to virtual reality in 3-D and 360 degrees. The VR era is happening now, and we will see the integration of more and more solutions. The most popular VR service today is gaming, where we have started to watch many acrobats and sports activities and games joining in. Now you can travel virtually and be in real adventure rather than watch flat or curve screen.

Teachers, banks, travel services, museums, and even clinics and hospitals have begun to join this technology. VR will change the meaning of learning and teaching. Education is the base for a thriving society, and virtual reality can be used to enhance student learning and engagement. VR education can transform the way educational content is delivered; it works on the premise of creating a virtual world that allows students not only to see it but also to interact with it. Being engaged in what they are learning will help them fully understand it. It will require less cognitive load to process the information.

In addition, VR will shape the future of telemedicine, which just started during the last few years. The ability to view the inside of the human body in virtual reality is not only useful for doctors but also for patients. VR allows patients to be taken through their surgical plan by virtually stepping into the surgery.

All of this looks like small steps with respect to what is waiting for the generations to come. And here we begin to ask, What is the limit for our brain? How can it manage all these changes? And how will the future look for human beings.

Since the early days of the Palestinian National Authority, a Palestinian TV station started broadcasting as the official TV in Palestine. The station used UHF (ultrahigh frequency) with transmitters in Ramallah, Jericho, Jenin, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza to cover all districts. A few years later, many local TV stations emerged, some of which were very successful, including Wattan TV in Ramallah and Al-Fajar TV in Tulkarem, to name a couple. Then we started to see a few Palestinian stations and media centers join the satellite broadcast which enabled those stations to disseminate Palestinian content internationally.

Today most of our TV and radio stations broadcast on the internet, and you can watch or listen to their broadcast from anywhere.

Hani Alami, a Jerusalem-born expert in the telecom sector, lives in Jerusalem. He founded many telco companies such as Coolnet (internet service provision), Fusion, and SMT. He designed and built the communication network for the PNA between 1994 and 2000. In 2016, he founded JEST, the first NGO in Jerusalem to support and provide financial empowerment to entrepreneurs. Recently, he started Yaboos, the first Palestinian radio station in Jerusalem.
Givara Budeiri

I Have a Dream

I am a Palestinian from Jerusalem and was raised to believe that my Arab nationalism is my identity. Yet I was brought up in the shadow of an occupation that had stolen the hopes and dreams of the people of my land. These people resisted, and they believe that education, knowledge, and love for their country are their most effective weapons.

I was thirteen years old when the United States attacked Iraq after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As a curfew was imposed, my parents were glued to the TV, watching the news. The Israeli TV channels were reporting that the Americans had destroyed all their targets. Hours later, Jordanian TV announced that Iraq had won. Even as a child, I found myself asking: Where is the truth? This became my sole quest. I realized my dream by studying journalism at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Upon my return, I was hired by Al Jazeera network.

As I grew up, I was influenced by my father who was editor, then editor-in-chief of several Palestinian newspapers, and by my mother who had her own column in a few newspapers. When I became a journalist, they stood by me and encouraged me through thick and thin. My brother Ahmad followed suit and also chose journalism as a career. My main challenge was the occupation itself, which more often than not, prevented us from conveying the truth. We were targeted and shot at several times, and our team frequently took rocky paths to reach areas in conflict.

When I became a mother, things changed. My daughters Raya and Taleed taught me strength, patience, and even fear. Before having them, I never cared about my safety or the consequences of the dangers I put myself in, but as a mother I feel I owe it to them to protect myself. It’s certainly not easy, but with motherhood came a new understanding of what mothers, especially the mothers of martyrs and prisoners, go through not only in Palestine but around the world.

When I met the mother of the prisoner Akram Fasfous, I wasn’t able continue the interview. For almost twenty years, her dream has been to have all six of her children sit together for a meal. All of her children are in prison. She has spent her life travelling from prison to prison to see her children.

In 2006, the Israeli army was destroying houses in Rafah. Um Ahmad insisted that we film her pigeons. I thought it was silly, but we obliged. Later that evening, as we watched the news from Rafah from the comfort of our homes, my phone rang. There was a lot of noise at the other end. It was Um Ahmad screaming that an Israeli tank was about to kill her pigeons. Then came a loud cry and the sound of an explosion; a rocket. The voice went silent. She had been martyred.

But sometimes stories have a happy ending. In 2017, when the occupation put electric gates at the doors of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Muslims and Christians resisted. During the sit-ins, all sorts of supplies were sent by anonymous people to help sustain those who refused to go home. During those days, the streets of Jerusalem were my home. We won that battle and the electric gates were removed.

I dare say that June 5, 2021 was the most memorable day of my career so far. I was beaten by the Israeli army while covering the story of the home evictions in Sheikh Jarrah. The attack on me was unprovoked. I suppose the army considered my mere presence to be a provocation. I ended up with an injured back, a problem with my knee, and a broken hand. At the Israeli police station, an officer told me: “We did this so that you, Al Jazeera, and all journalists would shut up.” “Do what you want,” I replied, “but we won’t shut up.”

Now I would like to move into investigative journalism. My dream is that my final reporting would recount the freeing of all prisoners from Israeli prisons, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and my return to my family’s home in Qatamon in West Jerusalem. Even though it’s a dream that seems difficult to realize, what’s important is that I too have a dream.
During high school, I was passionate about journalism and thought of pursuing studies to fulfil my ambition – inspired by the fact that in the 1980s there were few Palestinian female journalists who worked with the only three media outlets (mainly newspapers) that existed at the time. However, family advice and school counseling pointed to media being a terrain with no guarantees of a sustainable career, which then led me to complete my bachelor’s degree in economics and business at American University in Washington DC.

