

**Enhancing Democratic Communication? Television and  
Partisan Politics in Palestine**

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# **Enhancing Democratic Communication?**

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**PhD**

**2012**

# **Enhancing Democratic Communication?**

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of the University of Westminster for the degree of  
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**January 2012**

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## **Abstract**

Against the political backdrop of the Palestinian conflict and Israeli occupation, this thesis focuses on the most important media in the Palestinian context, television, which has the widest reach and influence among Palestinians. The main aim of the thesis is to investigate the question of how far, in the perceptions of Palestinians, the two television channels – Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV – are contributing to the development of a new democratic political state through participative communication processes. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the Gaza Strip between December 2009 and July 2010 through a survey questionnaire of 500 Gazans, semi-structured and unstructured interviews and focus groups with a range of participants, from university students and human rights activists, to journalists and non-governmental organization (NGO) employees.

The thesis investigates the perceptions of different sectors of Palestinian society and media workers about their access to the television channels, their views on media reliability, freedom of expression, the watchdog role of television, their opinions on the status of democracy and human rights, and other issues related to media functions and democracy in Palestine. Three functions of the media - as a forum for discussion and debate; as provider of information and as a watchdog, critiquing the powers that be – are explored. The thesis examines how the media perform in providing the functions of democratic communication through exploring the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas governments and the two television channels Palestine Television and Al-Aqsa.

The key findings of the research were, in the view of many respondents, that the two television channels, Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV, were controlled by the two political parties - Fatah and Hamas respectively and that this has compromised the media's function to promote democratic communication and the democratic process. The thesis argues that the two political factions are trying to manipulate the public and conceal information that affects their power. As a result, the political parties have polarized the emerging public sphere. The lack of freedom of expression and access to information has prevented the establishment of a democratic space essential to create a coherent political system and on which to base a democratic society that respects human rights.

The thesis concludes by suggesting, however, in the transition to democracy, the existence of partisan media may be able to fulfil a role in contributing to the democratization of Palestine. The two television channels do provide limited functions of democratic communication to their own factions, so between them they may benefit Palestinian society in the progress towards the development of independent media.

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**Author's declaration:**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Bahjat A. Abuzanouna  
January 2012

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*‘...Palestinians acknowledge the pluralism, values and freedom of opinion that the Palestinian media has greatly enjoyed up to this day. ... And, therefore, we will use our full power to stop any attempt to restrict the Palestinian media. Liberty was always one of the main goals of the Palestinian struggle’ (Yasser Arafat, 1994).*

*‘...dominant elites today, especially the previous revolutionaries and freedom fighters (in other words, Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization), adopt a pragmatic policy whether with conviction or without, and use it as an excuse to suppress any opposition’ (Edward Said, 1996).*

#### 1.1 Forging democracy in a conflict zone

The problem of Palestine remains one of the most vexed, unresolved issues in the contemporary world. It is a key concern at local, regional and global levels, because of its position in the geo-politically and economically important Middle East. Palestine is a conflict zone because of its position geographically and historically as a holy place for the world’s three major religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The roots of the Palestinian problem go back to the first Zionist Congress organized by Theodor Herzl in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. As the Jewish populations across Europe were facing racial discrimination and violence, Zionist ideologists wanted to create a Jewish homeland which would attract Jews from around the world and thus end the prejudice and hatred they experienced for centuries in Christian Europe (Za’aiter, 1986; Herzl, 1946; Vital, 1980). The Basel Congress approved that Palestine should become the homeland for Jewish, paving paved the way for the colonisation of Palestine by Zionist settlers (Ilan, 2006).

By 1914, Jewish population in Palestine had reached 85,000, and as the strategic position of Palestine became more pronounced during the First World War, many Jewish groups argued that they could protect and promote the regional interests of the European powers (Al Hammad, 1997). It was ignored that over half million Palestinians were living in Palestine, their traditional home. Instead, the argument was made that Palestine was uninhabited and its population was nomadic, travelling in and out of the territory without a fixed home (Za’aiter, 1955). The slogan which was making round then was: ‘A land without people (Palestine) for a people without land (The Jews)’.

The Sykes-Pico Agreement which was signed by Britain and France in 1916 divided the Arab region into zones: Lebanon and Syria were handed over to France, Jordan and Iraq to Britain, and Palestine was to be internationalized (Abu A'arafa, 1981). In November 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, named after the Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour, promising the Jews the establishment of a national home in Palestine. It stated that:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country (cited in Smith, 2004, p.72).

The Balfour Declaration was a crucial endorsement for the creation of a Jewish state. Concerned about being evicted from their homes, the Palestinians resisted the new and enhanced Jewish migration to the region. By the end of Second World War, the conflict between Palestinians and Jewish groups had been militarized (Khoury, 1976; Neville, 1976). The newly formed United Nations intervened to resolve the crisis: in November 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 which divided Palestine into two states (Ferguson, 1973).

The Palestinian rejected the plan on the grounds of sheer injustice: Palestinians constituted 70 per cent of the population and owned 92 of the land, but were allocated only 47 per cent of their country, while the Jewish total was only 30 per cent of the population and they owned just 8 per cent of the land, but were awarded 53 per cent of Palestine (Abu Sitta, 1998). Even though the Jewish leaders had not accepted the partition plan, they agreed to establish their state on the granted land. The Arabs rejected the partition of Palestine, arguing that this will legitimize the existence of a Jewish state in Palestinian land. The holocaust and its aftermath had created a wave of global sympathy for the Jewish people, reflected in the United Nations decision to establish the state of Israel in 1948.

The creation of Israel shattered the Palestinian community, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees (Gerner, 1991). In December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 194 which called for the United Nations Conciliation Commission to facilitate the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes (UN, 1948a). The resolution known as the Palestinian Right of Return which insisted that the Palestinians have a right to return to the homes and villages they were forced to leave. Although the Western powers called Israel to permit the Palestinians to return to their home, Israel refused to accept the resolution, linking its acceptance to have a peace agreement with neighbouring Arab governments. Israel found itself surrounded by hostile countries. From the Israeli perspective, Palestine is their historical and holy land and Palestinians belong to Arab countries, and therefore Arab countries should absorb the Palestinians into their societies (Said, 1992). Since then the Palestine-Israel conflict has escalated into regional wars – including the 1948, 1967 and 1973 wars - as well as subsequent Israeli incursions in southern Lebanon and Gaza. (Cattan, 1988; Masalha, 1992; Masalha, 2000; Sela and Ma'oz, 1997; Ilan, 2006). Of these, the most significant was the 1973 war which changed the geo-political reality of the region. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 338, calling all parties to ceasefire and to implement the Security Council Resolution 242, which was passed after the 1967 war, and called for 'withdrawal of Israeli forces' from Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip which it occupied during that war. (Aronson, 1990; Abu Khalaf, 2009). Despite repeated pressure from various Arab countries these two crucial UN resolutions remain unimplemented (Masalha, 2000; Ilan, 2006).

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains at the heart of Middle East politics. It has defined the geo-political landscape of the region for more than six decades. It is not surprising then that the case of Palestine has attracted many scholars who have researched and written about political, social, religious and cultural aspects of the life there. Recent Palestinian history is the story of a people who have high ambitions to end the occupation of their ancient land and to build a new democratic state (Bennis, 1990). The Israeli occupation has made them refugees in their own land, a population without a political identity, living as stateless citizens, either under military occupation or as minorities in the Israeli state. The outside world, especially the West, has been intimately involved in the process, trying to mediate between the two sides to resolve the crisis (Sela and Ma'oz, 1997; Ilan, 2006). During the Cold War years, it became a

key site for superpower rivalry, with the Soviet Union supporting the Palestinian cause while the West, led by the United States, standing by their strongest regional ally, Israel (Aruri, 1984).

However, with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, followed by the US attack on Iraq earlier that year, the US and its European allies promised statehood to the Palestinians. After the Oslo Agreement of 1993, the first ever multi-party elections took place in the Occupied Territories. These generated much enthusiasm among Palestinians, who at last expected to practise real democracy in all its aspects, such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, participation in decision-making, the rule of law, implementation of human rights, as well as civil and political rights protected by the constitution. It was also expected that independent and professional media institutions would be established in order to play their role as a fourth estate and cooperate with civil society organizations to prepare for building a new state. This altered political situation has encouraged interested researchers to study the nascent democracy in Palestine.

Despite continuing political instability in the Palestinian territories, democracy there is taking small but steady first steps. However, to study democracy in such a complex situation, many issues have to be taken into consideration, such as the difficult circumstances that the Palestinians live under, which is represented in the complicated socio-political situation, the troubled and still unfolding peace process and the reality of the Israeli occupation. There is no doubt that the Palestinian Authority (PA) does not exercise full sovereignty to implement democracy in a meaningful manner. This is, in part, due to the external pressure that is constantly imposed on the Palestinian Authority by Israel and the international community. Operating under such pressures has made the PA little more than a docile and dependent entity, unable to implement its commitments towards democracy and human rights. Soon after acquiring power, it started to impose censorship and restrictions over freedom of expression, and commit violations against human rights. This has led to the vanishing of the opposition groups and eroding the power of the adversarial media - both considered vital for a healthy democracy. Inevitably, such a situation has had a negative impact on Palestinians and Palestinian political institutions, especially its fragile media institutions.

The peace process and agreements signed between the two sides, Palestinians and Israelis, started in 1991, after the end of the first Gulf War, when President George Bush called for an international conference on Middle East peace, to be organized in Madrid. Despite the Israeli objection to Palestinian attendance, the delegates participated in the conference in conjunction with the Jordanian delegation. After this high-profile and much publicised conference in the Spanish capital, secret negotiations continued between the Palestinian groups, led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israeli government in Oslo, leading to the so-called Oslo Accords (Baumgarten, 2005). On 13 September 1993, Washington invited the two parties to sign the Declaration of Principles (DOP) at a ceremony, where the PLO chairman shook hands with the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Rabie, 1995). In May 1994, Yasser Arafat returned from his enforced exile in Tunis to take control and head the newly formed Palestinian Authority. According to agreements between the PLO and Israel, additional areas were handed over to the Palestinian Authority. The PA and Israel continued to negotiate in several rounds of talks and signed many other agreements. The announcement of the DOP gave great hope to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, as they believed that this would end the Israeli occupation and liberate some of the territories. Indeed, such announcement marked an historical development in the peace-making process.

In January 1996, Palestinian elections took place, in which 88 members of the legislative council and the president of the Palestinian Authority were elected. Among Arafat's many opponents were the Islamist groups, particularly strong in the Gaza Strip, inspired by and under the influence of Egypt's powerful Muslim Brotherhood (Hilal, 2006). The Islamic parties, led by Hamas, opposed Arafat and the Oslo Agreement he signed, thus delaying the elections. However, the elections were conducted 18 months later than planned to consolidate Arafat's hold of the Palestinian population and silence the opposition. Arafat controlled the election in a sense to prevent anyone to contest against him without his approval. As a result, Arafat became the first President of the Palestinian Authority (Muhsen, 2003).

