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Against All Odds: Media Survive in Palestine

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Abstract

With very limited English language literature on the history of the Palestinian media, this paper is meant to offer a historical background of the present Palestinian media landscape, especially in Gaza and the West Bank. It surveys the long history of the Palestinian printed press starting from the era of the Ottoman empire, through the eras of the British Mandate, revolt, Egyptian control, Israeli occupation to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Throughout, it is noted how inter-elite competition fosters media factionalism. However, the birth of nationalist media survived under different forms of occupation and against all odds. This is also a continuous thread in the history of media in Palestine. The detailed examination of this history makes it possible to connect past trends with contemporary technological developments, including the advent of satellite TV. The study thus reveals the longer-term trends that underlie some of the more puzzling features of media in the Palestinian context today.

Keywords: *media, Palestine, Gaza, occupation, Ottoman empire, Israel, Egypt, nationalist media, journalism, freedom of expression*

I. Introduction

The main problem addressed in this study, its theoretical underpinnings and some of the key methodological considerations that inform it will first be outlined. This research seeks to illustrate the historical background of the present media landscape in Gaza and the West Bank. The first section outlines the present configuration of the most relevant media. By looking in more detail at the history of the media in Palestine, in general, and the history of the printed press, in particular, it is hoped that some of the most puzzling features of the media in Palestine today come to the fore. This study, in examining the past in some detail, helps reveal elements of the wider configuration of more recent media technologies today, especially satellite TV.

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In this paper, the media are presented as a key vehicle of expression of Palestinian nationalism. In line with Benedict Anderson's thinking, the media can be seen as one of the key tools of constructing 'imagined communities' (2006, pp. 34-39), in this case the imagined community of Palestine. The study explores the argument of Anderson (1980) that nationalism is encouraged by the appearance of print media in particular. It further explores, roughly chronologically and also by the type of media, the connection between Palestinian identity and the emergence of media. The paper covers the emergence of media in Palestine through four key phases: (i) the Ottoman sultanate, (ii) the British mandate; (iii) the Israeli occupation, settlement and expulsion of Palestinians from their land; (iv) the two intifadas, Israeli wars, and the inter-factional fighting of recent years. What emerges is how the media have successively reinforced both national imaginaries of Palestine and the Palestinians and been prey to factional forces. The media have been factionalised to the extent that print or other media express sectarian, political and factional divisions in society, especially inter-elite rivalries. However, national imaginaries tend to resurface and are never absent despite such narrow, factional forms of identification. Technologies of media will also be traced from the earliest printing press under the Ottomans to the development of contemporary Palestinian satellite and social media from the mid-1990s to the present.

According to recent scholarship, media content mirrors the relationship between governing entities and the nations they rule (Flew & Waisboard, 2015). The media have been very effective in shaping political realities in Palestine since they reflect both public opinion and the expectations and opinions of ruling elites (Peterson, 2015). The media in Palestine still continue to play a significant 'public information' role delivering

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information about administrative policy and changes through legislative decrees to the population, something that started under Ottoman rule. The media can be seen as set of spaces that connect people, for instance for the purposes of imagining themselves as one people or nation and as a historical territory. By the same token, the media can divide through forces such as party political divisions, location-based identities, and personal forms of rivalry and factionalism (Hroub, 2012). Arguably, it is only more recently that the media in Palestine have started to provide spaces for genuine popular opinion, and the growth of a new sense of 'Palestinianism' is evidence of that. With IT-based and satellite media, this role of the media in providing spaces for public opinion has grown and has started to encompass more diverse constituencies than before covering women, young people as well as creative and intellectual pioneers, including those in the diaspora.

II. Emergent Media under Ottoman Rule (1878 -1909)

Divided under the Ottomans, what is now considered Palestine was under imperial rule for four centuries. With a Muslim majority, Palestine was viewed as desirable and useful by Ottoman rulers, and the printed press became the rulers' communicative tool for informing the public – directly and through those who could read – about administrative policies, new rules and regulations, and tax demands. It is fascinating that elite families from that period, materially no better off today than many other Palestinians, nonetheless retain that 'aura' of being part of well-known families through their names. By some, they are considered the 'foundational' elites of modern Palestinian nationalism (Khalidi, 2006). This goes to show how history is very much a present and daily reality. The link established under the Ottomans between the media and specific elite families can still inform factional 'framings' in the media today.