Destiny led me to media. Having returned from America and worked in the Palestinian private and diplomatic sectors, I was propelled to where I was meant to be – first, as founder and manager of the pioneering English radio station in Palestine, 93.6 RAM FM in 2005, and thereafter as the co-founder and managing director of the first and currently only women’s radio station in the Arab world, Radio Nissa FM in 2010. Consequently, my views and assessment of the media sector in Palestine, mainly broadcasting, are a result of my institutional experience and subsequent knowledge.

Even though the Palestinian media sector – as a source of information separate from the occupation media outlets – may have filled the gap that had previously existed, it remains beset with huge challenges. According to a survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2019, there were 70 radio stations broadcasting in Palestine, and 11 TV stations. Palestine also has three newspapers that are distributed in print format, and many social media outlets have sprung up, providing Palestinians with news, information, and entertainment. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications, Palestine is unique in that it has more radio stations per capita than any country in the world.

Although this new abundance may have solved or filled a gap, there remain unsolved issues and complications. For example, the number of media graduates from Palestinian universities is high, with limited opportunities for them, especially for female graduates. With media outlets unable to absorb them, they have exacerbated the unemployment issue. Those who are fortunate enough to obtain employment generally do not earn a salary that is in keeping with their education and work effort. Aggravated by the COVID pandemic, media outlets have suffered financial losses that forced them to lay off journalists and employees or put them on reduced salaries and working hours. Moreover, as citizen journalism has presented itself as another source of information and news that is very popular in Palestine, it has taken attention away from traditional media and has gained a substantial share in the news and information market.

Female journalists continue to face societal and work challenges: access to jobs is limited, and freedom of movement and work is more restrictive for them in comparison to their male colleagues. Senior positions in media are still monopolized by males, despite a slight improvement in recent times.

In general, freedom and access to information continue to be limited in Palestine. The occupation is a major reason for the prevailing lack of mobility that affects the work of journalists. It is exacerbated by Palestinian media laws that should be reformed and changed to accommodate and fit in with modern media criteria. The law that regulates the right to access to information, for example, must be clarified. Unethical competition between media outlets and technical issues also remain a major concern that should be seriously addressed by the formal sector and the regulators.
All is not lost. Having experience in this challenging sector, I have learned that obstacles can be overcome if planning is done well. Media is no different from any other sector: strategic planning and analysis are regularly needed. Surveys and questionnaires are important. The number of listeners does not indicate the success of the media. Sustainability and social impact, rather than numbers, become paramount.

In addition, it is a moral and societal duty to have responsible media that is capable of initiating change and diversifying its content. Media is obliged to make a positive, even transformative, impact on society and its attitudes instead of increasing the numbers and profits at the expense of quality and integrity. Most importantly, media has to be dynamic and not rigid; it has to be vocal and objective, and must build rather than destroy. Finally, media has to adjust and evolve to keep up with all the technological and media trends of today.

Maysoun Odeh-Gangat is a Palestinian entrepreneur from Jerusalem. Her higher education took her to the University of Grenoble in France and American University in Washington DC. Her media career started after she joined the newly established South African Representative Office in Ramallah as the adviser on media and trade. In August 2009, and in partnership with the Swiss-based Womanity Foundation headed by Swiss businessman Yann Borgstedt, Maysoun set up Nisaa FM, the pioneering all-women radio station in the region. Today, Maysoun heads its operation.

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A Journalist’s Personal Testimony

Hana Mahamid

Journalism with a Conscience

On a winter day in 2018, alongside my journalist peers, we waited outside an Israeli high court for prisoner Israa Al-Jaabis to enter the courtroom. Israa was accused by the Israeli Occupation Authorities of carrying out an attack against its forces in 2015. During that incident, Israa’s car was set on fire, causing her to be disfigured. We all knew of Israa’s scars and disfigurement, but seeing her face in such close proximity was suffocating.

Our main camera was rolling, but I was also taking pictures with my mobile phone. I asked her if she was in pain. She gave me the side-eye and sarcastically answered: “What do you think?” I asked her about her hands and fingers. She raised her hands in front of the camera and said, “There are no fingers.”

This memory of Israa still haunts me – her sullen facial expressions in response to what seemed like superficial questions asked by journalists. The line between extracting a piece of information and capturing a photo on one hand and violating a person’s privacy on the other is often very thin. I am always conscious of this and worry about crossing that line.

I have been working as a field journalist for thirteen years, and when Al Mayadeen satellite television channel aired a decade ago, I was one of its reporters, producers, and documentary directors who covered events in the occupied territories. Throughout my career, the pain of the Palestinians has been the dominant story. Rarely, if ever, are other stories told. But all journalists, in the midst of covering loss, destruction, and bloodshed, must revisit their consciences and tap into their humanity to avoid the devastation of repeatedly witnessing and having to communicate such harsh realities, which can easily compromise their capacity for compassion and numb them to events. I wonder whether this is required of Palestinian journalists as well. The answer, of course, is very complicated.

As I watch from the other side, I have always felt perplexed and confused by the scenes of shelling on the besieged Gaza Strip. My focus and concern have been for the Palestinians subject to bombardment and for an entire city turned into a pool of death for children and entire families, along with their destroyed memories.

I would be lying if I said I work without bias. Throughout my long and difficult journey, I have been careful to report the news accurately. But I have always searched for what is beyond the stories of Palestinians who have had to chase after their rights and their dreams of freedom.