The concessions that the PA was almost forced to give to Israel under the agreements, embarrassed Arafat and eroded his credibility within sections of the Palestinian society. According to the agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, the PA had

to control Palestinian military factions. The two religious groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, opposed such control, and decided not to respect the agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Since the first Intifada in 1987, Hamas and Islamic Jihad had a strong base in the Occupied Territories. They had earned much social solidarity through focusing on social welfare, education, healthcare, and establishment of charitable organizations. Indeed, they acquired their support and political growth from such social services (Abdullah, 2005).

The next major step in the peace process was the Camp David summit convened in July 2000 by the US President Bill Clinton, who invited the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and the PA Chairman Arafat. After Arafat refused what Barak offered him in Camp David, Israel declared he had not worked as a peace partner, while the US blamed Arafat for not taking the advantage of this opportunity. The US argued that Arafat was not only responsible for the failure of Camp David summit, but also for the outbreak of the Second Intifada (Rubenberg, 2003; Baroud, 2006).

In September 2000, hard-line Ariel Sharon supported by dozens of Israeli forces, visited the *Al-Haram Al-Sharif* (Temple Mount) in the Old City of Jerusalem. His visit, part of his campaign for Prime Ministership, had outraged most Palestinians, as they considered it as an assault on one of the holiest shrines for Muslims. Consequently, violent demonstrations took place against the Israeli forces. Gradually, the confrontations exploded into the Second Intifada and spread all over the Occupied Territories. As a result, Israeli forces reoccupied the territories granted to the Palestinian Authority (Laetitia, 2004). The incident raised Sharon's popularity within Israel and helped him to become Prime Minister.

One outcome of this action was that the Palestinians were living under stricter security control. The agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel had stipulated that the PA was responsible for internal security in the Occupied Territories and to prevent any violent actions against Israeli targets. The fledgling and resource-starved Palestinian police forces were made responsible for security and controlling the territories. There was a growing sense among the Palestinians that rather than confronting the Israelis, the Palestinian Authority was suppressing its own people. This was at a time when there was the continuing expansion of the Jewish settlements on Palestinian territories. Even though negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel were going on, Israeli

government did not stop the expansion of settlements (Baroud, 2006). This situation had weakened the position of the Palestinian Authority among the Palestinians. In contrast, Hamas, by opposing to hold negotiations with Israel, gained public support. Moreover, the two religious groups - Hamas and Islamic Jihad - were challenging the Palestinian Authority. Influenced by militant Islamic ideology, these groups argued for a 'holy war' against the Jewish state. From their perspective, negotiations with Israel would not result in returning Palestinian land to its legitimate inhabitants. The only solution, so the argument went, was to fight and forcibly expel the Jewish settlers from Palestine (Beinin and Stein, 2006).

For the Israelis and the US Administration, Arafat's long political career was coming to an end as he was increasingly becoming irrelevant within Palestinian politics. The 9/11 attack in New York and Washington also contributed to the changing US geo-political priorities in the Middle East, with 'Islamic' terrorism becoming a primary concern. A major blow to Arafat's reputation was inflicted in January 2002 when Israeli forces captured *Karine A*, a ship carrying weapons. Israel declared it had been sent from Iran to Palestine and succeeded in convincing the US administration of Arafat's responsibility and even complicity in the *Karine A* incident. The US Administration accepted the Israeli version and considered Arafat had violated the peace accords and thus deceived the international community. Israeli forces surrounded the Palestinian President Arafat in his compound in Ramallah in the West Bank and destroyed it except the floor where he was trapped. They restricted his movement and declared the area a closed military zone (Beinin and Stein, 2006).

In June 2002, President George W. Bush called for Arafat's removal because he had not done enough to stop 'terrorist' attacks against Israeli targets. He declared that the Palestinians could build their viable state only by fighting terror, reforming their political process, and change their leader. The change of Palestinian leadership and the beginning of new political development resulted in the emergence of the 'Road Map', which was composed by the 'Quartet': the United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union. In March 2003, after the pressure from the Quartet, Arafat agreed to appoint Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister and Salam Fayyad as finance minister.



This was a major shift in Palestinian politics as Arafat was for decades seen all over the world as 'Mr. Palestine,' having relentlessly pursued the cause for the liberation of his motherland (Cobban, 1984). Arafat died in Paris on 11 November 2004, his death marking an end of an era of Palestinian history. Within weeks of the death of the most popular Palestinian leader, presidential elections took place in the Palestinian territories - on January 9, 2005. Mahmoud Abbas won the elections and became the Palestinian Authority President. Despite the public support they had got, Hamas and Islamic Jihad boycotted the elections. For them entering the elections meant a change in their ideology and an end to the resistance to Israeli occupation (Usher, 2006).

However, a year later, in January 2006, when the elections for the Palestinian parliament were held, Hamas changed its strategy and announced its participation. They won many seats and thus gained the majority within the Palestinian parliament (Hilal, 2006). The victory of a party hostile to the Jewish state alarmed the Israeli government and their US allies. Consequently, Israeli government declared that if Hamas participated in any government activities, Israel and the international community will not recognize the Palestinian National Authority (Brom, 2006). This stern warning forced Hamas to moderate its policies towards Israel and change its strategy to be recognized as mainstream political movement. The party stopped attacking Israeli targets, and declared a cease-fire against Israel (Beinin and Stein, 2006).

Yet, the United States and Israel continued to consider Hamas as a terrorist group, and therefore they would not allow it to represent the Palestinians. The Israeli government and the US pressurized the Palestinian President Abbas to prevent Hamas from being part of the government. This assertion was not without its contradictions: before the Palestinian elections in 2006, the US had called for democracy in the Middle East, arguing that all political parties had the right to participate in the elections. When the elections approached, both Israel and the US were aware that Hamas was contesting the elections. However, they did not expect Hamas to win so many seats. The US avoided any overt communication with Hamas and maintained a very sceptical attitude regarding its participation in the new Palestinian government (Seo, 2009).

Within the faction-ridden Palestinian politics too, the rise of Hamas and its huge public support was viewed with alarm. After Hamas swept the elections, the Fatah party (the

party established by Arafat) refused to participate in any government led by Hamas. In addition, after they came to power, Hamas started to take over leadership positions within the Palestinian Authority. This situation irritated Fatah leaders. Tensions between Fatah and Hamas militants gradually increased in the Gaza Strip – the Hamas stronghold, culminating into street fighting. In May 2007, the conflict between Fatah and Hamas had escalated to such an extent that the supporters of the two parties exchanged fire. Consequently, in June, Hamas succeeded in gaining control of the Gaza Strip and expelled Fatah to the West Bank. Many reconciliation attempts led by Arab leaders, Palestinian independent groups within Palestine as well as other Palestinian political faction leaders took place, but without any success.

Implementing electoral democracy against the backdrop of such a politically-fraught environment is extremely difficult. The hostility between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas led to the latter's focus on social life to win public support. It invested in building a network of Islamic social institutions such as schools, sport clubs and clinics. Such socio-economic support systems coupled with its continued resistance to Israeli occupation, provided Hamas with a large popular base among the residents of Gaza. While in the West Bank, the PA led by Fatah, monopolized the political arena since its establishment, and prevented others participating in political decision-making. Unlike, Hamas, the PA came to terms with the Israeli state, in the process losing some credibility and support among the Palestinian public. When it participated in the parliamentary elections in January 2006, Hamas raised the slogan of 'Reform and change'. Its victory in those elections, judged by international observers as transparent and fair, was not respected by Israel and its allies.

Political analysts argue that in order to have a democratic political system in Palestine, it is important to integrate the Islamic movements such as Hamas into the political process. Ideological differences are healthy in a democracy and contribute towards building a liberalized and pluralist political system. However, electoral politics has instead exacerbated tensions and the two parties - Fatah and Hamas - have monopolized the political decision-making in their spheres of influence (West Bank and Gaza, respectively) and prevented other factions participating in democratic processes. Each party has suppressed the others' voices, thus undermining key aspects of democracy. Freedom of expression among political opponents has been severely restricted, while no

criticism of authorities is tolerated. For journalists and media professionals, new and strict restrictions have been imposed to curb their already limited freedom to acquire information and express their views. In such circumstances, public participation in democratic processes has been confined to party members only, excluding a majority of the other voices. Increasingly, the media are unable to criticize political elites and their role as a fourth estate has been undermined. The rule of law becomes difficult to implement in the absence of a fair judicial system, and human rights violations have become almost routine.

In addition, the continued Israeli occupation remains another key factor obstructing the implementation of democracy in the Palestinian territories. Despite the Israeli government claims that it prefers to negotiate with democratic Palestinian government, it has become clear that it only wanted to enter in talks with a pliable Palestinian group such as Fatah, rejecting any Hamas participation in the governance of Palestine.

As the 2006 elections demonstrated, Hamas has a popular base within Palestinian society and it is capable of wresting power from the PA even in the West Bank. Such a scenario does not suit Israel as it cannot control and pressurise Hamas in the way it has managed with Fatah. During its direct occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel did not encourage freedom of expression and freedom of information, as that contradicted with occupation laws. Since the Oslo Accords, Israel has been pressurising the Palestinian Authority to suppress the Palestinian opposition parties. It has announced its opposition to Hamas holding power and forming the Palestinian government, and if that happens, it has threatened to abandon any negotiations with the Palestinians. It placed political and security pressure on the Palestinian Authority to impose restrictions on the freedom of expression of Palestinians. Such pressures have affected the whole status of democracy in the Palestinian territories.

## **1.2 The nature of Palestinian society**

It is important to note the distinctive nature of Palestinian society in Gaza, a society which has lived under occupation and constant economic blockade. Such economic and political realities inevitably have an impact on social norms and structures – the class division in Gaza is less clearly visible than in many other Arab countries. According to Professor Rafiq El-Masri, a well-known socialist in Gaza, the structure of Palestinian

society has been profoundly shaped by the special circumstances prevalent, notably the Israeli occupation, an occupation different from others such as the French colonization of Algeria. He added, 'The Israeli occupation is ideologically based on transfer policy in which they transfer the original people from their lands to outside. But in Algeria, the French colonialism was known for occupying territories and establishing settlements, but they did not expel the original people'. Israeli occupation expelled the Palestinians and thus created the refugee problem. This has created a situation in which Palestinians could not form a complete society. Thus it is not possible to refer to the situation in Palestine as a complete society; instead it is necessary to talk about Palestinian communities. These communities are located in different areas such as the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Palestinians refugees dispersed all over the world.

The Gaza Strip is geographically a very small area, densely populated, with very few natural resources. The Strip was administered by Egypt until 1976, the year it was occupied by Israel then in 1994 the Palestinian Authority took control. Even after the Strip became nominally independent under the control of the Palestinian Authority, recourses remained limited. Consequently a robust business class has not yet emerged, because more than 75% of Gaza's population are refugees. These people have no land, no regular job and therefore no proper income. After the Palestinian Authority came to power in Gaza, a new class developed. This class, according to El-Masri, can be called the 'aristocratic class' which lives off the Palestinian Authority resources – themselves dependent on donor aid. Most ordinary people remained as they were: jobless, poor and deprived. The unemployment statistics in Gaza Strip for the last year were very high (PCBS, 2010).