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Palestine was introduced to printing in 1830 by a man named Nasim Baq who established the first printing house in Jerusalem for the purpose of printing Jewish religious texts in Hebrew (Suliman, 1987). In 1846, an Austrian monk named Sebastian Frotechner opened a printing house in Jerusalem with the aim of promoting Christian values. He printed texts in both Arabic and Italian. Then, in 1848, British missionary entrepreneurs started the London Printing House in Jerusalem for the purpose of converting Jews to Christianity by exposing them to books like 'The History of The Church' (1848). In the 1850's, Palestine was filled with the sound of printing machines run by Jewish (1830's), Armenian (1848), Greek (1849) and local media presses such as David Sassoon's printing press in Jerusalem. *Al Quds Al Sharif* was the first newspaper to be published in Palestine starting in the late period of Ottoman imperial rule up to 1918 when Palestine came under the British mandate. Although *Al Quds Al Sharif* is not included in the collections of one important archive, it was published before *Al-Ghazzal*, which the archive lists as the earliest print media in Palestine, stating that this paper was owned by Sheikh Ali al-Rimawi (Zentrum Moderner Orient, 2015). Media in the area now called Palestine started with the Ottoman Publication Law of 1865. The first printing press under Palestinian Arab control began to operate in 1876 (Najjar, 2005). The first Arabic printing press started in Egypt in 1798, in Lebanon in 1858, in Syria in 1865, and in Iraq in 1869 (Abu Shanab, 2001).

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According to some sources including Campos (2011) *Al Quds* started as the official organ of the *mutasarifiya*, the representative in Jerusalem of the Ottoman Empire. As the first newspaper, *Al Quds Al Sharif* was to play an important role in shaping the face of the

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Palestinian media, and it played for some time a relatively independent role *vis a vis* the central authorities in Istanbul (Najjar, 2005).

As happened so often in empires, later the same elites who worked closely with the imperial rulers ended up being among the first to lead anti-imperial nationalist movements. Some inherited lands ceded by the Ottomans and British to specific, favored families. When *Al Quds Al Sharif* was censored by Sultan Abdul Hamid, this was in response to it having published news of the successful actions taken by Russian and Romanian forces, cutting off transportation and supply routes to the Ottomans in 1877. Both censorship and punishment led *Al Quds Al Sharif* to adopt a policy of self-censorship during the war, especially when it became known that Maktabji, an Ottoman publication controller in the province, was inclined to physically punish journalists. Coercion that amounted to torture was inflicted. It was reported that “[h]e would not hesitate to punish journalists by *falqa*, which is severe beating on the feet, in any place, including in his house” (Al Gharib, 1978, p. 6). During the late nineteenth century, the early press in Palestine operated under severe restrictions, including the requirement for newspapers to seek permission from the Minister of Knowledge to publish news content (Al Gharib, 1978). Journalists were not allowed to criticize Ottoman imperial figures or Ottoman policies. Other sources document journalists being arrested in accordance with Article 13 of the Ottoman law which stipulated that newspapers and journalists publishing insulting phrases about the Sultan could be incarcerated for anything from 3 months to 3 years (Suliman, 1987).

As the late Ottoman empire tried to control newspapers, through new press laws and threats of punishment, public opinion started to move away from them. This history of

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imperial control and efforts to work with elites is one of the historical roots of how factional influences resurge from time to time in Palestinian media even today. Thus, the various, sometimes conflicting, regional elites and ruling bodies seek to control sections of the media for their own goals. In the wider region, however, nationalism has emerged mainly in reaction to foreign occupation, and especially when that occupation became overtly oppressive, as it did under the late Ottoman Empire (Baroud, 2015). Without imposing Turkic cultural institutions, from 1517-1918, the Ottoman empire ruled through mostly indirect means until during the late Ottoman period resentment at foreign occupation coincided with the rise of a modern sense of Palestinian nationalism as well as demands for freedom and the powerful idea among the elites and organised opposition of national and even class self-determination (Suliman, 1987). Despite press censorship, restrictions and penalties, more print journals were established in the late nineteenth century and the press flourished (Khalidi, 1997, pp. 55-56). These papers included *Majalet Madrasat Suhioon* (Zionist School Journal) in 1906 and *Al Taraqi* (The Knocker) in 1907. When a coup toppled Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1908, restrictions on press freedoms were blamed, and freedom of speech was improved that print media started to flourish throughout the region (Najjar, 2005; Suliman, 1987).

III. Towards More National Agendas (1909-1914)

After the new laws, the printed press started to flourish in Palestine, and during the years 1908-1909 alone, 15 newspapers and journals were established; 12 were based in Jerusalem and 3 in Jaffa. “On balance, however, Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period, was too small a market, and too provincial a city, to be a major publishing center” (Khalidi, 1997, p. 55). Newspapers from the wider region, such as *Falastin* from Jaffa

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and papers from Beirut, Damascus and Cairo, were read by the elite in Jerusalem as well (Khalidi, 1997, p. 55). All these publications wrote about politics, arts, humor and religion. During this early period of an emerging Palestinian press, Palestinian newspapers started to appear that covered politics, analyzed the Zionist movement and cultivated opposition to the Ottoman government (Najjar, 2005; Bin Yousef, 1987).