In October 2015, I faced one of the most challenging moments of my career. I was covering an Israeli incursion into Al-Essawiyah neighborhood in Jerusalem when a stun grenade was thrown directly at our crew. I suffered facial burns and became hearing impaired in my left ear. The moments of the attack were horrendous and filled me with terror and humiliation. I felt my face melting and became terrified at the idea that my little girl Shams would grow up with a mother whose face was disfigured. The horrifying thoughts that came to my mind are too many to recount. My agony did not stop there; rather than providing help, an Israeli officer began to interrogate me. Two days later, my Israeli-issued journalist card was revoked.

It’s an understatement to say that the path of a Palestinian journalist is not paved with roses. But what is important, in my view, is the message: the stories and perspectives that we present make our work worth the challenges. Professionalism is the perfect mixture of a job, an identity, emotions, and respect for the privacy of the other. It is a complicated equation that I certainly aim to solve one day.
East Jerusalem is recognized as being underserved compared to other areas of Palestine in terms of innovation and the digital ecosystem. Current offers do not meet demands, especially for the large number of young people who lack real pathways to employment. The unemployment rate among Palestinian computer science and computer engineering graduates is high due to skills gaps that arise from limited links between universities and the industry and from a lack of research labs and equipment, making access to the job market difficult.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, eleven Palestinian universities provide the Palestinian market with approximately 3,000 engineering and computer science graduates per year, which is equivalent to 8.2 percent of the yearly net labor force increase. But recent graduates from Palestinian universities, especially women, suffer because of the high rate of unemployment. In 2018, the unemployment rate among computer science graduates was 43 percent among males and 75 percent among females; for engineering graduates it was 39 percent among males and 69 percent among females in the West Bank and Gaza.

As the IT services sector in the West Bank and Gaza has been growing at 6 percent annually since 2010, more than 20,000 direct and indirect workers (0.4 percent of the employed labor force) were employed in more than 1,000 establishments, mainly working in the information- and communications-technology sector in 2017, which contributes an estimated 7 percent of the overall GDP. More than 5,000 graduates in the fields of computer science or computer engineering from Israeli universities are entering the labor market each year. Approximately 17 percent (or around 850 to 1,000) are Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship; of these, a further subset of 3.4 percent (around 290 to 300) are from East Jerusalem. Hence, a total of 680 Palestinians from East Jerusalem were actively employed or engaged in the Israeli high-tech sector.

Furthermore, the demand for high-tech employees has grown as well, with an estimated 18,500 open tech positions in the Israeli technology industry as of July 2019, an increase of 8 percent compared to July 2018. The percentage out of the overall number of high-tech employees amounted to about 12 percent in 2019. The skills gap – which refers to specialized technical skills, practical training, soft skills, and creative thinking – found among computer engineering and computer science
graduates is due mainly to the rapidly increasing output factor of higher education that has not been aligned with the number of available vacancies in the labor market. The university output has maintained a traditional emphasis on technical professions but has gradually diverged from the demands of the private labor market. Thus, this deficiency is partly a result of the rapid enrollment increase in tertiary education while the necessary adaptation of curricula and the alignment of professional training with the needs of the private sector have not taken place.

As the high-tech sector’s demand for talent is rapidly increasing and not matched by the supply of skilled programmers and engineers, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of investing in new technology, facilitating remote work, and preparing or maintaining the tech-savvy workforce that is needed to make it all happen.

Accordingly, the Jerusalem High Tech Foundry (JHF) has developed a special program that is based on an assessment of market needs, conducted in early 2021 in consultation with local and global high-tech companies. Studying employers’ demands, it identified the skill sets that allow job applicants to remain competitive and meet the challenges of a fast-moving digital landscape, also considering the available jobs forecasted for the coming years.

Given the difficult context of young Palestinians, income-generating opportunities that can flourish despite potential physical, political, and social restrictions are all the more important to provide them with a reliable income. Ensuring that such opportunities become widespread and sustainable, especially in a new market such as East Jerusalem, requires – beyond technical training – a holistic “ecosystem” approach that develops an overall enabling environment and provides aspiring tech workers with the appropriate skills and knowledge, a supportive leadership, a conducive culture, and access to the appropriate financial and human resources required for success.

JHF aims to further increase internet-enabled work opportunities by strengthening multiple pillars simultaneously: technical talent, professional skills, and cross-cutting support for a strong, inclusive community, including the entire Jerusalem governorate. The organization thus follows the strategic direction of expanding the education-focused verticals of its tech employability program through the educational training program that enhances marketable twenty-first-century skills and tech-focused skills while strengthening professional skills and connections to the online global marketplace that are aligned directly with market demands.

The technical training is designed to be flexible in the topics that are covered and in the training approach and its duration, which ranges from 90 to 320 hours in three categories, short, medium, and long-term. Using the hybrid modality (face-to-face as well as virtual classrooms), tailor-made training content ranges from basic to advanced topics that are in high demand. Topics include front-end and back-end software development (both web and mobile) for iOS and Android, software quality assurance, data analytics, cloud systems, data science, artificial intelligence, and more.

The training serves as the foundation for enabling the growing Palestinian youth population to remain competitive in the online global marketplace that is a key driver of employment opportunities through direct hiring or the freelance track, helping youth and young professionals overcome the various political and geographic challenges that affect Palestine.

Thus, the technology sector leverages more sustainable and inclusive economic development for young women and men in East Jerusalem and in Palestine, supporting them in accessing decent job opportunities.

Eyd Al Araj, a co-founder of Jerusalem High Tech Foundry, has a long career in international development, over 20 years of extensive senior managerial experience in the nonprofit sector, and a record of success in getting initiatives off the ground and ensuring that they flourish.