### **1.3 Media and democracy in Palestine**

Given this complex political legacy, as outlined above, it is important that any analysis of the Palestinian media has to take into consideration the historical circumstances which have shaped and continue to influence the Palestinian political landscape. Over several past decades, the Palestinian media have suffered from various forms of occupation and mandates in which suppression and repression were the main characteristics. Since the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, Israeli authorities have been imposing restrictions on journalists, censoring those who report

anti-Israeli stories and arresting the ones who violate the occupation laws. Operating under such difficult regime, a vast majority of Palestinian journalists were limiting their work to the coverage of mostly local news.

After control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip passed to the Palestinian Authority and Hamas respectively, the security forces for both organizations became responsible for dealing with journalists. Following on the tradition of Israeli authorities, these security forces too were ruthless in curtailing media freedoms and the right of journalists to access information. It is not surprising then that even the ordinary people of Palestine have been affected by this culture of censorship and coercion. This has prevented them from participating in political processes, and the discourse of democracy and human rights has therefore been undermined by both authoritarian and sectarian tendencies.

Although the Palestinian media had played an important role in raising the Palestinian issue among other Arab nations, and indeed internationally, in its domestic context, it tended to fuel the internal conflict and contributed to the drift into a spiral of political struggle. In this ideological battle for power and privilege, the official and opposition media in Palestine were expressing their respective party's position and broadcasting partisan, and sometime inflammatory, material rather than disseminating information and opinion which would create a culture of tolerance and promote democratic pluralism. Such a partisan media reflected negatively on freedom of opinion and expression and acted as a setback for the establishment of democracy in a fragile and fragmented polity, whereas democratic media provide the opportunity for citizens to participate in dialogue that contributes to reducing tension and encourages attitudes that serve the public interest.

The political system prevalent in the Palestinian territories, represented by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, has played an influential role in creating an atmosphere of control and censorship, and has prevented freedom of expression, especially among workers in the media sector. As some semblance of power shifted to the local elites after the elections, they succeeded in building cordial relationships with journalists and media institutions, thereby ensuring that favourable reporting became the norm. For many Palestinians, this close proximity

of a partisan media to those in power made the media information suspect, thus undermining the role of media in the public sphere. As for the journalistic community within Palestine, such a media culture divided journalists and media organizations between those who promoted the elites and those who chose to practise self-censorship.

In addition, the absence of laws or negligible implementation of those laws on the statute books, have resulted in a situation where there are little or no legal procedures to protect freedom of expression and violations against press freedom. In fact these violations have progressively become more strident, extending to kidnapping and physical attacks against journalists.

However, in the light of political changes in the Palestinian arena, freedom's margins are always changing. On occasion media coverage has provided meaningful criticism of contemporary issues and gone beyond partisan politics and the narrow ideological framework which has defined Palestinian life in the post-9/11 era.

Against this political backdrop of a partisan media system, this thesis focuses on the most important media in the Palestinian context: e.g. television, which has the widest reach and influence among Palestinians. Specifically, it examines the contribution of two major television networks in Gaza - Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV - to the political process and democratization of discourse in one of the world's most difficult political spheres. The channels are chosen as case studies as they represent the two major political groups in the Palestinian society: while Palestine TV represents the interests of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, Al-Aqsa TV promotes the Islamist Hamas.

This is undertaken through a detailed and wide-ranging study of the reception of television among Gazan citizens. The discussion is organized within the broader context of the relationship between a largely partisan media and a nascent democracy. Five major themes are addressed: the first theme, *Palestinian television and public participation*, examines the role of Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV in providing a platform for open discussion of divergent opinions and a consideration of whether the two channels create an arena for different groups to communicate freely with each other. The second theme, *Political dimensions of television in Palestine*, demonstrates how the two channels relate to both political parties – Fatah and Hamas – and function

as a mouthpiece for the factions. It also explores to what extent these channels help in bridging or expanding the political divide in Palestine. The third theme, *Television performance and promotion of democracy*, examines the role of the two television channels in fostering democracy, in relation to the three functions of media in a democracy: information, forum and critique. The fourth theme, *Television's role in monitoring government actions*, is concerned with the role of the two channels in monitoring government activities. It explores to what extent these two television channels function as a fourth estate, able to take a stand against government corruption and to criticise those in power. The fifth theme, *Television and the project of state-building*, aims to illustrate how the control of the two channels affects the state-building process, and the importance of an independent media at a difficult stage of its evolution. It also aims to illustrate practical evidence of how the measures against the media and restrictions on journalists affect the process of state-building.

It is important to emphasise that for the purposes of this dissertation the definition of democracy is not limited to elections. In this context, democracy is about freedom of information, freedom of expression, independent and pluralistic media, public participation and state-building. Our understanding of the media too needs to be in its broader context. It is suggested that independent media are vital for a society and help in shaping the public sphere and reinforcing the process of democracy. It is considered as the backbone for democracy, providing credible information and enabling citizens to participate in political decision-making. It can play a watchdog role to reveal misuse of power by those in authority. It is argued that a free flow of information strengthens democracy and empowers citizens.

In Palestine, as elsewhere in the world, politicians and other influential groups attempt to control the media in order to communicate with people, influence public opinion and shape the public sphere. Unlike in mature democracies where this process has acquired political sophistication, as the management of media for political purposes is done with professionalism, in much of the Arab world control is maintained by coercion. Given the history of occupation and exploitation, the Palestinian case provides a very good example of such practices, as the following chapters demonstrate.

## **1.4 Research questions and thesis structure**

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the central question: How far, from the point of view of Palestinians, the two television channels - Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV - have contributed to the democratic process, by enabling political participation through democratic communication?

Arising from this are the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do the two networks supply the necessary political information to Palestinians in Gaza?
- Do the two networks provide a platform for political participation to Gaza residents?
- How far have the two networks functioned as a fourth estate in a fledgling democracy?

The thesis consists of seven chapters, structured as follows. The introductory chapter provides a background to the thesis, discusses the rationale for the project and its main research questions. The second chapter reviews the theoretical framework around ideas of media and democracy. It examines different aspects of democracy in relation to the media and discusses how the media can contribute to promoting democracy. Three functions of the media - as a forum for discussion and debate; as provider of information and as a watchdog, critiquing the powers that be – are explored. It is argued that for fostering democracy and ensuring a proper functioning of a democratic polity, citizens need credible and complete information to make informed choices and decisions affecting their lives. The forum function refers to one of the basic principles of democracy that individuals have the right to participate in political life and it is the role of media to provide the platform for their discussion in order to reach rational decisions for public good.

The information function refers to human rights affirmation of the right of individuals to access information, and therefore it is the role of media to inform people to help structure their opinions. In order to foster democracy, the media have to provide the necessary information and allow individuals to have free access of information. The



watchdog function refers to the essential part of democracy where the media have a role of watchdog to examine those in power in order to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded.

The third chapter, 'Palestinian media and democracy in a historical context,' explores the prospects of democracy in Palestine through examination of the relationship between the media and the different rulers in Palestine, in a historical context. It provides an overview of the development of the media, censorship and media control during different stages of Palestinian history. It is argued that a fuller understanding of the importance of media institutions in the contemporary Palestinian context can be acquired by tracing the Palestinian media history and examining the circumstances and the factors that affected its evolution. The chapter demonstrates how the press - serving as an instrument for political communication and a tool for political mobilization - reflected the struggle for Palestinian identity. It shows how Palestinians have lived under the control of different powers and, that, as a result of this foreign domination, the Palestinian media have tended to be more political than commercial. This political dimension was also visible, the chapter suggests, in the way the Palestinian press gave equal if not more significance to covering pan-Arab issues rather than focusing solely on Palestinian nationalism. The history of Palestinian media can be seen as a struggle against various censorships under Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli, and then Palestinian rule: the media in Palestine have been a target of all the powers which have ruled over it during the last century. Independent media have so far remained elusive and varying forms of censorship and self-censorship have continued to shape journalism. These different forms of censorship prevent journalists from taking part in promoting debate and democracy in Palestinian society. The press in the Palestinian overseas diaspora has played an important role in uniting the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. The diaspora – with its access to media outlets in different countries - also contributed to bringing the world's attention to the cause of Palestinian freedom.

Political instability and continued Israeli occupation has also severely damaged the evolution of democracy in Palestine. Palestine is at an early stage of state-building, and media independence and the protection of human rights are essential tools for the execution of democracy. Unfortunately, the situation of the media under the Palestinian

Authority has not significantly improved. The institutional structure of the Palestinian Authority is highly bureaucratic and, in addition, the dominant role of the Palestinian elite has a major impact on the media system.

The fourth chapter sets out the methodology used to investigate the research questions and includes an overview of the methodological approaches. The chapter critiques the advantages and disadvantages of various research methods and how these were adapted to be appropriate to the Palestinian context. It describes the methods which were deployed during the field research and the collection of data in order to answer the key research questions in this thesis. These questions aim to explore the extent to which the two leading Palestinian television channels, Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV, enhance democratic communication. They also aim to explore the perceptions of the Palestinian people of the two television networks and their role in state-building. The two channels, which are allied to the main political parties, Fatah and Hamas, seek to influence the public sphere and both channels have played an important role in the socio-political development of Palestinian society: consequently their contribution to state-building deserves special attention.

It is also important to look into the ideologies and policies of both channels to see to what extent these influence coverage of particular events. This provides an understanding of the nature of the media organizations operating within Palestinian society - a society making conscious moves towards the establishment of a democratic political system. It is essential to triangulate a number of methodological strategies and so both qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed. Social survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were combined in order to examine the questions raised in the thesis. Indeed, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods can be very useful and result in enriched data. The strength of data collected through each method combined to provide an opportunity to triangulate the results. Combining these methods was also a useful tool for investigating the relationship between media and democracy in the context of state-building.

Different approaches were employed to develop a scientific set of data that reflects the stratified structure of Palestinian society. The chapter discusses the variety of research approaches, divided into three sections, each dealing with one of the methods used in

this thesis. The first part concentrates on focus groups, the second discusses semi-structured interviews, and the third focuses on survey methods. The qualitative and quantitative methods which have been used in this study were designed to investigate Palestinians' perspectives about media, democracy and state-building. In the interviews, focus groups and the questionnaires, the researcher deliberately targeted people from different socio-political and socio-cultural backgrounds to reflect their perceptions of media, democracy and the Palestinian situation.

The fifth chapter, 'The Social Survey: Findings and analysis', provides findings from a survey of 500 Palestinians in Gaza, representing different ages, areas, and political affiliations. The questionnaire aimed to look at the Palestinians' perceptions of Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV regarding their contribution to enhance democratic communication in Palestine and the state-building process. The survey covered, among others, respondents' media consumption, television's reliability and independence and freedom of expression. The respondents were also asked about their views on television as a fourth estate and its role in promoting democracy and human rights in Palestine. The survey had a very good respondent success-rate: 486 out of 500 questionnaires were returned. It does not however in any way claim to be representative of the whole of Gaza. Different places, such as sports' clubs, universities and Internet cafés were targeted in a range of areas throughout Gaza.

The sixth chapter, 'Focus groups: Data analysis,' analyses the data from focus groups which were conducted with Gazans about Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV and their perceived contribution to enhance democratic communication in Palestine and towards the process of state-building. Respondents believed that each of the two channels were used as proxy by its controlling party – Fatah and Hamas – in the battle between the rival political groups. They introduce divisiveness rather than harmony, hatred instead of rational debate, and suspicion rather than social trust among Gazans.