Al Karmel, founded by Najeeb Nassar, started publication at this time (1908), and it already carried articles warning the population of the dangers of the Zionist movement. Readers were advised not to sell their family properties to pro-Zionist agencies. *Al Karmel* was also instrumental in encouraging others to set up newspapers and journals the following year. Then in 1911, Issam Al Issa and Yousef Al Issa established the important newspaper *Falastin*, which was more widely read and also served as a platform for promoting national issues within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, in *Falastin*, Sheikh Suliman Al Taji Al Farouki advised readers, "First you should be national, and second sincere to the Ottomans" (as cited in Abu Nimr, 1993, p. 48). Another writer, Aref Al Aref, wrote a warning to the Caliph of the Ottoman Empire, "If the situation remains as it is, Zionism will take over the nation, village after village and town after town" (*Falastin*, January 25, 1913).

In November 1913, *Falastin* was shut down by the Ottoman authorities for criticizing the Ottoman provincial governor in Jerusalem (Najjar, 2005; Suliman, 1987; Yohsa'a, 1974). The newspaper owners changed the name of their publication several times in an effort to avoid censorship. However, *Falastin* remains the oldest, continuously published paper in Palestinian history. It has remained in print almost continuously for 56 years. Later, *Falastin's* newspaper logo was adopted by Hamas, which still published the

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newspaper in the Gaza Strip in 2015. However, the paper now has become a factional media platform expressing the views of Hamas.

In 1908, *Al Quds* emerged after its owner Georgei Habeeb Hanania waited from 1899 until 1908 for permission to start operating his printing press (Hanaina, 2008, p. 124; Najjar, 2005; Bin Yousef, 1987).² The newspaper was not only political, but also discussed issues related to announcing times of breaking the fast during the Muslim month of Ramadan. *Al Quds* published on October 10, 1908 contained an advertisement announcing the first movies to be shown in cinema “which include drama, comedy, and documentaries - shows on display every evening, except on Fridays” (Hanaina, 2008, p. 125).

The combination of political and art journalism broadened and further extended media’s reading public. At that time it was common for papers to be shared between dozens of readers, many of whom in turn would share the texts with those who could not read (Khalidi, 1997, p. 56). The attractiveness of the press was increased by Palestinian political cartoon artists who contributed to both *Al Quds* and *Al Asmaai* newspapers.

Although political journals were largely dominated by Ottoman law, art journals, on the other hand, were more publicly-based initiatives (Suliman, 1987). Among such newspapers, *Bakoret Jabal Sahioon* (First Fruits of Mount Zion) was founded by students who both hand-wrote and hand-distributed the journal. Not connected directly to the Zionist movement, *Bakoret Jahal Sahioon* played an important role in advancing art and science topics. The paper was edited for two years by Tawfeq Zebaq, as documented by Yohsa’a (1974). The magazine focused on art as well as cultural and global affairs including articles about the Turkish Constitution and the war in Japan and Russia. All

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Palestinian newspapers published during this period were weekly, bi-weekly or monthly rather than daily newspapers.

At that time, Palestinian media were viewed by other regional nations where there were more extensive resources and staff as lacking in professionalism. Newspapers of that era were relatively small and did not usually exceed more than 4 printed pages, with each page having 3 or 4 columns with little or no coordination between the headlines and the content of articles. Nonetheless, Palestinian journalism expanded and flourished after the institution of the Ottoman's second Constitution due to popular enthusiasm for nationalism and a renaissance of political interest. Local Palestinian journalists looked to the media in neighbouring regions, like Lebanon and Syria, as they remodelled and reshaped the layout of Palestinian print media (Hanaina, 2008; Yohsa'a, 1974). Despite this, sales grew and the readership grew even faster, and in this way the imagination of the public started to be caught during this period and a form of nationalist imagination – even if still broadly 'respectful' of Ottoman rule – started to emerge. A sense of Palestinian distinctiveness was thus aided by the early Palestinian media in the form of the printed press and readership grew.

IV. Media under the British Mandate (1920-1948)

During the first two years of World War I (1914 to 1916), the Ottoman state stood against the French and British, and it was eventually defeated during the second half of the war with the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that divided up the territories of the former Ottoman Empire between the two new imperial powers. In claiming victory, the British and French were also acquiring the wealth and possessions of the old order; one of these possessions was Palestine. After four centuries of Ottoman rule, the British

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mandate started with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, started in 1920 and lasted almost thirty years. The Balfour Declaration also proclaimed the establishment of a new national home for the Jewish people in Palestine (Parsons, 2013).

The Constitution that governed the press during the Ottoman Empire remained in force throughout the British mandate period (Jarrar, 2009). During World War I, no newspapers were produced in Palestine (Najjar, 2005; Bin Yousef, 1987). After the end of the war, a total of 18 new Palestinian newspapers, including two Jewish newspapers and one British government paper appeared and started to once more be distributed through the region (Abu Hasheesh, 2005; Al-Sherif, 1979). From 1920, telegraphs transmitted news from around the globe to newspaper headquarters in Jerusalem in record time (Haninia, 2008). The revolution this produced can be compared to the information technology revolution of recent years.