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2 Ibid.
7 Jerusalem Hi-Tech Labour Market Assessment,” 2017.
Community Radio Media in Palestine

Imagination is freedom, it frees our vision with no limitations. When we realize that media is freedom, then we listen to a radio frequency of our own choosing, one that addresses our concerns and attracts our attention. When we participate in a debate, we feel as though we are sitting with a group of friends or coworkers who share the same level of education and experience. We speak freely, without censorship, except that of our own commitment to the truth, which we owe to the listeners. This is the positive role and impact of public and community radio, impartiality, and independence.

It happens that sometimes, when we listen to a guest speaker about a very interesting topic, our attention drifts away and we get distracted, due to our inexperience and lack of presentation skills. Leading an interactive program is totally different from broadcasting. Remember, for example, when football matches were broadcast on the radio – not watched on television! People also used to listen to plays through that small box instead of lining up to get their seats in a huge, dimly lit theater. I assume many Gazans relived this experience during electricity cuts in Gaza, for instance, back in 2014, when radios were the only source of information; people depended on them and trusted whatever news was communicated.

When it comes to radio, what is never missing is the sense of suspense. Most radio content is produced for one-way programming – be it live or on-demand, online or offline. Listeners are therefore exposed to content that they were not expecting or had not looked for previously. Radio’s content provision to listeners does not depend on what they have previously listened to. Developing a critical mind is the tool we must utilize to ensure that misinformation is avoided, and information is received as perceived.

Media could be our gateway to freedom: freedom of expression and freedom of access. Its widespread and virtual wings allow both the presenter and the recipient, in addition to information and news, to “roam around” freely and easily, like the frequency of sound.

Asking legitimate questions about a radio station’s strategy and vision, we must examine media content and practices closely. This process entails establishing a practice of critical thinking about how digital technology and social platforms are channels of the information disorder; fighting back against disinformation and misinformation; fact-checking techniques; verifying social media and combatting online abuse and hate speech. All are in the core of UNESCO’s support, provided through the various programs of Freedom of Expression and Media Information Literacy.

Behind the box hides a voice. Even though no facial expressions are to be seen, feelings are evoked by mere sound. It might be news, a poem, a song, or just a debate that attracts our attention, simply because the topic speaks to us and provokes emotion and thought, and touches on our common, daily concerns as citizens or on the events of the hour. When we read a book or a novel, our imagination creates the characters and scenery; we color it the way we want and shape the characters according to our own hopes and lived experiences. When that book is made into a movie or a documentary, we often face a new perception, even disappointment!
Since innovation is key to good practices and sustainability, especially in media, radios are encouraged to be innovative, as are stations and social media accounts, in addressing issues and presenting their stories.

In Palestine, there are about 20 registered radio stations, but over forty are broadcasting. Back in 2017, only 26 were broadcasting in Gaza, which led to the belief that radio was the only source of information during times of conflict. This brings us back to the importance of reliable information and news, to the type of program that attracts the audience and engages with their concerns, the professionalism of presenters, and their tone of voice. This is precisely what makes the radio station – and any other media source – last long and have a high number of listeners or followers. But this is not the only reason why some radio stations have been shut down. The rise in the number of stations also reflected the state of experimentation that accompanied the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The majority, if not all of these stations were created with limited resources and skills. They were generally dependent on self-or family employment. Significant investment in the media has been absent both before and after the establishment of the PA.

Despite the consideration and need for minimal support, radios, especially those that were community-based, did not survive long. As the PA was being formed, few radio stations were established in rural areas and refugee camps to tackle issues related to settlements, the right to return, and gender-related issues, which were all major concerns for the Palestinian people. While citizens’ basic needs grew and gaps arose in their basic rights, radios could not continue to serve.

To sustain their existence, radio stations had to register as for-profit companies, depending on advertisements. However, in the absence of an advertising policy in place in Palestine, advertisements were looked at closely by regulators to avoid sustaining publicly owned stations and favoring them over those that were privately owned. Economics therefore plays an enormous role in the sustainability and continuation of these media outlets, and the COVID-19 pandemic showed us the reality at its ugliest. The creation of such a large number of media outlets following the establishment of the PA, particularly regarding geographically confined local radio and TV stations, was a deliberate step towards creating media pluralism for Palestinians and ending the reliance on Israeli media, which had been the major source of information and news following 1967.

Digital spectrum and social networking took over, radios that could not sustain their presence simply turned into virtual and online radios, functioning with limited staff, mostly volunteers, to support their cause and raise their voices in an open platform. Surprisingly, resilience kept spirits high, and freedom of expression continued to be exercised through open discussion and flow of shared information.

In this overall landscape, radio is a key source of information in Palestine as it reaches a wide range of the public. But radio stations have been hit most by the economic crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated. It is therefore of utmost importance that all sectors in the Palestinian community, especially business owners, contribute to the sustainability of radios, to support their existence offline and online. It is equally critical that radio station owners, especially those who acknowledge their essential role in democracies, provide information and high-quality reporting to encourage social cohesion at the regional, national, and local levels and, through better media coverage, to promote the inclusion of people, particularly women in society and public debate.

Community radio is crucial for providing an outreach mechanism for increased access to education, self-expression, and communication among rural and hard-to-reach populations. Such stations allow communities a sense of ownership regarding their own development agenda, enabling them to become self-empowered to publicly express their opinions, debate issues, and promote the culture, history, and language of their communities.

For Palestine, the key to strengthening social cohesion and resilience of local communities is to create opportunities and channels for dialogue, providing space in the public discussion to make everyone’s voice heard – particularly those in marginalized groups.

Hala B. Tannous is the communication and information focal point at UNESCO Ramallah Office, which supports programs related to freedom of expression and access to information and media information literacy. Hala completed her higher education in global management from the University of Salford in the United Kingdom.
“W"e need to include experienced and well-educated reporters on our teaching faculty at the Media Department. Work in radio must be taught from within the broadcasting studios and editing corridors.”