This leads to the undermining of media credibility, public mistrust and debasing of democratic structures. Yet the two channels cannot avoid their responsibility for shaping public opinion, building peace and social consensus. At this stage of state-building, the two television channels can function as a fourth estate, promote democracy by encouraging tolerance among various factions, and protect human rights. But their

actions so far, as noted by Gazans, are insufficiently democratic as they are not even able to promote tolerance between the two factions.

The chapter provides an overview of comments and views expressed by the participants during the focus group sessions about the role of the two TV channels. The participants were taken from different groups – university students, human rights activists, journalists and non-governmental organization (NGO) employees - the intention being to target both the politically affiliated and independents in order to examine their perceptions of the two television channels and their perceived contribution to the democratization of Palestine. The discussion was organised within five themes, exploring the role of television in public participation, political dimensions, promotion of democracy, as a watchdog and contributor to state-building.

The chapter examines from the participants' point of view the different functions of media in a democracy such as information, critique, and forum. These three functions were examined from the five different themes. By deriving empirical evidence from fieldwork, the chapter demonstrates how the two factions control the two television channels and how participants see the channels' contribution to the state of democratic communication in Palestine. By doing this, the chapter provides information about the Palestinian socio-political situation and the role that these two factions played to manipulate the media in order to dominate the public sphere. The differences in participants' points of views showed how they see the two factions' perception of the future of democracy in the Palestinian state.

The seventh chapter, 'Discussion: Media and democracy in a conflict zone,' synthesizes data from interviews, focus groups and surveys to paint a picture of the complex relationship between television and democracy in one of the world's most polarized societies. It discusses the difficulties of peaceful co-existence between two ideologically-driven political groupings, vulnerable to regional and international economic and political pressure. The role of mass media, especially television, is highlighted to provide a communicative space to create a democratic polity in Palestine as a conflict zone.

The chapter discusses the structure and nature of the Palestinian media and the problems that hinder its contribution to the enhancement of democratic communication. It demonstrates the different aspects of democracy that are taking place during the transition period, using examples from fieldwork to explore democracy as an ideal that Palestinians seek and as an obstacle that hinders its progress.

These issues affect the Palestinian media in its everyday practices. Despite several media institutions having been severely affected by the two governments and by Israeli occupation policies, they are still able to carry out some of their daily activities. The lack of freedom of expression, the obstruction of information, and the existence of daily harassments by the two governments' security forces have become major barriers in any move towards democracy. Although Palestinian press law affirms freedom of expression, it contains vague terms which are subject to different interpretations. Ambiguous terms and sentences contained in the press law were intended to enable censorship of media and journalists. The prominent role of the executive forces of the two governments and the vagueness of the Palestinian press law has had a significant impact on the right of freedom of expression. Violations against freedom of expression, self-censorship, restrictions on Palestinian press freedom and the detention of journalists have all been part of a decline in Palestinian media performance.

The data from fieldwork shows that the two television channels are providing a platform for their own members and supporters of their policies. Interviews with political analysts reveal that such participation that does not include the range of civil groups in a society contributes to a deepening of political differences which then leads to state destruction rather than state building. Moreover, the two governments' control over media channels has resulted in public mistrust in the information that is broadcasted. However, the presence of the two opposing television channels has in some ways acted for the public interest, as each channel functioned as a fourth estate for its opponent. But, at the same time it has become clear that the two television channels play the dual role of being government channels, which defend their owners' strategies, and political opposition channels which distort the image of others.

The concluding chapter summarizes the key findings and reflects on the importance of a partisan media in a deeply politicised environment, susceptible to regional and international pressures.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

There is little doubt that a free and pluralistic media system is one of most important conditions for a democracy to survive and prosper. Indeed, having independent and pluralistic media is necessary for public participation as the basis of a democracy, as well as contributing to social stability and state-building. Such a media can function as a Fourth Estate and thus work to protect and promote the interests of citizens. O'Neil notes that 'the media . . . is vital to the creation and vitality of civil society; without it, freedom of communication, and thus the foundation of democratic rule, is undermined' (O'Neil, 1998, p. 2). Democracy implies not only free and fair elections, but freedom of information and expression, respect for minorities and human rights for all citizens. This chapter explores the relationship between media and democracy. After providing an overview of definitions of democracy, I examine the different aspects of democracy in relation to media and discuss how the media can contribute to promoting democracy.

#### **2.1 The media effects research**

The question of how media influence its audiences has a long and complex history. In this section, I want to explore some of the main strands of academic work undertaken in this area. My empirical research for this project has been informed by the extensive theoretical work done in the US and in Europe. Although these theoretical frameworks have evolved within a Western context, some of the arguments they articulate and the thinking they contribute about the audiences are also relevant for the Palestinian situation.

The origins of media effects research go back to the 1920s in the US with research into the impact of the new mass medium of film. Researchers tried to answer the central question 'What effect do the media have on the individual?' The growth of radio and the success of Nazi propaganda urged scholars to put more effort into studying media effects, which applied even more strongly to television, as a powerful visual medium in people's homes. The media enabled by new cable, satellite and video technologies have

added a further dimension. The concern is still the same fear that the effects of the media might be harmful, especially to vulnerable minds.

Media researchers have designed many ways of investigating and interpreting the impact on audiences, attempting to make sense of what media consumers come across in their everyday lives. However, it should be noted that the views about the nature of these effects is changing all the time. Yet, the idea of individual affected by the powerful message of mass media has varied, from being passive recipient to active and selective user of media content (Klapper, 1960). Indeed, media content can affect individual's behaviour, thoughts, or opinion in a way that could be immediate or late, direct and indirect. However, studying users of media shows that there is need for doing more than surveys in order to find strong, direct and immediate effects.

McQuail (1994) divided the history of research on media effects into four stages. The first stage from 20<sup>th</sup> century to the late 1930s was led by the notion of using the media as a propaganda tool. The second stage was from 1930s to the late 1960s. This stage had reviewed the pattern of strong media effects and considered personal influence as the main paradigm. The third stage which began in the late 1970s was dominated by the search for new strong media effects. The fourth stage which started in the early 1980s till now is dominated by what he called 'social constructivism' in which the explanation of media and individuals incorporates elements of both strong and limited effects.

As he noted, media effects theory goes back to the era of the First World War when the media used as a propaganda tool. During the Russian revolution, communists realized the importance of broadcasting. In fact, in 1925, the Soviet Union was the first country used short-wave radio in Moscow where they started to broadcast communist propaganda (Thussu, 2006). In the 1930s, the Nazis used the media to disseminate 'racist and anti-Semitic ideology of the Third Reich' (Thussu, 2006, p.15). Another example of using media as a tool for manipulating people's minds was when National Fascist Party led by Mussolini (1883-1945) used the media 'to promote Fascist ideals' (Thussu, 2006, p.15).

Harold Lasswell notes in his book *Propaganda Techniques in the World War (1927)* during the war time, it is not sufficient to mobilize men and means; mobilisation of



opinion must occur. Such political propaganda and media manipulation by elites has led to what so called *hypodermic needle* or ‘hypodermic effect theory’, which visualized the media message as a strong drug that would have influential effects on individuals (Lasswell, 1927). It is based on the assumption that media are a powerful means of public communication and capable of injecting the views of ruling elites into a passive individual’s mind. Gunter notes that the period of 1920s and 1930s ‘witnessed the emergence of mass audiences on an unprecedented scale as a function of the growth and establishment of the press, films and radio’ and at that time ‘the media exercised a powerful and persuasive influence’ (2000, p.10). The theory is also linked with Shannon and Weaver’s model of direct effect (Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

Despite its flexibility and regular revision, the hypodermic needle model has been subject to many criticisms as inadequate (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955/2006; Ang, 1996; Gunter 2000; Gauntlett, 2005; Morley, 2006). In addition, it cannot account for the complexity of the relationship between the media and the individual. Gauntlett (2005) has argued that ‘the effects paradigm should be laid to rest, of interest only as part of the natural history of mass communications research’ (p.5).

Political elites and governments have turned their attention to the mass media as a tool of manipulation. James Curran (2002) notes: ‘The conviction ... that the media are important agencies of influence is broadly correct. However, the ways in which the media exert influence are complex and contingent’ (p. 158). The Second World War had witnessed prompt growth of using mass media as mobilization tool. Examples of these were when Britain used the BBC (Curran and Seaton, 1997) and the United States used Voice of America (Thussu, 2006).

Marxist scholars such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1979/1944) and Marcuse (1964) noted the use of media as propaganda tool by Nazi in Germany and in the United States. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1979) recognise what they call ‘the culture industry’, in which ‘the flood of detailed information and candy-floss entertainment simultaneously instructs and stultifies mankind’ (p. xv). Adorno (1978) argued that the cinema had negative effects on an individual’s perception. He noted that ‘Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider or worse’ (p. 75).

Views of the media as a propaganda tool reinforced theories of cultural hegemony. Cultivation theory has received attention from communication scholars. It is developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976). The theory was based on many studies conducted in the late 1960s in the United States about violence. The studies made by the US National Commission after the assassination of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. It meant to identify the causes of violence in the country and the ways to prevent it. It focused specifically on the effect of television in spreading violence. Gerbner and Gross (1976) considered television 'a medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviours' (p. 175). Morgan and Signorielli (1990) introduced theoretical and methodological techniques to assess the television's influence of people's social life. They added that 'Cultivation analysis is concerned with the more general and pervasive consequences of cumulative exposure to cultural media' (Morgan and Signorielli, 1990, p.16). However, one of the drawbacks of media effects theory is that it did not take into account the different responses that individuals might have to the same media content.

## **2.2 Active audience research**

In the early 1940s Paul Lazarsfield and Herta Herzog carried out a mass communication research programme to find out the 'uses and gratifications' that radio listeners gained from daytime serials, quiz programmes, etc. (Herzog, 1941). Lazarsfield and Herzog rejected the hypothesis that the media have great power. Their empirical research concluded that media effects were limited. This then challenged researchers to establish how to measure media effects. They began to look at the media and its relationship with opinion, attitudes and knowledge. They concluded that media effects could be important in some cases such as children who may be more influenced by media than others (McLuhan, 1964). In Uses and Gratifications research, the central question was 'What does the individual do with the media?'. Such research considers recipients as active users who can consume media contents and decode it. Gratifications could differ for different individuals and can include information, entertainment, social interaction, etc. (McQuail, 2005).

The concept of the active audience has shifted the emphasis away from the power of the media to the power of the audience. Scannell (1996) notes that 'power in this relationship (in the first and last instance) rests more with those on the receiving end

rather than with those who produce what is on offer. And this is because no one can make anyone listen to or watch anything on radio and television. If listeners and viewers don't like what they find they can simply switch over or switch off' (p.12). However, active audience theory has been criticised by other media theorists (Morley, 1980, 2006; Fiske, 1987, Ang, 1996). Ang (1996) argues that 'audiences may be active in myriad ways in using and interpreting media, but it would be utterly out of perspective to cheerfully equate 'active' with 'powerful', in the sense of 'taking control' at an enduring structural or institutional level' (p. 139).