During this period, it became more obvious that the development of Palestinian media went hand in hand with the establishment of a National Movement. This would later be intensified with the end of the British mandate and the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestinian land. However, already in the 1920s, Palestinians were starting to think of themselves as united and with a common national identity and history despite their diversity (Khalidi, 2006). Simply stated, the early nationalist Palestinian movement emerged under the British mandate and fed on Arabs' feelings of betrayal at the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917, both of which made conflicting promises to local Arab populations, Palestinians, and new Jewish settlers (Pappé, 2006). In the 1930s, with the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, gradual Jewish

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emigration into Palestine speeded up, and Britain became more accommodating of the Zionist movement than Ottomans had been.

In the press, an emergent sense of common identity among Palestinians, Arabs and Jews alike started to emerge. New political realities led Palestinian Arab media in Palestine to openly oppose further Jewish immigration into Palestine. For example, new groups were established with more voices warning that such immigration was intended to grab the land. Another author, writing under the pen name “M” (August 3, 1908) in *Al-Quds* criticized those against Jewish immigration saying, “[t]hey came to Palestine to build and develop it and live with its people, and therefore we have to live with them as brothers’ (Hanina, 2008, p. 125). The Balfour Declaration’s promise to establish a national homeland for Jews was rejected by the Palestinian press on behalf of the non-Jewish populations in Palestine. The polarisation of the press over the issue of Jewish settlement during the inter-war years led some academic historians to refer to this as ‘factional journalism’ (Abu Shanab, 2001, p. 21; Bin Yousef, 1987, p. 18).

The result of the politicization of the media was that 48 new publications appeared in Palestine, including 8 political journals, 13 art journals, 5 economic journals and a number of religious and humour journals (Najjar, 2005). With the establishment of the Communist Party in Palestine in 1919, new newspapers emerged that sought to defend workers’ rights. There were 13 print shops in Palestine, and the early twenties witnessed more openly political newspapers appearing including *Lisan Al Arab* (The Tongue of Arabs), which was established in 1921 in Jerusalem by Ibrahim Salim Al Najjar and Ahmed Izzat Al Adami, two Lebanese journalists. This publication supported a British policy based on ‘even handedness’ towards the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. In 1925,

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Sheikh Abdullah Al Qalqali started a new publication, *Serat-ul-Mostaqem* (The Straight Path) and also revived the *Falastin* newspaper, which originally started in 1911 during the Ottoman rule. Cultural expression flourished too, alongside more political newspapers and journals, with novels and short stories playing a significant political role during this period, especially for Palestinian Arabs (Khouri, 1976).³ One of these was *Zahret Al Jameel* (The Beautiful Rose) founded in 1921 by Jameel Al Bahri in Jaffa, its name shortened a year later to *Al Zahra* (The Blossom) (Yaghi, 1960). Al Bahri was assassinated shortly afterwards following a political dispute.

From 1920 to the mid-1930s, once Britain's strategic objectives and the Zionist intentions became more obvious to the local media, this became a turning point for the National Movement. Media's awareness of widespread opposition to turning Palestine into a national home for Jewish people started to produce marked divisions in the printed press in terms of their arguments. Some newspapers, like *Filistin*, published anti-British Mandate views while other publications, such as *Lisan Al Arab*, looked to the British to protect the Arab populations from the Jewish settlers' expansionist state-building ambitions (Najjar, 2005; Mahafza, 1989; Bin Yousef, 1987).

Most historians trace the rise of the Palestinian National Movement to the crucial years from around 1923 to 1939, with journalism growing to play a part in providing a form of expression for this movement and those who were becoming part of it (Khalidi, 2006). In 1923, several more newspapers were founded, including *Al Heqooq* (The Rights) by Fahmi Al Hussaini (Suliman, 1987). More significantly, in 1924, with the emergence of seven more newspapers, some major factional newspapers appeared including *Al Jami'aa Al Arabya* (The Arabic Federation) under Munief Al Hussini, a

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supporter of Federalism, *Sawt Al Haq* (Voice of Truth), and a Palestinian communist party newspaper, *Ila al Amam* (Forward). As the competition for leadership of the emerging movement deepened among political elites, more newspapers representing various political interests and speaking to their own supporters began to emerge (Najjar, 2005). *Al Jami'aa Al Arabya*, for example, represented the Arabic Palestinian Party. The famous *Filastin* newspaper was owned by a Greek orthodox who advocated pan-Arabism and supported the Al Defa'a Party (Defense Party) founded by Ragheb Al Nashashibi (Abu Hasheesh, 2005). These competing interests did not really develop into full factional journalism until later, however, with the defeat of 1948. Newspapers like *Al Yarmouk* (1924), *Al Jazeera* (1924) and *Al Etyhad Al Arabi* (Arab Union) were among the leading independent newspapers not governed by factional agendas (Yohsa'a, 1974).