This is what the then Dean of the Department of Media at Birzeit University said in 2018 when I was selected to teach media at the university. To me, teaching at Birzeit University’s Media Department was not only a job to add to my CV or academic record but a real breakthrough in my professional experience. At that moment, I felt a sense of passion, perseverance, patience, and continuous readiness to learn. I realized that taking my profession seriously would secure recognition and appreciation not only among media outlets and institutions but also in academic establishments.

My studies were not an indicator that I would pursue a career in journalism. I had obtained a BA in political science and a master’s in international studies. However, twelve years ago, in 2008, a short volunteer experience at Filistin Ashabab magazine paved the way for me to embark on this profession.

After spending two years with the A. M. Qattan Foundation as a pedagogic researcher in human and social sciences – during which I produced many socio-educational articles and essays – I joined a leading youth magazine, Filistin Ashabab, as one of its youth volunteers. Later, the administration of the magazine came up with an idea to create a local youth radio program. I was selected along with another colleague to host the Filistin Ashabab radio program. This simple decision completely diverted my career, allowing me to delve into journalism and media work for local and satellite TV and radio stations.

I continued to prepare and host my radio show Filistin Ashabab for over five years, during which I addressed issues of interest to youth. This experience helped to qualify me to become a lead anchor on the first radio program to focus on women’s issues in the Middle East, “Nisaa FM.” I worked there for five years as an anchor and talk-show host, meeting many senior officials and leading figures in Palestine. I started to become more confident and gained important experience that enabled me to compete with my other colleagues who I viewed as role models due to their creative media skills. My success is due to perseverance, hard work, and self-confidence, combined with an unstoppable yearning to step out of my comfort zone and learn. In addition, the help and training provided by Nisaa FM enabled me to meet experts from South Africa and allowed me to compete for advanced posts in the Palestinian journalism sector.

In early 2015, the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation proposed that I become a TV and radio show host. This offer tested my ability to work for a big enterprise and challenged me to shine among 200 colleagues whose experience was far more extensive than my own. I made the decision to join Voice of Palestine Radio – the official government radio station – to host talk shows on social, economic, and political issues. I became one of the few female journalists to become a talk-show host on both TV and radio in Palestine. Most of my female colleagues usually host morning and recreational programs. I host TV shows on culture, primarily visual arts, the economy, and many other topics.

In 2018, I was awarded first prize at the Arab Media Festival in Tunisia for my radio talk show on women and sports. I was also selected by Care Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza as a success story and role model for their program “Kayani” (2020), which focuses on women’s success stories.

Throughout my career, I have been committed to volunteering in civil society organizations and have joined the boards of many Palestinian institutions, such as Al-Mada Association for Arts-Based Community Development and Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation. Patience is the key to success. This is my motto, especially in this age of acceleration and overwhelming desire for fame among most media practitioners. Without patience it is impossible to build a solid career. You need to enjoy the journey and take your job seriously. This is how I built a career in which I went from a youth talk-show host to Birzeit University and Al-Quds University in Abu Dis to teach media with a focus on radio.
Imagine for a second that you have the ability to immerse yourself in a 3-D virtual reality (VR) world with an exact replica of a heritage site you want to visit. You look to your left and right and walk through the site as if you were there. You extend your hand to touch the walls, the floors, the columns as if they were right in front of you. You feel the presence of history come to life.

3-D VR is truly the best way to experience a heritage site digitally. An ideal experience involves wearing VR goggles. These goggles allow the curious navigator or tourist to look around in all directions and see the place as it really is.

Other layers could be added to the 3-D VR environment to make the experience even more pleasant through features such as combining it with text, music, and even a tour guide to explain the history of the place as the user walks around in this digital platform.

A short movie that shows a basic flythrough through the main archaeological site at Sebastiya is available at https://youtu.be/H9s350ztEZI.

This is not futuristic technology; this technology exists today. Using a 3-D laser scanner is just one way to capture the beauty of a location. We can also use drones to achieve the same result but with less accuracy. Palestine is beautiful and rich with cultural heritage sites from many civilizations. By creating an online platform that shows these sites and adds narration, we bring these sites to life.

Our kids today need an interactive 3-D VR platform to experience history and learn from it. Their attention span is so short these days that unless we give them a new way to learn, they will not have the chance to experience the fascinating wonders of our precious history.

Other benefits of 3-D laser scanning include presentation, as it enables us to present culture heritage sites in a 3-D VR manner for all to see, all around the world. Furthermore,

Revisiting Media in Palestine

By Sam Husseini

According to religious tradition, the body of Saint John the Baptist was found in Sebastiya.

This image (below) of the site was captured using a 3-D laser scanner that moved from one location to the next to capture the entire place. The scanner uses a laser beam (Laser Class 1 – nonharmful beam) to measure the most intricate details and to capture the exact geometry of every rock, stone, crack, and column it sees (1 million points per second are captured with up to 1 mm accuracy).

The ruins of Sebastiya.
it serves education, as it allows us to educate future and current generations in a new interactive way. Finally, it serves preservation, since by documenting the site today, we will be able to restore it in the future to exactly the way it once was, due to the 3-D measurements done by the 3D laser scanner.

Our shared goal is to attract tourists to our country and show them the beauty of this land. The road ahead has many challenges, but we know we will prevail. We have many outstanding partners working side by side with us to promote cultural heritage in the country. A short list of our partners includes the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, UNESCO, Riwaq, Taawon, and Custodia Terra Sancta.

For more information on LionHeart3D and the work being done in Palestine, visit www.LionHeart.ps.