Katz and Lazarsfeld (2006/1955) and Joseph Klapper (1960) refuted the claim of media effects and showed that media power was overestimated. Klapper (1960) established that mass media were more likely to strengthen existing attitudes than change or create new attitudes. In his study, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, Klapper (1960) found that there was a small segment of voters changed their vote plans during the election campaign, as their prior beliefs influenced the message interpretation. In addition, the messages were discussed among opinion leaders and friends leading to the two-step flow model. In this regard, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955/2006) argue that 'communications studies have greatly underestimated the extent to which an individual's social attachments to other people, and the character of the opinions and activities which he shares with them, will influence his response to the mass media' (p. 25). They affirm the role of personal influence in the media-audience relationship. They emphasise, 'personal influence seems to be singularly effective' as it achieves what they call the 'reinforcement function'. 'When a mass media influence-attempt coincides with an interpersonal communication, it appears to have much greater chances of success' (pp. 82-83).

Another study which refuted media effects theory was conducted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, published in their book, *The People's Choice* (1948). The study was about voting behaviours in the 1940 US presidential election. They found that the effect of media content was less direct than had been expected. They asserted that personal effect has more influence on individual's attitudes than media content. They note that 'In the last analysis, more than anything else people can move other people' (Lazarfeld *et al.*, 1948, p. 158). It should be noted that the two-step flow model has been criticised by scholars (McQuail and Windall, 1993). Robinson argued in 1976 that the

two-step flow model was no more efficient. He asserts ‘when interpersonal sources and mass media sources are compared or are in conflict, interpersonal sources wield greater influence. However, that condition of ‘when’ needs to be stressed’ (p. 315).

In fact, the emergence of new media has contradicted the two-step flow model and paved the way for individuals to seek for more information, which shows that there is a multi-step flow in a reverse form: from the new media to individuals who seek more from traditional media and others for reinforcement. Donald and his colleagues (2004) conducted a study about the influence of internet on individuals seeking information on genetic testing. They found that ‘The diffusion of the Internet has radically expanded the readily available sources for information of all types. Information that was once obtained second-hand from friends and acquaintances—the traditional ‘two-step flow’—is now found easily through the Internet’ (Donald *et al.*, 2004, p. 660).

In both effects research and Uses and Gratifications research, different methods have been used, including survey, interviews, participant observations etc. But the main difference between the two approaches is that the Uses and Gratifications research tends to use less structured techniques such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, while the effects research use highly structured techniques (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990).

In the mid-1980s, a new audience research approach in mass communication emerged. Such research is referred as ethnographic research, which involves a researcher living in a native or foreign community to learn about their life, applying different scientific methods and concepts (Moore, 1993). The important point here is that the ethnographic approach is considered a more open and representative technique than questionnaires, as the latter do not allow the participants the opportunity to use their own words. It also allows for interaction between the researcher and the people who are coming from different cultures and backgrounds. At the same time, the researcher in this approach holds the power to choose the focus of the research, the observations that should be involved and the findings distribution style (Hermes, 2010). Moore (1993) notes that Morley’s study of the television magazine programme ‘Nationwide’ was the leading empirical ethnographic study that dealt with audiences. The study was based on a large number of group interviews. The groups comprised of part-time and full-time students,

schoolchildren, managers from banking institutions and trade union officials. The Nationwide programme was recorded for approximately 30 minutes and then showed to the groups for discussion. Morley (1980) in his study had applied the encoding and decoding model while interpreting his *Nationwide* interviews. He rejected the idea of textual determinism in which the text has dominant power over audiences and is the source of meaning. At the same level, he takes into account the audience interests, arguing that interaction between texts and audiences are occurring. Morley suggests that individual's readings are considered the product of their social experience and the cultural knowledge they have access to (Morley, 1992).

In 1970s, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham initiated research related to humanities and social research. Stuart Hall's 'Encoding and Decoding' model was an important example of the CCCS work (Hall, 1980). The principle of this model is that producers encode meanings into the media text and audiences decode the meanings from that text. The meaning that made by producers is encoded by conventions to hide the text's ideological construction. On the other side, audiences watch, listen or read the media text and interpret the text according to a number of frameworks such as education, gender, age, ethnicity and class. In addition, past experience and previous knowledge also affect individual's interpretations. It should be noted that researchers of audience studies prefer qualitative over quantitative methods because it allows them to take into consideration the social context.

The encoding and decoding model theorizes three positions that audiences could adopt; (1) the dominant attitude, where recipients agree and recognise the full meaning of the text 'preferred meaning'; (2) the negotiated position, which is established when individual adopt or oppose the text; (3) the oppositional attitude, where individual oppose and reject the text (Hall, 1980). Morley (1992) had criticised this model, arguing that the process of analysing audiences viewing is more complex than what was suggested by encoding and decoding model. In his study of *Nationwide*, Morley (1992) found that groups that had the same class gave different interpretations. Despite the criticism of encoding and decoding model, it still offers a solid theoretical base for analysing media reception in which individuals are seen as active meaning producers.

Katz and Liebes (1990) had conducted research about the globally popular American television series *Dallas* in order to determine whether such programme have a cultural imperialist effect. The research was conducted with fifty groups of befriended couples from different ethnic communities. The groups were asked to watch the programmes and then discuss a list of open questions. Katz and Liebes were able to classify substantial differences in the ways that the different groups interpreted the programme. They studied how far *Dallas* was relevant to those groups by attending critical statements made by respondents about the value of the programmes and referential statements as if they were real. They showed that cultural origin was important in the way the groups interpreted the programmes. The study by Katz and Liebes provided very useful framework for audience studies and opened up new avenues for research in media reception (Katz and Liebes, 1990).

### **2.3 Exploring the relationship between media and democracy**

Although there are many different definitions and forms of democracy, there is no single working model of democracy (Raboy and Bruck, 1989; Antic, 2004). According to Kivikuru (2006), the concept of democracy in relation to media is based on four assumptions: (1) that citizens are well informed, (2) citizens are concerned about politics, (3) The right to speak and participate in decision making is equal for all citizens, and (4) decisions are submitted to public discussion.

Diamond notes that democracy is not just about transparent, competitive, and periodical elections. Liberal democracy consists of an autonomous judicial system, the rule of law, an executive legislature, a guarantee of human rights, the freedom of the press and of expression and institutions, and independent law enforcement agencies, as well as civil and political rights protected by the constitution (Diamond, 1999). Others have defined democracy thus:

We define a democracy as a regime (1) that sponsors free and fair competitive elections for the legislature and executive; (2) that allows for inclusive adult citizenship; (3) that protects civil liberties and political rights; and (4) in which the elected governments really govern and military is under civilian control (Mainwaring, Brinks and Perez-Linan, 2000, p. 38).

Fukuyama (1992) defines liberal democracy as a representative form of government in which constitutional and pluralist politics co-exists. He argues that liberal democracy is a set of rules in which society participate to choose their representatives through free, transparent and periodic elections. However, the notion of democracy needs to be defined in a social context. Raboy and Bruck (1989) provide a broader notion of democracy, affirming that certain principles need to be maintained, such as sovereignty and independence of individuals and communities in making decisions related to their lives, equal opportunity for individuals within a society and the right to oppose all forms of suppression which limits individual autonomy. For Habermas (1989), democracy means a guarantee for equal rights for all citizens, ensuring a successful participation in political processes.

The relationship between media and democracy is of particular interest to social and cultural theorists (see for example, Keane, 1991; Dahlgren, 2000; Pratt, 2007, among others) and it relates closely to Habermas's concept of the public sphere (see below). Hatem (1996) argues that although there is a logical link between democratic media and democratic society, it is the democratic media which accomplishes democratic society not the other way around.

The role of the media in promoting democracy has been extensively covered in academic literature (for example, Randall, 1999; Jamal, 2003; Kumar, 2006; UNESCO, 2008, among others). Media can work as an important tool for educating voters about elections, raising consciousness of political rights, and mobilizing them to actively participate in political life. The media have an important role in upholding democratic norms during the election process: the media can be seen as a facilitator and one of the guarantors of fair elections (UNESCO, 2008). In this context Curran (2000) states that:

The media brief the electorate and assist voters to make an informed choice at election time. The media also provide a channel of communication between government and governed, which helps society to clarify its objectives, formulate policy, co-ordinate activity, and manage itself (p.127).

McNair (2003) adds that the media provide voters with the information they need to make political choices among competing political parties. This implies a greater degree

of political participation, which contributes to an enhanced and pluralistic citizenry that can influence the process of decision-making and government policy. In this sense, a pluralistic media can contribute to the promotion of human rights and treatment of all individuals as human beings, as well as represent their views. The basic principle of democracy is that individuals have the right to information that affects their lives and are guaranteed participation in political decision-making (Hatem, 1996).

## **2.4 Media and the freedom of information**

Berger (2002) notes that in a successful democracy such principles as freedom of information and expression, equal rights for individuals, respect for human rights and protection of minorities as well as right of access to public information are equally important. Indeed, laws ensuring the freedom of information have been adopted by many countries and grant access to information to media outlets, organizations and individuals. However, the degree of accessing such information varies considerably in different countries and the implementation of freedom of information laws can be seen as a measure of the transparency of a particular political system. The right to communication guarantees the individual's right to send and receive information, and not to be treated as a passive recipient. The new information and communication technologies have greatly facilitated this function by allowing more interactive dialogue between individual receivers and senders (broadcasters) of information.

Fostering pluralistic media and ensuring that the media work for the public interest and provide them with political choices, is the basis for a healthy democratic state (Berger, 2002). It is essential, therefore, for mass media to uphold the right to freedom of expression and provide citizens with a platform through which this right can effectively be applied. In this sense, the media can be seen as protecting and promoting fundamental human rights (UNESCO, 2008). Democratic and pluralistic media discourse can be enriched through discussion, in which minority views compete with majority opinion. Freedom of expression is one of democracy's most valuable principles, protected through resistance to political and economic powers. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts special emphasis on freedom of expression:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart



information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (United Nations, 1948; UNESCO, 1980).

However, despite the massive growth of media globally, many countries are in fact experiencing a shrinking of media pluralism. Advocates of social justice argue that media institutions controlled by governments are unable and unwilling to provide opportunities for freedom of expression. Even though governments commit to implement civil rights in their constitutions to protect freedom of expression, they tend to apply many direct or indirect forms of control over the media to suppress this freedom. Many governments have succeeded in manipulating the law to justify their actions against the media. State control over the media can be used as a tool to manipulate public opinion.

Furthermore, it can be argued that state-owned media are not representative of all citizens and not concerned about consumer demands. In many instances governments effectively own the media, thus eliminating any competition from private or community media. The constitutions in many countries delineates the rights of freedom of expression, but governments limit such rights in the name of national security, respect of religion and morals, and protecting individual rights. The concept of national security can sometimes be misused by states to suppress opposition.

One reaction to such use of power against opponents in the name of protecting national security has led to civil society actors to protect citizen's rights. New digital technologies – especially those on-line - have given audiences a chance to interact with each other at an unprecedented level. In the new digital age, political activists can use mass communication as a weapon for social power against governments that control them (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003; Castells, 2009). The globalization of media and communication and the technology revolution that it has triggered makes it possible for countries to penetrate others' boundaries. Transnational media can inform, promote, and encourage populations to press over their governments for change, making many governments anxious and even fearful about the collapse of their arbitrary rule (Chalaby, 2005; Thussu, 2007; Castells, 2009).