Despite growing opposition to plans for mass Jewish settlement, political stagnation resulted during the inter-war years from the infighting between two major Jerusalemite families, the Al Hussainis and the Al Nashashibis, locked in rivalry around the leadership of the National Movement (Najjar, 2005). The factionalism that arose was critiqued with great sarcasm by Mustapha Al Ghalaini who in 1924 published a poem addressed to the public that included the following lines. "They [the public] think leadership is a dome built on a foundation of gold... [which] they glorified. But glory itself refuses to be violated" (*Al Zahra* magazine, 1924). This kind of factional conflict continues to influence political and national movements today, and it has deep roots. Such clashes over leadership among the big Palestinian families foreclosed the possibility that some other potentially important families could lead the national movement, notably the Al Khalidi family. This was among the oldest and most educated families in Jerusalem,

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known for making its collection of documents available to the public in Palestine (Al Sharif, 2011).

V. Women's Voices in the Media

The role of women journalists and publishers during this period needs further research since women have not often been mentioned in other publications. Nonetheless, we do know from research by Suliman (1987) that women worked on the layout of printed press, and in some cases wrote op-ed articles that voiced 'the woman's point of view' on current issues. In this way, messages were being relayed to a wider and wider audience of those opposed to Zionism, and the role of the press in informing more sections of the population, including women and young people, started to be recognized as crucial (Suliman, 1987). All in all, the records and archival materials of the Palestinian press show that in the inter-war years, intellectuals, farmers, and women living in Palestinian villages and cities increasingly came to rely on newspapers to get their information. After the Al Buraq revolution in 1929, this became a real concern for the British Mandate, with the Shaw Commission (Miller, 2010) explicitly stating, "Palestinian farmers are more politically aware than many of the Europeans, despite the high illiteracy rate among them' (Alloush, 1975, p. 22). This included women whose political activity also increased and started to be reported in the press. In response to the rising awareness, a new law introduced in 1932 imposed strict controls over what could be reported and started to imprison those who opposed the mandate, women included (Suliman, 1988).

From the start of the 1920s, the press focused some attention on women's issues, mainly in the household, in local agricultural communities, and sometimes even in politics and public life (Najjar, 2005). One story of 200 women who organized an Al

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Quds Conference in support of the male-dominated National Movement in 1929 stands out. On October 30, 1929 in *Sawt Al Sh'aab* (People's Voice), the event was reported as 'First Arab Women's Conference.' The conference focused on stopping Jewish immigration to Palestine and putting an end to the Balfour Declaration. Palestinian press reported on women's demands at the time (Najjar, 2005). In the same year, 1929, Christian and Muslim Palestinian women demonstrated together in front of foreign consulates in Jerusalem also attracting media attention. *Falastin* and *Al Defa'a* newspapers viewed their own (male) journalists' presence alongside the female protesters as a form of paternal protection. The articles listed the names of the women organizing the protest.

Women's affairs were not absent from *Al Karmel* newspaper either, which dedicated part of its layout to a 'Women's Journal' which afforded women the chance to write in with opinion pieces (*Al Karmel*, 1926) Articles with headings like 'To the daughter of my town,' 'A word to the wife,' and 'Marriage and Partnership' were published. Sadej Nassar, listed as arrested by the British authorities in 1935 for political activism against the Balfour Declaration, was herself married to Najeeb Nassar, owner of *Al Karmel* newspaper (Moghannam, 1937). When Britain extended her incarceration period from 3 to 6 months, other Palestinian Arab women, political activists and journalists like Asma Tobi, Samira Azzam and Mary Shehadeh publicly defended Nassar and protested. Moghannam (1937) documents the first broadcast on Palestinian Radio of a women's affairs program. Mofeeda Al Dabagh introduced the program which covered social and family topics. Women also used this program to communicate their political messages,

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including objections to foreign expansion into Palestinian lands under the British mandate.

In 1929, women also became involved and gained unprecedented attention in Palestinian media in the revolution that took place provoking the harsh response that followed from the British government (Suliman, 1987) toward both the press in Palestine and in the neighbouring countries. The British tended to punish Palestinian journalists for opinions they (the British) found unacceptable by shutting down newspapers. The Palestinian press protested against such one-sided censorship. In the *People's Voice* newspaper, it was argued, 'All newspapers should enjoy press freedom ... you don't stop the Jewish press, while Arab press overflows with calm peace and contentment, and we see Jewish press spouting venom poison ... leading to chaos and unrest' (*People's Voice*, December 2, 1929) If anything, women became more active during this period, as repression on male journalists and editors was stepped up (Najjar, 2005).