With a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, Sam N. Husseini is the CEO of LionHeart, a group of four companies, and a fellow at the Aspen Institute, Middle East Leadership Initiative. He has an exemplary record of leading business development globally for small through billion-dollar software- and hardware-development companies and is highly skilled at creatively motivating employees and empowering them to perform at their optimum levels of productivity.
Ruba Shabit
The Face of Courage in the Midst of Adversity

Before I got involved in the field of journalism and became a TV correspondent, I was an English-language teacher with limited knowledge of politics and the media. I received my bachelor’s degree in English literature and pursued plans to continue in the field of commerce, never expecting that one day I would be able to speak, express, and analyze media and politics the way I do today. In my work as a journalist, particularly as one who lives in a place filled with conflicts and war, I have covered Palestinian protests and clashes as well as the daily struggles and the deteriorating conditions that Palestinians endure. In the beginning, although I found it challenging to have to learn about this career all on my own, it seemed manageable — until the day I had to cover the Gaza escalations. At that point more than ever, I realized that I would be responsible for conveying the truth of events. Each time I heard the bombings, I had to conceal my fear and muster enough courage to photograph the events. I never fathomed that fear could be veiled until I worked as a field correspondent. I’ve learned that it’s actually healthy to be afraid at such times, but it is also useful to put this fear on hold until after I articulate and share the truth.

During the last Gaza escalation, I experienced the most significant incident of both my personal and professional life. Despite having covered previous wars in the Gaza Strip, I was not able to experience the last one with my family. I had to be everywhere in order to cover all the events even as I worried about the safety and well-being of my family. I worked around the clock from hospitals to bombed buildings and ended the day at my office, grateful that I had managed to survive another day. One particular day during the 11-day bombardment was the hardest: I had gone home to get some rest so that I could continue working in the morning and to make sure that my family was okay, when suddenly we heard the unbelievably distressing sound of bombing. Israeli airplanes had targeted the building where my family and I live as well as the entire street. Dozens of my innocent neighbors were killed. I could do nothing but try to stop my tears in order to convey the truth and serve as their voice to the world.

That day confirmed for me that journalism is my passion and the career I want to pursue. Since then, I have worked constantly to share about the victims of the escalation and give them a voice. This has helped me realize that my work as a journalist is not in vain. Journalism has taken over parts of me and changed my personality and perspective, but I have no regrets. I am now more aware of the truth that images convey, and I believe that I am making a valuable contribution to the struggle of my people.
Nasser al-Laham is the editor-in-chief and founder of Ma'an News Agency, director of Al-Mayadeen TV channel, and a member of the Palestinian National Council. His many important career benchmarks include working at the Radio and Television Corporation founded by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Jericho in 1995. While a biology student at Bethlehem University, Nasser al-Laham was editor-in-chief of both Bethlehem TV and Al-Mahd TV. His arrest at this early age prompted a varied academic journey as he changed his major to English literature and then moved to the Faculty of Sociology, from which he graduated. Neither his working career nor the Israeli occupation has managed to stop al-Laham from pursuing higher education and earning a doctorate in psychology that focused on body language. He has been working in written, audio, and visual journalism for thirty-two years and, in addition to Arabic, speaks English and Hebrew.

Al-Laham has published several books in Arabic: Tel Aviv: A City with No Secrets (2002); Fatah: The Sword and the Pen (2003); The Popular Front: Learn Well, Fight Well (2005); Media under Hamas (2007); The Blind Do Not Like Carrots (2011); and Body Language in the Israeli Media (2015). His portfolio holds thousands of articles, TV episodes, and journalistic reporting. Possibly his most important television program is A Tour of the Hebrew Press, which has ranked first in opinion polls for the past 20 years and boasts close to 7,000 episodes. Other TV programs include Hard Questions and The Week’s Harvest. In addition, al-Laham has produced several films, the most important of which are Korea … Rivers Never Live; Marwan Barghouti; Monsters of Africa; Turkey and the Sublime Gate: Cuba, the Communists’ Paradise; Jericho, The Oldest City in the World; and General Jabr al-Akkas.
Middle Eastern Christians are not the homogenous, helpless people that many Western historians would have you believe.

The issue of the persecution of Christians in the Middle East has experienced a resurgence of attention since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and is a focal point of international diplomacy in the region. In fact, native Palestinian and Christian theologian Dr. Mitri Raheb writes that their most defining characteristic is resilience not persecution.

While many people claim to speak on behalf of Middle Eastern Christians, few within the international community pause long enough to hear this religious group speak for itself. The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire represents more than mere retelling of history—it represents the Middle East speaking for the Middle East to a Western audience.

As one might expect, an insider’s take on historical context is critical in grasping the complex geopolitical forces that have placed, displaced, and formed Middle Eastern Christians’ identities over the past two centuries. Raheb, the founder and president of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, charts Middle Eastern Christian history in accessible and fluid prose, from Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion in 1799 to the so-called (and relatively recent) Arab Spring.

Raheb’s historical assessment covers European incursions into the Middle East and their effects on society and religion; the destabilizing and stabilizing effects of war and peace on the region; evolving ideologies embraced across the Arab world and their fruits; the rise of oil, Islamic fundamentalism, regional powers, and international interests, and their effects on Middle Eastern Christians, as well as key challenges that remain for the region and a recasting of Middle Eastern Christians’ identity.

Above all, in an incisive epilogue, Raheb offers the Western world a gentle correction regarding the true situation among Middle Eastern Christians: “Christian persecution is a Western construct that says more about the West than about the Christians of the Middle East,” writes Raheb. “It is a perception rather than an actual description, and the politics that underlie it should not be understated.” Raheb concludes the book by observing that the politics surrounding the notion of “Christian persecution” has been leveraged by the West and by the Christian evangelical right to advance their own agendas. “...Western empires were never really interested in the Middle Eastern Christian but sought a pretext to promote their imperial interests. Over and over again, Middle Eastern Christians were sacrificed on the altar of Western national interests.”