In addition, Srestha (2003) states that the role of independent media in a democracy is crucial to ensure diversity of public opinion and to work as a watchdog against corruption and inefficiency of governments and ruling elites. It is essential, he argues, that communication channels are not in the control of any political party or government.

According to Srestha (2003):

It is common knowledge that for ideal conditions of democracy to subsist, the existence of a free and pluralistic media system is one of the foremost conditions. In other words, the existence of democracy in the true sense is not possible without an independent media (p.1).

There is widespread recognition that if individuals are accessing information through media channels, they can make informed choices and enhance their contribution to decision-making on issues that affect their lives. In order to meet its essential role in fostering and promoting democracy, the media are required to be accountable, reliable and responsible. The media have the ability to address diverse sections of a society, in the form of ethnicity, race, religion and social class. To strengthen democracy, mass communication channels need to be beyond the control of established interests, while citizens should have free access to independent information (UNESCO, 2008).

Overall, the state should be responsible for regulating laws concerning freedom of communication, media ownership, pluralism of media channels, and the guaranteeing of two-way communication, ensuring a diversity of views can be expressed. Freedom of communication can achieve development and prosperity, but for this to materialize, the individual's access to information to participate in decision making is essential. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights has made freedom of communication essential for development and democracy in the world. It has become an important measure by which the democratic nature of a government can be defined and assessed.

## **2.5 Media as the 'watchdog' of democracy**

In this context, it is argued that the watchdog role of media is one of the basic elements of a liberal democracy; its main function is to act as a check on the state to protect the public interest. It needs to relate to a pluralistic political system in which people are represented through parties and groups. The role of a democratic media is to monitor the actions of the state, and report violations by those in power against individuals. In

addition, the media provide an arena for debate, to provide communication channels and thus link people with the government by presenting their views (Curran, 2000).

Thus, for democracy to prosper, it is essential to have an independent and pluralistic media system that monitors government policy and performs a watchdog function. As Nordenstreng (2001) notes, media monitoring in democracy is based on four premises: (1) the media are a powerful institution in society; (2) media are free and this freedom is framed in the constitution; (3) the media are responsible and accountable established in law; and (4) the media which are powerful and free themselves are subject to criticism and monitoring. For independent media to function effectively, political and economic institutions have to be powerful, balanced by an independent judiciary and there has to be a communications infrastructure in place. According to Kumar (2006), in transitional and post-conflict countries, political parties and elites control many aspects of civil society, with various forms of censorship and self-censorship, making independent media weak. Despite these restrictions independent media can contribute to a multi-party political culture, protect human rights, strengthen stability and achieve development (Srestha, 2003).

Nordenstreng (2001) also offers three key functions of the media in a democracy: (1) Information - the media inform societies to form opinion; (2) Critique - the media watch and examine those in power; (3) Forum – the media provide a space for diverse opinions. In addition, for the media to perform its democratic role effectively, it has to reflect the diversity of society (UNESCO, 2008).

As Fox (1998) states, independent media play an important role in exposing government corruption and confronting politicians. They keep checks on the state, reveal violations against human rights, encourage freedom of expression, and report daily events to draw the attention of local authorities. Furthermore, they can cover election processes, to guarantee transparency and give candidates equal access and equivalent time. Such functions make media act as a fourth estate. However, for the media to function effectively as a fourth estate, it has to be financially stable and editorially autonomous. This is then dependent on the existence of institutions to ensure the proper functioning of the media. According to Kumar (2006), developing ‘media entities’ to support its role in society involves: enhancing journalists’ skills; promoting independent media;

encouraging free flow of information; building capacities to support media entities, helping civil society actors that call for media freedom, and developing laws and regulations related to media.

Kumar argues for media assistance to developing countries, because he believes this helps strengthen rational debate, raises sensitive issues for discussion and makes representatives accountable. Such assistance can also contribute to giving a voice to the voiceless, and in the long-run, help resolve conflict and contribute to undermining authoritarian rule. It is argued that an independent media are necessary for human development, as it carries information to and empowers those who live in the margins of society (World Bank, 2002).

## **2.6 Media and democracy: the political and social context**

Politicians need the media and therefore they cultivate media owners and journalists, while media also need politicians to survive. Politicians exert power to control the media, because they see its role in communicating with the people and forming public opinion and debate. It is argued that even when the media are not state-owned, they nevertheless seek to be near those in power. According to this view, media are dominated by the government and work as a tool for information transmission and even manipulation (Herman and Chomsky, 1994).

Authoritarian governments attempt to exert control over the media through rules and regulations, particularly about determining and identifying content that can be deemed safe for publication or for broadcast. They harass journalists who are investigating 'critical stories'. This can affect journalists' work and even the reliability of information. UNESCO (2008) affirmed that journalists should be protected to enable them to investigate human rights violations. Their security, safety and the freedom of movement should not be violated, so that journalists are able to provide to the citizens reliable and unbiased information without fear or favour. Under international law, countries are obliged to protect journalists even during conflict and war. Journalist's rights can be guaranteed by independent judicial system able to protect them from arbitrary actions by the state. By doing so, journalists can work safely and media can disseminate reliable information (Hatem, 1996).

Media in many developing countries do not adequately meet the needs of citizens or reflect their interests and aspirations. The prevalence of corruption in the political systems of many of these countries affects the media system too, resulting in a vicious cycle of accusations between the politicians and the media. In the Palestinian context, the nascent democratic discourse is deeply constrained by the reality of Israeli occupation and continued blockade (Al-Mezan, 2009). Jamal (2003) has argued that through its military procedures, Israel has affected every domain of Palestinian public and private life. These procedures, which violate the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, have had a profound impact on their lives.

Media have an important social dimension too as a channel to encourage communication within various segments of a given society – non-governmental organizations, syndicates, civil society groups, religious, and ethnic communities. This mediated interaction enhances the participation of various groups through exchange of information and deliberation thus contributing to social, political and cultural development. This should promote societal peace, a necessary condition for fostering democracy.

Theorists of media and modernization argue that mass media are an instrument for economic and social development which can spread the message of modernity (Sparks, 2007). Sreberny (2001) argues that democracy is a key part of the development process. Therefore, the media are vital for the creation of civil society and there is much need for greater participation and development of human resources. Participation enhances democratization, by which people's voices are heard, they have ownership over the channel, and develop programmes related to and relevant to their lives. McQuail (1994) suggests a development model in which the media are expected to contribute to promoting and enhancing social harmony. The objectives of democratic media are to ensure the active participation of individuals, diversity of opinions, and to expand people's participation including at the grassroots level (Hatem, 1996).

Mass communication, such as television, has the potential to empower citizens by providing a space to discuss issues relating to their lives but also to challenge those in power. As Curran (2000) states, a democratic media system enables subordinate groups to provoke debate about issues they are facing. Baker (1998) notes that the democratic

idea of media is to enable citizens to discuss issues related to their interests. However, such accessible media systems require media specialists to facilitate debate and audience participation and then broadcast it in order to influence the government. Sreberny (2001) asserts that it is the role of the media to foster public debate and promote cultural pluralism by providing channels of communication to increase people's participation. Albatreeq (1993) notes that media and communication technologies can work effectively only if there is sufficient participation in decision-making: 'Unless this function is fulfilled, mass communication will be counter-productive and contrary to the fundamentals of democracy' (p.70). Pratt (2007) argues also that civil society actors should be considered an important part of the democratization process.

At an international level, democratization and peace-building in communities through media institutions - which receive financial and technical assistance - is considered an important goal (Kumar, 2006). Technology has removed geographical distances between countries by providing communication channels, so that globally citizens can share their views, for example, about issues relating to human rights, freedom, and democracy. According to Drale (2003), participating in democratic deliberation shows us how to undertake 'rational argumentation' and become active participants in decision-making.

Some media scholars have argued that in many developing countries aspects of society such as religion, social and cultural background can act as barriers to the development of democracy. Ayish (2001) notes that the development process is vulnerable, especially in the Arab world, because of media channels being controlled by governments. He uses the term 'participatory development', referring to media channels as an essential tool for people's participation in political and social development. The ultimate goal for democratic participation is to ensure the equal involvement of all sectors of society in the process (McNair, 2003). In order to maintain this, there have to be procedural rules governing the elections and the performance of the elected. Additionally, the media have a role to promote grassroots social responsibility and thus empower individuals.

As Wasko and Splichal (1993) argue, the media do not exist discretely in society; it is associated with the social and political structure. Socialization of communication

promotes social unity and enables citizens to interact, thus allowing active participation in public life and decision-making. If the communication process is to encourage social relations, it should be based on free discussion and free flow of information. One of the important obstacles which obstruct democratic media is the vertical flow of information – from the elite to the masses. If the communication process is to be democratic, the flow of information has to be horizontal not vertical and in many directions. The only way to achieve this is to have a democratic media system.

## **2.7 Television and the Public Sphere**

The concept of the public sphere is associated with a democratic political discourse with its roots in the European political tradition (Habermas, 1989). The word ‘public’ refers to a collection of common interests, while ‘sphere’ refers to the space within which public discussion takes place and public opinion is formed. Habermas (1989) argues that for a public sphere to function properly, legitimate state and political culture has to be guaranteed. Thus, for the media to play a democratic role, there is a need for a democratic constitution, implying that a public sphere without civil society contribution is fragile. In this context, Berger (2002) notes that despite the criticism by numerous scholars of Habermas’s public sphere theory, the concept has been widely and fruitfully used to analyze the role of media in a democracy.

Consequently, groups within civil society have increasingly turned their attention to the role of media in the public sphere and television in particular as the greatest mass communication medium to date. Given that visuals have greater influence than words, especially in the context of developing countries where millions cannot read, television has a special position as a mass medium and therefore its relationship with democracy is important to explore (Chalaby, 2005; Thussu, 2007).

For some, the public service broadcasters such as the BBC have an important public sphere role (McQuail 1994; Curran, 2002). Diversity of media is considered an important element to strengthen the public sphere. McQuail (1994) has emphasized the importance of media as a catalyst for progressive change in society, such as the evolution of the ruling elites, diversity of power distribution, and exchanging of power interests. He believes that media thus are integral to a pluralistic democracy. If the media system functions properly, this would reflect also on the effectiveness of the

political system, with the ultimate goal of both media and political systems serving the public interest (Hatem, 1996).

It has been suggested that for a public sphere to be effective as a public good, policies need to be aimed to take full advantage of television. There should be strategies to enhance participation of citizens, structures to support public access to television, as well as diversity of media ownership (Habermas, 1989; Drale, 2003). As Keane (1991) stated mass communication can empower all citizens in a democracy and enable them to communicate and convey the message communally. Drale (2003) suggests that a successful democracy implies an aggregation of individual interests to majority interests, therefore achieving contentment for the public. In essence, a democratic state has to ensure that the media maintain to serve the public interest and foster pluralism and impartiality. Preventing people from participation in decision-making is an indicator of a fragile democratic media system (Hatem, 1996).