VI. Factions without Factionalism

Between 1930 and 1935, the rapid growth of the Palestinian media was shaped by developments in printing, information gathering, acquired knowledge from the experience of print media in other countries, and the emergence of Palestinian political factions (between 1932 and 1935). By 1935, there were six political factions. Soon they would be joined by many more. During this period, each political faction favoured particular newspapers which they used as platforms from which to promote their agenda and their politics, oppose British policies and recruit new members – a pattern that would set a trend for the next few years of factional fervour (Al Sharif, 2011; Al Hout, 1986). Although the British authorities made it difficult for journalists to work, 43 new

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newspapers were established between 1930 and 1939 (Najjar, 2005) including 17 political newspapers, 9 cultural publications, 8 religious journals, 2 scout publications, 1 economic magazine, 4 education and science newspapers, and 1 industry magazine.

The print media became daily as well as weekly and monthly, with 8 of 17 political newspapers published daily. As in 1908-1909, this period just prior to World War II is considered one of the high points of literary output in the history of Palestinian media and publishing (Al Sharif, 2001; Najjar, 2005; Bin Yousef, 1987). The critical mass of publications meant that more and more diverse political voices were able to find expression, and political parties were able to express their political views through their newspapers and other publications. Each party had its own outlets, but this did not result in the factionalism noted in other periods. Instead, this was a period of 'factions without factionalism' in media terms.

For some historians, the Palestinian revolution represents the most important moment in the recent Palestinian history of nationalism and the media (Abu Shanab, 2001). As intense confrontations with the British authorities increased, the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt gained strength. As Zionism increased its oppression of farmers by seizing huge areas of land for the rapidly growing numbers of Jewish settlers in Palestine, discontent grew among Arab and Christian Palestinians in particular from the late 1920s onwards. On August 30th 1930,⁴ *Falastin* newspaper quoted one outraged farmer saying:

I sell my land and properties because the government is forcing me to pay taxes ... in a time that I don't have the necessary tools to support myself and my family. Under these conditions, I am forced to take loans with 5% interest due after one or two months. This [i.e. not being able to repay the debt in so short a time] forces me to

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renew my debt over and over again, adding more cost on the original debt. This condition will force me, in the end, to sell my land in order to repay some of the debt.

Media coverage of Zionist land appropriation increased the spread of anger among Palestinians. On 23 March 1930, *Falastin* published an editorial after Lord Balfour died on March 19 which said, “Balfour died, and his declaration should die with him.” *The Arab Federation* newspaper wrote on August 13, 1930,⁵ “Oh Palestinians, kick out this Zionism with your feet, and stand face to face with Great Britain.”

Britain reacted to such dissenting coverage with different types of retaliation (Najjar, 2005; Al Kayali, 1968) including arresting journalists and even executing three prominent political activists: Atta Al Zir, Mohammed Jamjoum, and Fouad Hijazi. Their executions were carried out by the British government and Jewish combatants. Many newspapers then began a 40-day strike to protest against these executions. After the strike, *Falastin*⁶ wrote, ‘Force enabled us to speak, and the crime was committed on the podium.’ *Al Yarmouk*⁷ ran another headline that listed the names of those killed on its front page. According to the archives of *Al Zuhour* (17 June, 1930), the three men were executed one after another at 8, 9 and 10 am during which time all the church bells and mosques sounded their mourning. Even today, their names are still remembered and Palestinian children learn about their heroism at school and in national songs (Matar, 2010).

During that turbulent period internal disputes still took place as in Jaffa, for example, where a long-standing dispute between Roman Catholics and Muslims continued over ownership of a cemetery (Najjar, 2005). Factions would use newspapers to spread their own political messages. Despite this, though, from print media archives and other

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documents, it does appear that a single broad perspective was starting to emerge among most newspapers regarding the need to return and retain the land, shared opposition to Jewish immigration, and the need to protect the rights of workers and farmers (Najjar, 2005). Different sections of the press would also call for an end to colonialism worldwide at that time.

Throughout this period, the press improved its content, quality and professionalism. Palestinian reporters worked internationally in Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt, and these included Yousef Yassin, Mahmoud Al Khaimi, Abdelhadi Erfan and Mosallam Bseso respectively (Al Aqqad, 1967). With the improvement of the standard of professional journalism, the distribution of newspapers, including Palestinian newspapers, also grew. Old land-owning families and highly educated elites no longer had monopoly on political parties or on the media. For example, a year after the Fourth Conference for Community Labor in 1922, Arab workers formed the Palestinian Community Party (PCP) with the aim of actively resisting the British Mandate. The party gained popular support throughout the Arab region (Mahafza, 1989). It had strong ties with women's organizations and other progressive groups working in Palestine (Mahafza, 1989). This association with women's groups distinguished the Palestinian Community Party from other parties at the time. The communist approach of including women in the revolutionary movement influenced this party.