The Politics of Persecution will be of great importance to anyone interested in the geopolitical environment of the Middle East and the future of Christians there.

Dr. Mitri Raheb is the most widely published Christian theologian in Palestine. He has written and edited more than forty volumes, including Shifting Identities: Changes in the Social, Political, and Religious Structures in the Middle East; Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes; and Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East. Raheb is the founder and president of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem.
Mohamed Harb

An artist, filmmaker, and Gaza native, Mohamed Harb reflects the stories of Gaza through the visual arts. He has been a member of the Palestinian Association of Fine Artists since 2003, and works as an artist and filmmaker at the Palestinian Space Channel in Gaza. To promote his art, he has participated in many local, regional, and international exhibitions held in Europe and the Arab world.

Mohamed has witnessed many challenging events in Gaza, including uprisings, blockades, and wars, and still lives in Gaza under harsh conditions. His art is influenced by the drab reality of the Palestinian situation, which he tries to characterize through color. Nevertheless, all of his work investigates the hidden human body.

Since 1995 Mohamed has been working in plastic and other fields of art. In recent years, he has been interested in photography, video art, and directing visually artistic documentaries. His fertile imagination has led him to blend art and technology, creating artistic images by using light to enhance shaping. Through this process, Mohamed has become one of the most important Palestinian contemporary artists in the field of visual arts. He was also nominated to participate in the September Academy at Darat al Funun in Amman – Jordan 2003.

Mohamed obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Al-Najah University, Nablus, in 2001 and also graduated from the School of Visual Arts in Marrakech, Morocco in 2015. He has been working in the field of film directing since 2005 and has organized many art exhibitions and workshops as well as feature-length and short films locally and internationally. He took part in the Cannes International Film Festival within the Palestinian pavilion of the film Repatriation Room 2019. The film was nominated for the Robert Bosch International Prize in Germany as Best Documentary Project on Human Rights. Mohamed has received many local and international awards and several grants for his innovative work not only in project implementation but also in the use of IT and video techniques.

Over the past three years he has been working on several projects, including the artistic A Biography of Gaza, which has recently been screened in many Arab and European cities.

Like many other artists, Mohamed Harb looks forward to bringing to fruition his dream to build a better life in Gaza and to add vibrant color to the drab situation. He has been working as founder and general supervisor of the International Video Art Festival -Gaza for three years. He can be reached at harb.art@hotmail.com.
The Ancient Olive Tree

By Bassam Almohor

The ancient olive tree in Al-Walajeh, south of Jerusalem, protects the balance of history in this land of survival, Palestine.

Al-Walajeh olive tree is a couple thousand years old, probably the oldest living thing in Palestine. Still standing, alive, and growing, it has witnessed all our glory and misery since the Romans – and maybe even beyond. It has survived the Babylonians, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Ottomans, British, and Israelis, and is likely to outlive the next invaders in the current millennium.

Its mother trunk – old, wrinkly, and wide, with a nine-meter diameter – supports 22 other smaller trunks that have sprouted from its roots. Thus, the ancient mother tree has a total diameter of 25 meters. Mother olive’s shade spreads over 250 square meters, enough to accommodate a crowd of several hundred people. She rises 13 meters into the sky and is very well taken care of by gray-bearded Salah Abu Ali, 49, who at all times treats it as gently as if it were his elderly mother. He built a stone wall around it, clears away the weeds and flying dirt, and waters it with a hose that is connected to a nearby spring. He lives all day under her canopy, talks to her, and perhaps imagines all the tales that have been told in this place.

This month, mother olive will yield less oil than average, which at times can come to half a ton of very rich, deep-yellow, delicious olive oil. Sadly, mother olive is disturbed by the ugly scene of the adjacent, recently built five-meter-high shiny Israeli apartheid fence that cuts through the hills of Jerusalem.

When you reach Al-Walajeh, west of Bethlehem or south of Jerusalem, descend the steep road into town and give Salah Abu Ali, the tree companion, a call at 059 516 5502. He will guide you to his beloved olive.

Bassam Almohor can be reached at almohor@gmail.com, 059-753-4681, or Facebook @toursmore.
Ahlan Palestine Postcard

By Malak Hasan

A Wadi Qana Picnic by the Freshwater Spring and Citrus Trees

To celebrate fall in Palestine and our favorite time of the year to plan outdoor activities, we decided to take you on a beautiful trip to one of the most amazing nature reserves in Palestine, the famous and evergreen Wadi Qana. This Palestinian oasis is a must-visit in Palestine if you want to hike, take beautiful photos, or simply spend a quiet morning or afternoon in nature with your friends and family.

Wadi Qana is located between the cities of Salfit, Qalqilya, and Nablus, in the northern West Bank. You can drive to Wadi Qana by taking route 60 in the direction of Nablus and then turning left onto route 505 right before you pass the village of Za’atar. As you pass the villages of Haris and Kifl Haris, take route 5066 which leads you to the heart of Wadi Qana.

Alternatively, you can drive to Wadi Qana from Ramallah through Birzeit, Nabi Saleh, Deir Ghassaneh, Kifl al-Dik, and Bruqin before you arrive at Route 5, from which you can drive by Kif Haris and Deir Istya to Wadi Qana. While taking the highway is probably more straightforward, driving through the Palestinian villages will guarantee that you enjoy scenery like no other and maybe stop for a photo or two, especially in Wadi Amuriya in Deir Ghassaneh.