As Keane (1991) has pointed out, democracy needs informed citizens and when citizens enjoy access to various channels of communication, deliberation could be fostered by democratic means to reach social and political agreement. It is important that grassroots have access to media channels by which they engage in deliberations and ensure that their voices are heard.

As argued above, media organizations need to have specialist crew who are able to provide citizens with channels to express themselves, as well as to share their ideas. For this to materialize, media institutions need to be democratized internally; in the sense that the power should be with the people working for such institutions, thus creating a system of democratic societal control (Nieminen, 1997). According to Dahlgren (2000) democracy in the real world is difficult to implement, because there are many forces that need to be taken into account, such as political economy, social structure and media institutions. Therefore, media cannot be separated from its cultural, social, and political environment. Hatem (1996) argued that obstacles that confront the implementation of democratic media systems are those means which restrain freedom of expression. These obstacles have a negative impact on the democratization of media systems. However, the main obstacle is the infrastructure of these systems which make the flow of information vertical. This means only elites can participate in deliberation and the



majority of citizens are mere consumers of media messages. Efforts are being employed to overcome these obstacles, such as expanding people's participation, fostering media pluralism, decentralization of channels and encouraging greater degree of freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the introduction of new technologies has broadened the media space across nations, by which citizens have the possibility to intervene in talk-shows and news programmes in their own country as well as trans-nationally. Hatem (1996) has argued that technology has entered intensively into our daily life and become an important aspect of connecting people globally. It plays significant role in the flow of information, images and ideas which can inspire people to learn and benefit and to build mutual understanding between nations.

## **2.8 Television and state-building**

The role of television is crucial in the process of state-building, as it helps to shape the public sphere and strengthen progress towards democracy. Visual communication is vital for a society; it is the cement that associates citizens together. It links individuals, governments, groups, and institutions. With reference to the process of democratization and the role of television, Wedell and Tudesq (1997) noted that:

The contribution which television can make to the process of democratization depends upon progress made in the professionalization of journalists and politicians. Managing all the new technologies requires knowledge of the pertinent legislation, functioning rules, and above all, ethics. Journalists must ensure that the burgeoning of the media does not become an obstacle to democratization, creating false images of democracy and alienating the population (p. 22).

Pye (1963) noted that it was the function of the media to contribute to developing national unity, especially in the former colonial countries. Modernity and development can work in parallel in order to achieve state-building, and for this to happen, independent mass media are much needed as they provide, according to Randall (1999), the channels of communication between different groups of actors within a given society. The media thus play an important role in the process of state-building (Jamal,

2003). For democracy to function properly, a free flow of information must occur, which will enable citizens to participate in state-building, and bridge the gap between the government and the governed. One reflection of this is the content of the programmes disseminated through broadcast systems. A free flow of information between the government and the citizens, and among citizens themselves, it has been argued, reinforce democracy and empower citizens against their political representatives (Keane, 1991).

Pratt (2007) suggests that for the state-building process to succeed, it requires active political participation from ordinary citizens, as the foundation for social relations and a keystone of the state. Journalists have different roles to play: as a link between government, policy-makers, and people. It is the duty of journalists to assist citizens to raise their concerns with authorities. It is important for journalists to be independent, as their political affiliations could affect the quality of media content. To enhance the accountability and credibility of a media system, journalists have to be free to report and provide information to public, working within and protected by clearly-defined laws and regulations. Such professional and institutional infrastructure is important for journalists, because ambiguity can be used by authorities to silence and threaten journalists which will affect their work, especially reporting on sensitive issue or undertaking investigative stories (World Bank, 2002). However, the growing commercialization of media can lead to a fall in journalistic standards as they operate in a crowded and competitive market for tele-visual images (Berger, 2002).

Speaking specifically about the Arab world, radio and television were viewed in many Arab nations as a constructive tool for state-building (Ayish, 2001). Even though the interdependence between media and government was seen as part of state-building process, governments still controlled the media under such excuses as safeguarding national security (Ayish, 2001). Others have argued that many Arab countries justified media control as part of their social responsibility, given the political and sectarian differences in their societies which could be exploited by vested interests represented by an unregulated private media system (Hafez, 2001). In some Arab countries the subordination of media institutions to government was legitimized by nationalist leaderships, arguing that the media was to be used as a tool for state-building (Ayubi, 1995). According to Jamal (2003), the sovereignty of the media is fundamental for

state-building as it is essential for the success of the national project. However, it has been argued that the politicians control the airwaves for their own interests (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002). Authoritarianism is not only shaped by the actions of the elites, it is also affected by politicians' self-interest in staying in power (Pratt, 2007). In the development process and state-building, media policy is intended to contribute to stability and provide equal and just representation to all sections of society, including minorities (Jamal, 2001).

## **2.9 Media control and censorship: the Arab context**

Nossek and Rinnawi (2003) discuss three models to explain the relationship between the media and the state. The first model is the totalitarian model, where governments control the media and use it as a manipulation tool for political mobilization. The second model is the American democratic model where the media are subject to market competition but has a social responsibility. Journalists have the responsibility to inform and educate people and to direct the media in a way to ensure that published or broadcast content does not violate the law or hurt the rights of others. The third model is the continental European democratic model where individual and collective rights are balanced.

Although proponents of public ownership of the media affirm that information is a public good, many governments in the developing countries still control media and the state-run media remains the dominant paradigm, despite massive growth in private media – both nationally and trans-nationally (Chalaby, 2005; Castells, 2009).

In contrast, the public-service media in a pluralist democratic system have a crucial role in enabling communication within civil society, thus building networks among individuals and various groups. These networks are important because they can act as bulwarks against any potential or existing political suppression and how to deal with it. Such networks also encourage individuals to 'cultivate the virtues of democratic citizenship: prudence, judgment, eloquence, resourcefulness, courage, self reliance, sensitivity to power, common sense' (Keane, 1991, p. 146). In addition, they can contribute to a dialogue between citizens and policy-makers to assess, estimate and understand the possibilities and consequences of dangers, thus the media can work as an early warning system and suggest ways to avoid any social conflict (Keane, 1991). In an

idealized democratic system, the role of the media is to help a society to develop and practice such values – public service broadcasters have an important function in this endeavour (Drale, 2003).

However, in many Arab countries the governments continue to control the mass media – especially radio and television – and use these as a propaganda tool (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002; Lynch, 2006, Mellor, 2007). Some Arab governments have justified their control of the media as a mechanism to protect the Arab culture against Western influence, mediated through television (Hafez, 2001). A UNESCO report of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, affirms that in most Middle Eastern countries broadcasting media systems are seen as part of governmental institutions (UNESCO, 2008). Almost all broadcasting systems in the Arab world are funded by the governments and therefore also controlled by them (Amin, 2001). Amin divides Arab media control into two main categories: the first, according to him, are the governments which tend to control the broadcasting system and deploy the ‘ideology of national mobilization’ to introduce restrictions on the media. Such governments use radio and television as a tool of political communication and to persuade citizens of the validity of government actions and thus gain support for national unity. Amin’s second category includes the governments which run the broadcasting system in a bureaucratic manner – retaining executive control but leave the day-to-day running of television and radio to professional journalists and thus acquire legitimacy and gain national support for the government.

In societies with high rate of illiteracy, broadcast systems become the main source for circulating information and entertainment (Amin, 2001). These systems transmit audio-visual content which can affect individuals and groups – in political terms, thus governments can mobilize people to achieve political ends. The rationale behind centralizing broadcasting systems is to support national unity, claimed to be threatened by hostile powers in the region as well within the countries. Many commentators have argued that Arab governments control broadcasting systems because they are afraid that their power will be lost to internal enemies, especially during the time of a sectarian or religious conflict (Amin and Boyd, 1993).

Despite the existence of laws in Arab countries guaranteeing freedom of expression, governments can and do persecute journalists or ordinary citizens on such charges as threatening national security. Ayish (2001) notes that though individual rights exist in Arab communication laws, these could be overruled if a journalist or media institution is found guilty of what the governments may consider an offence against the respective state. Governments apply strict censorship laws and journalists can be prosecuted if they are perceived to be indulging in activities against the national unity and security, or even harmful for any individual's rights. Such regulations severely restrict the freedom of expression and shrink journalist's professional space (Ayish, 2001; Jamal, 2003). Another way of governmental control is indirect: through funding television and radio, ensuring that media institutions remain obliged to government officials and political leaders.

The Palestinian media scene is a good example of such tensions. In relation to the media models discussed by Nossek and Rinnawi (2003), in the Palestinian context the situation of mass media is a mixture of both democratic and totalitarian model. State control over the media is commonplace and Palestinian politicians tend to use it as a mouthpiece. In addition, many media entities have been created since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority – many of these media are subjected to the market competition (Batrawi, 2001). However, even though many of these media entities are autonomous, they work in close collaboration with the government.

The political system is considered an important indicator of media development, as it shows the degree of freedom enjoyed by the media. Palestine is experiencing deep political divisions, also reflected in the mass media environment. The policy and ideological disagreements between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the other political parties are also to be seen in the mass media. All major political parties have aimed to and made efforts to control the media, making the media an arena for struggle, and a manipulation tool that each party desires to mobilize the masses to achieve or retain power. Moreover, political actors and civil society activists have also turned their attention to the media to promote their political agenda and shape the public opinion (Jamal, 2001; Jamal, 2003).

The authoritarian tendencies manifest within the Palestinian Authority have also been noticed in the manner in which the Palestinian media system has been controlled and curtailed. The Palestinian President has control of public institutions at all levels, including the mass media, and especially television. The control is manifested through appointing a loyal person as the head of Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), and even locating the PBC building within the compound of the President's office (Jamal, 2001). According to Jamal (2003), there is a clear relationship between the Palestinian elite and the media, where the national elite not only controls the process of state formation but also succeeded in controlling the media and uses it to promote their interests and to achieve their goals. Referring to media regime, Jamal (2001), affirmed that even the Palestinian President played a major role in constructing a bureaucratic regime, and he managed to intervene in all levels and aspects of the Palestinian institutions. In some respects, this situation is not that dissimilar to the dynamics between media and the state in other Arab countries, many of which have authoritarian regimes (Lynch, 2006).

Within such a controlled system, compounded by political and economic instability, civil society and human rights organizations cannot be effective. If the media institutions are controlled by the state, they are constrained to function as a medium for democratic dialogue. However, it is impossible for the state media to continue to control information in a digital globalized media age. As new communication and information technologies are spreading, media channels have penetrated the national boundaries (Jenkins, and Thorburn, 2003). To seek information that is denied to them, citizens are diverting to transnational mass communication channels, looking for content they seek. As Callard (1997) noted: 'over the last seven years the Middle East has moved from a situation of very limited access to television which was virtually all government controlled, to a market where there is a vast number of channels to choose between' (Cited in Sreberny, 2001, p.18). Such a media environment, triggered by the digital revolution, can foster a greater degree of freedom over time, even in non-democratic countries, where the nascent media have a chance to develop.