Moscow recognized the PCP as a national progressive Arab party opposing imperialism (Mahafza, 1989). In 1929, the party slogans called for the ousting of the British and ending Jewish immigration to Palestine. Rather than choosing Jerusalem, the party chose Beit Safafa, a village close to Jerusalem and populated mainly with poor

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farmers, for its meetings and headquarters. The movement worked hand in hand with the National Movement in 1933 by calling for a boycott of Zionist and British products. Communist Party newspapers that supported the party, farmers and workers (Najjar, 2005; Abu Shanab, 2001) included *Al Ghad* and *Al Etyhad*. The latter is still published today.

VII. Elite Competition, Factionalism and Revolt

In 1932, the constant sense of being treated unjustly and oppressively under the British Mandate motivated Palestinian youth to organize a conference which established a new political party, namely the Istiqlal (Independence Party). This party launched a paper named *Majalat Al Arab* (The Arab Magazine). They sought to promote Arab products and establish cooperation between the working class and farmers. In the same year, the Palestinian Youth Party was also established by Rasem Al Khalidi and others. In 1935, the new leader, Yacoub Al Ghussien, launched the *Al Kefah* newspaper, though it did not last for long due to economic difficulties.

Under a law introduced in 1935, an editor-in-chief had to have a university degree (Najjar, 2005; Suliman, 1987) – a discriminatory act in light of the growing self-organisation of women, workers and farmers. As women started to have a more active role in Palestinian media and politics, so did the youth, and media and political party formation went hand-in-hand. The National Defense Party (NDP) was established by Rageb Al Nashashibi when he failed to win in the Jerusalem municipality elections. Journalists and editors like Issa Al Issa of *Falastin* newspaper joined the political faction of Al Nashashibi, a wealthy group of individuals, the cultural and social elite, including those from *Al Quds* (Khila, 1974). In a historic newspaper article on December 3

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(*Falastin*, 1934),⁸ these founders of the NDP pledged to end their role as middle-men trading and mediating in the sale of land to Jewish settlers. Instead, they pledged the full liberation of Palestine and the establishment of a government of national unity. However, some historians doubted that these elites could survive outside the close relationship maintained with the British under the Mandate, echoing their role under the Ottoman rule previously (Khila, 1974). Three newspapers spoke on the elites' behalf, however, including *Falastin*, *Miraat Al Sharq* (Mirror of the East), and *Serat-ul-Mostaqem* (The Straight Path) (Najjar; 2005; Najjar, 1975).

In 1935, Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was killed and a series of nationalist and popular Palestinian workers' uprisings began. This 'Arab Revolt' lasted from 1936 to 1939 when Palestinian nationalist armed groups confronted British troops and Zionist Jewish gangs over jobs and lands appropriated for Jewish settlers. A movement at this time tried to bring solidarity among Jewish and Arab workers but failed because of religious divisionism. Jewish organisations' factionalism was echoed by factionalism among Palestinians. Intense rivalry followed for Palestinian leadership, again involving the Al Nashashibis and Al Hussinis. Their own ownership of massive tracts of land meant they were less vulnerable to seizures than poorer Palestinian farmers and workers, and this led these elites to largely ignore the Zionist threat of land seizures until it was almost too late (Al Namy, 2010).

Jamal Al Hussini then presented his own party, the Arabic Palestinian Party (APP), as opposed to the elitist NDP of Ragheb Al Nashashibi. The objectives of Al Hussini's Arabic Palestinian Party included the liberation of Palestine, resistance to establishing a national Jewish home in Palestine, closer connections between Palestine and the

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surrounding Arab territories and countries, and the formation of a common front among Arab political factions in Palestine (Al Hout, 1986) The APP did, in fact, establish this wider network with offices opening up new channels of communication with the leadership in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Jordan (Al Hout, 1986; Al Kayali, 1968). Well-funded, the APP had nine newspapers to advocate its thought on its behalf including *Al Jami'aa Al Arabya* (The Arab Federation), *Al Wedha Al Arabia* (Arab Unity) and *Al Nidal* (The Struggle). The party established two English language journals: *Arab Federation* and *The Arab Times* (Abu Shanab, 2001). By 1935, the NDP split when Dr. Hussein Fakhri Al Khalidi – who did not agree with the Party's approach of negotiating with the British – created his own political party, *Al Islah* (the Reform Party). Khalidi lobbied both Christians and Muslims and maintained good relations with the Al Hussini family (Abu Fakher, 2003). At this time, most political parties were still centralized around Jerusalem, the capital, and extended their influence to Palestinian villages and towns from there, usually to the region of origin of the party leader or faction (Al Dajjani, 1989; Najjar, 2005).