The drive down to the valley is an experience in itself. As you descend, you can notice the change in scenery. The valley stretches over 10,000 dunums and has 12 natural springs that overflow with water all year around. You can park your car near the sign at the entrance to the valley or drive all the way to the main park area next to one of the valley’s many water springs, Ein al-Fawvar. The walk from the main road to the spring is approximately one kilometer and you pass through long stretches of land planted with all kinds of trees, such as olives, almonds, and citrus. It is an easy 15-minute walk, but if you are planning a lavish picnic, then maybe it’s a better idea to park your car by the spring.

For our quiet and relaxing morning, we planned a small picnic with some of our friends and prepared a tomato dish with garlic and green chilies next to a side of fried goat cheese and homemade labaneh balls. The star of the picnic was the delicious Jerusalem sesame bread brought by our friends straight from Jerusalem.

While waiting for the tomato dish to be ready, we took a small tour around the park where we saw local Palestinian farmers tending their land. We met some of the farmers and returned with enough lemons and figs to accompany our small breakfast. We took plenty of photos of the beautiful freshwater springs and animals, and watched a variety of birds cruise the sky above us.

We highly recommend visiting Wadi Qana if you enjoy spending time in nature but want to avoid walking for hours to reach your destination. The park is child-friendly and you can play different kinds of sports, practice yoga, or maybe enjoy a good read.

Malak Hasan and Bisan Alhajhasan are the founders of Ahlan Palestine, a travel blog that promotes tourism in Palestine. You can learn all about the best travel destinations in Palestine if you follow their Instagram page @AhlanPalestine.
**BETHLEHEM**

**EXHIBITIONS**
Friday 1–Sunday 31
Bethlehem District Diaspora Convention III virtual exhibition presenting a variety of visual arts by Bethlehemite artists in Palestine and the diaspora. Organized by Bethlehem Municipality. Available at www.exhibition.bddc.ps.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**
Tuesday 26
18:30 Musical evening organized as part of the Bethlehem Academy of Music Jubilee celebration presenting a collection of musical pieces by the academy’s group. For more information, please visit www.facebook.com/bethlehemacademyofmusic.

**RAMALLAH**

**BOOK LAUNCHES**
Thursday 6
16.00–18.00 Book launch and discussion of From Arabic Culture to Arabic Islamic Culture. Researcher and author Jamal Daher will provide evidence that refutes the centuries-old historical claims regarding the extent of intellectual production among the Arabs before the advent of Islam, the “pre-Islamic era.” Jood Gallery & Café.

**EXHIBITIONS**
Thursdays 7, 14, 21, 28 and Sundays 10, 17, 24, 31
11:00–16:00 The Exodus and the Odyssey permanent exhibition by artists Ismail Shammout and Tamam Al-Akhal. Dar Zahran Heritage Building Museum.

**LECTURES**
Sunday 24
13:00–14:30 “Unforgettable: Palestine in Two Thousand Years of Documentation,” presented by Salman Abu Sitta, PhD, in dialogue with Johnny Mansour, PhD, discussing his ongoing project of documenting Palestine – the land and the people – spatially and socially. The Palestinian Museum.

**Gaza, Rafah, Khan Younis**

**CONCERTS**
Saturday 9–Saturday 31
19:00 The Sea and Freedom Festival is a cultural festival organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Local and guest musicians and artists present a rich variety of cultural productions and performances that facilitate access to cultural life and artistic productions for a society under siege. This year, the festival aims to contribute to the empowerment of the people of Gaza, particularly youth and women who have endured the cruelest war so far, to participate in cultural life that inspires freedom. For more information about the venue, please visit www.facebook.com/gazaesncm/.
This Week in Palestine will celebrate its 23rd anniversary. There was no rest for the wicked during all this time, but our platform ended up with literally thousands of non-news articles that essentially promote and document Palestine. Inadvertently, TWiP’s archive has become a (mini-) Palestinian national archive.

Our aim now is to launch a focused international campaign (virtually, of course), inviting all those interested in Palestine, friend or foe as I say, to delve into a plethora of content on Palestine. You want to know about Palestine’s cultural heritage? Here are 122 articles. Culinary issues? Here are 146 articles! The list is long. In fact, we will have over 70 categories to choose from. Accessing the bulk of the content will not be free, but a sizable portion will be available at no charge. In order to access the entire archive, there will be a (very) reasonable subscription fee. This Week in Palestine is not a business but a mission, and even missions need funding to be realized.

Prior to launching the campaign, some costly and time-consuming administrative work needs to be done. If the articles are to appear in various search engines, each of them must be tagged with its relevant list of categories. Once this work has been done, we will seek professional advice to determine which platforms to advertise on. We will target Palestinians who live in the diaspora, particularly those in the Arabian Gulf and South America. We will also target academic institutions that teach Middle Eastern studies. The list is long but will certainly include institutions that work in human rights issues, solidarity groups, think tanks, UN agencies, international NGOs, etc. – influencers and decision-makers, in other words.

Admittedly, this is a lot of work, but since passion is an essential ingredient, it can actually be fun. HOWEVER (and do notice the block letters!), I need to voice my dismay and disappointment at not finding one single public-sector or civil-society institution willing to shoulder this (in my opinion) important project. Not even one businessperson. We will proceed, though, and eventually become a rich source of information on Palestine. A source that documents the Palestinian narrative. Our adversary’s media machine is global, savvy, and influential. However, as faint as our voice might be, let it be there for those who seek it.

Within the vast amount of feedback that we have received during the past 23 years, two comments have consistently reappeared: “You make us proud,” and “You connect us with Palestine.” I pray that we will continue to do both.

Long live Palestine!

Sani Meo
Publisher