What made the Reform Party unusual was that, although officially launched in Ramallah, it included among its founding members the mayors of Ramallah, Gaza and Bethlehem in addition to scores of lawyers. The party was the first to bring together reforming elites from different parts of Palestine. The Reform Party did not create its own 'factional' newspaper, and it relied on the existing and extensive media outlets of the Al Hussini family (Abu Fakher, 2003). The Reform Party called for a new treaty between the Arabs of Palestine and the British, modelled on the 1935 treaty between Britain and Iraq. Al Bendek, then mayor of Bethlehem and a member of the Reform Party, did not

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even use his own newspaper, *Sawt Al Sh'aab* (People's Voice), as a platform for his party, thus showing an interest in reversing the dominant factionalism of the media at that time.

The British authorities could not control the expansion of the Palestinian printed press, and instead introduced the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 1936 as part of the BBC (Al-Omari, 2010). PBS broadcast in English, Arabic and Hebrew. Palestinian newspaper archives document the first time on PBS radio that a Jewish news announcer used the Hebrew phrase *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) sparking negative reactions in *Falastin* in its April 2nd, 1936 edition.

VIII. Conclusion

In this study, the historical background of the recent factionalism in Palestinian media has been traced -- from the first printing presses up to today's satellite TV and web-based information sources and social media. This history is also a history of a growing sense of shared Palestinian nationalism in the face of successive occupation periods. The media were shown to be a key vehicle of Palestinian nationalism expression, much as argued by Benedict Anderson (2006, pp. 34-39) in his notion of 'imagined communities.' Central to his argument is the idea that nationalism was encouraged by the appearance of printed press. On this basis, it becomes evident that in the case of Palestine, the idea of a Palestinian nation started to be articulated gradually through the printed press. Through an interview with an informant, it could be noted that because of the distinctive historical development of the media in Palestine, and the impact of occupation and dispossession, diaspora PLO media have not always reflected the views of Palestinian people living in historic Palestine (personal communication, December 6, 2013). This remains the case at

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present with few Palestinian satellite channels – besides *PSC* and *ASC* – representing the views of Palestinians in historic Palestine (Jamal, 2000). Whilst both *PSC* and *ASC* use technology that operates from faraway, and whilst they transmit their programs through satellite air-space, each media channel represents a different ideology that is firmly rooted in a relatively fixed group of Palestinians on-the-ground (Hroub, 2012). This research shows how under occupation, first the Ottoman sultanate followed by the British mandate, then under the Israeli occupation after 1948, then under conquest, the national imaginary of a common identity has grown gradually through opposition to common oppression. Even when the press was factionalised in terms of ownership and loyalties, these elements of shared imagined identity continued to emerge at one and the same time. This shows that throughout Palestinian history, the media have operated as a force for expressing the factional and sectarian interests in society as well as the overarching sense of shared national identity, common set of cultural references and political problems to confront.

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Endnotes

1. Media production began some centuries earlier with the first use of the mobile printing press invented in the 15th century by the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg. As among the first Arab regions to be introduced to the use of mobile printing by the Ottomans, Palestine and Lebanon became familiar with printed media as early as the 17th century (Yohsa'a, 1974). Print shops working in the region introduced Arabic letters at that time manufactured in Romania. Arabic letter printers mostly seemed to serve churches, interested in the evangelization of Arab Muslim and non-Muslim populations. The missionaries who used Arabic printing in the region, inadvertently spread its use through publications and reached a wider readership in Palestine, Lebanon and beyond (Yohsa'a, 1974)
2. An arts magazine, *The Arab College Magazine*, initiated by Ahmed Sameh Al-Khalidi in 1927. *Rawdet El M'aaref* (The Meadow of Knowledge), another art journal, continued to be published until the end of the British mandate. *Al Ghad* (Tomorrow Magazine) was published in Bethlehem in 1938 (Yaghi, 1960).
3. The source was found on photos in a Gaza library without page numbers.
4. Scripts were collected from undated photographs collected by Gaza library.
5. Scripts were collected from undated photographs collected by Gaza library from *Falastin* newspaper.
6. Scripts were collected from undated photographs collected by Gaza library.
7. Scripts were collected from undated photographs collected by Gaza library and no page number was available.

8. *Al Defa'a*, (The Defence) ceased publication after the war in Jaffa, but started publishing again from Cairo in 1958, and it was distributed from there to Jordan and the West Bank. A few years later, *Al Defia'a* was moved to Jerusalem and started to print from the Islamic Orphans House (Abu Shanab, 2001), with Sadek Al Shanti as the person in charge. The editor-in-chief was Al Shanti's brother, Ibrahim Al Shanti. *Al Jami'aa Al Islamyah (The Islamic Federation)* also resumed printing after the war and was considered to be one of the major newspapers at the time. Its first edition was published in Jordan in 1949 with Haider Al Farouqi serving as its editor. However, this newspaper did not last for too long.