## **2.10 Contribution of independent media to democracy**

In the late 1980s, the international community started to pay attention to expanding democracy to the developing world, triggered by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Their ostensible aim was to promote decentralization of power, development of civil society, rule of law, and free and fair elections (Price, 1999). Donors call for supporting democratic media institutions is influenced by the perceived need to maintain stability. The goal of supporting media is to have a democratic independent media, one not controlled by the government or businesses, and able to present their views and serve their interests (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 1999). International community sometimes supports both independent and state-owned media. Such support is important because state-owned media enjoy privileges such as links with local officials and access to government information. Donors recognized the role of independent media in building a democratic society. To develop the quality of media institutions and enhance citizen participation, donors provide grants for local media channels. These grants improve technical equipments and provide training courses for media practitioners. The World Bank defines independent media as, 'Independence refers to the media industry's ability to report information it receives without undue fear of being penalize. It also refers to a media industry that is not controlled by any interest group, but still has access to necessary data. No media outlet can be completely independent: even when the government does not directly penalize unfavorable news, it can refuse to provide information about good stories' (2002, p.4).

According to a World Bank report, media independence is determined by several factors. First, media ownership where control over the dissemination of information is implemented. Second, policies in place to encourage independent media industry. Third, the financing of media industries and the question of how the media entities are funded. Fourth, laws and regulations to implement media industry (World Bank, 2002). The regulations guarantee that the media outlets work for the public interest and not for the government, as well as to be objective and neutral. This will allow the public access to information, provide impartial coverage and reflect a variety of topics.

In situations such as one prevalent in Palestine characterized by a centralization of media in government hands and the lack of public participation, international

organizations have played an important role in promoting independent media. International NGOs and public culture institutions are running training programmes and providing technical support to enhance journalist's skills and to contribute to the independent media sector. It is important to emphasise that international organizations have a huge contribution in media sector in Palestine to strengthen Palestinian journalist's capacities. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is a striking example of such capacity-building endeavor. SIDA has established a project with BirZeit University in the West Bank to train Palestinian journalists. Jallof (2005) notes that SIDA's policy is 'to support the development of journalism and to make it possible for free media to contribute to ensuring that the general public has access to information and the social debate' (p. 5). This project, according to SIDA, has been found to be relevant and effective and has widened media freedom in Palestine.

Such international NGOs have focused in funding projects that create a space for journalists to express their opinions. They have provided technological equipment for alternative media spheres such as on-line portals where journalists can publish their stories to potentially huge audience. This is particularly relevant and much-needed alternative as mainstream media faces regular and rigorous censorship and other limitations imposed over media channels in Palestine. Not surprisingly, these internet sites have become very popular in Palestine. Bishara (2010) notes that 'some of these Internet sites have become respected sources of independent news for Palestinians and they have provided a vital means through which journalists can avoid the restrictions of the print media' (p. 75). The strategy behind empowering journalists and media institutions is to make them able to provide sufficient coverage about government violation of human rights, thus creating informed citizens who are able to question those in power.

UNESCO is another key international organization which supports the capacities of Palestinian media institutions and improves the training of media professionals. It runs projects to strengthen Palestinian participatory democracy and public dialogue. The objective of the projects, according to UNESCO, are to increase public participation, to strengthen democratic processes through independent media, to enhance democratic dialogue between citizens and officials, and foster public debates and widen and deepen people's participation in decision-making processes. There is little doubt that the aim of



such projects is to provide the Palestinian journalists the ability to support media channels as a force to promote dialogue and democracy. The importance of these projects and their role in supporting such media channels render unique importance in the Palestinian territories that lack the basic tools to sustain a robust public sphere.

Because of the turbulent political and dire security situation in the Palestinian territories, Palestinian journalists' often focus their attention on covering political issues and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The training programmes by NGOs are meant to orient news personnel and journalism more generally towards a socially responsible role. Their primary objective is to build media institutions and journalistic capacities to adequately cover wider social issues – development, gender inequality, intercultural understanding - within the civil society, considered vital for sustaining a democratic society and polity. It is argued that when journalists have awareness of social issues and democratic processes, they would be able to provide a platform for people's participation to create democratic public sphere. There narrow margin of freedom of expression and the regime that control mass media has made the Internet a good space for individuals and groups to discuss sensitive political issues (Rinnawi, 2002).

For such a media to prosper, political and economic stability are considered as key factors. But many transitional and post-conflict countries lack such stability, making the media a tool for the elites which manage and manipulate it. The violations of information and human rights usually takes place, especially when judicial systems are weak and do not enjoy autonomy, thus failing to implement the rule of law or guarantee individual rights (Kumar, 2006).

Independent media are often associated with privatized media. However, it is important to consider the relationship between the state and the private media. Though the state grants licenses to commercial media entities, owners may share business interests or have close political links with those in power. Even in countries where private media ownership exists, these institutions tend to be controlled by people or businesses with links to politicians (Wedell and Tudesq, 1997). According to the World Bank, apart from business and private interests, other factors such as high rate of illiteracy, the use and access of technology, and purchasing power of consumers, can also act as restrictions on independent media (World Bank, 2002).

The media legislations in many countries have also acted as a hindrance to independent media. Despite impressive growth in the media sector in many developing countries, competition is still weak. Price (1999) stated that: 'A system of domestic media law that prohibits competition internally, that constrains the capacity of programme distributors to meet the interests of consumers, will be a fragile one. It is not only constitutional reasons but pragmatic ones, in this view, that justify a far more open system of competition and freedom for broadcasters' (p. 17).

The independent media have benefited by the developments in broadcasting systems, warranted by globalization of television, offering the audience a variety of channels. These developments can affect authoritarian regimes and force these to pursue a more liberal broadcasting policy. In addition, globalization of communication has made it very difficult for authoritarian regimes to keep control over the media. Unlike on domestic media, sanctions, censorship and restrictions cannot easily be imposed on transnational media (O'Neil, 1998).

However, independent media needs state intervention to protect and enhance freedom of expression and at the same time to encourage media diversity and political pluralism. Governments in the Arab world are restricting this right in a form of censorship, and even self-censorship sometimes practiced by journalists. For democracy to succeed in such an environment, independent media have a crucial role, performing the function of checks and balances to ensure free and fair elections. Though regular elections are now held in many Arab countries, real multi-party democracy has so far failed to take root in most cases. In a democratic society, citizens need full and varied information to make an informed electoral decision. By providing such information and allowing individuals to participate in public deliberation, real democracy can be fostered. Kumar (2006) suggests that in the countries with low literacy rates, high cost of printing newspapers, and logistic difficulties in distributing media content, the independent media needs support from the state to reach the population. The state is often the provider of the communications infrastructure, necessary for independent media. This infrastructure consists of technology equipment, workers, trained, and skilled journalists. An independent and pluralistic media can thus broadcast programmes to encourage citizens to exchange ideas and interact with local government officials for monitoring

developmental activities. Such programmes can invite local government officials and enable citizens to question them regarding issues affecting their daily life. Such interactions also help raise government awareness about policy and may contribute to reforming or rejecting a particular policy in view of the public opinion (Kumar, 2006).

O'Neil (1998) has also argued that for democracy to function properly an independent media, which provides unbiased information and thus enables the citizens to make political choices, is essential. In such a formulation, independent media are considered as a corner stone for democracy and a key element in the establishment of a thriving civil society. Independent media make it possible for outlets to reflect what is relevant to the society and correspond to audience demands and interests. In this context, Kem (2007) noted that: 'Participatory theories commonly believe that the media should report public opinion to government officials, thereby prompting governmental responses. The media should also provide the public itself with knowledge about itself - so that those who disagree with the dominant opinion can contest it and so that people can have a criterion against which to measure government responsiveness' (p. 24).

Historically, independent media are capable of undermining authoritarian rule as illustrated by the revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe. It was an example of how democracy depends on the direct participation of individuals and involves freedom of speech, guaranteed by human rights and other conventions (Bennett, 1998).

A civil society-led independent media can act as a bulwark against information manipulation by the governments. Kumar (2006) argued that independent media assists civil society organizations by revealing misuse of power by the governments thus provoking public outrage and condemnation. This can lead to public support for independent media and assistance to such organizations as more and more citizens engage as volunteers with independent media sector. Civil society actors can exert pressure over the state to allow individual's participation, and assist them to have access to media (Diamond, 1999). Information empowers people and helps them to make informed choices among alternatives and to take rational decisions that affect their lives. Independent media can play the watchdog role to expose government actions, yet protect individuals from state aggression. Pratt (2007) argued that civil society actors have important role in fostering democracy, but conclude that: '...democratization is not

the outcome of a growth in the number of civil-society actors or the existence of civil society independent of the regime. Rather, democratization depends upon the ideological debates between civil-society actors and, in particular, the ability or desire of civil-society to put forward a vision that challenges authoritarianism, thereby paving the way for democracy' (p.127).

Civil society actors are important for media as they can perform many tasks in relation to media support and scrutiny. These tasks can be monitoring media content and ownership, support of implementing media laws and regulations, promoting people's participation and to guarantee implementation of freedom of expression and access to information (UNESCO, 2008).

As Sklair (1996) stated 'Democracy is a means to effectuate improvement in the overall quality of human life' (p. 40). Independent and free media are important for democracy to take root. It requires strong judicial and executive system to protect and guarantee freedom of expression. The purpose of a credible democratic media system is to form an arena for different groups to communicate with each other in order to reach rational decisions - unaffected by governmental control or business and commercial interests. UNESCO (2008) affirmed that independent media and greater access to information among the world's citizens would enhance good governance and encourage human development.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

The media can play an important role in fostering democracy. However, for democracy to function, citizens need credible and complete information to make informed choices and decisions affecting their lives. In this chapter I have discussed different prospects of democracy and how media can promote democratic functions. I explored the three functions of media in order to promote democracy. These functions are media as a forum for discussion and debate; as provider of information and as a watchdog, critiquing the powers that be. The forum function refers to one of the basic principles of democracy that individuals have the right to participate in political life and it is the role of media to provide the platform for their discussion in order to reach rational decisions for public good. The information function refers to Human rights affirmation of the right of individuals to access information, and therefore it is the role of media to inform

people to help structure their opinions. In addition, in order to foster democracy, the media have to provide the necessary information and allow individuals to have free access of information. The third function refers to the essential part of democracy where the media have a role of watchdog to examine those in power in order to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded.

It is important to note that the definition of democracy should not be reduced to elections, as this would devalue its worth. Therefore, democracy is not just related to political systems; it is about freedom of information, freedom of expression, independent and pluralistic media, public participation and state-building. Independent media are vital for a society and helps in shaping the public sphere and reinforcing the process of democracy. It is considered as the backbone for democracy providing credible information and enabling citizens to participate in the political decision-making. It can play the watchdog role to reveal misuse of power by governments or those in authority. In addition, free flow of information strengthens democracy and empowers citizens. We have to understand the media in its broader context, especially taking into account such concepts as the public sphere, freedom of information and human rights.

From our discussion above, it can be shown that politicians intend to control the media in order to communicate with people and shape the public opinion. Different political groups pay attention towards media in order to influence the public sphere. In mature democracies this process has acquired political sophistication, as the management of media for political purposes is done with much greater degree of professionalism. However, among authoritarian governments – still in power in many developing countries - attempts to control the media in order to stay in power and guarantee that their interest would not be affected continues to be the reality. Governments in many Arab countries aimed to control the media under excuses such as safeguarding national security or as part of their social responsibility. They apply censorship laws against journalists and media institutions justifying these by protecting national unity and security. The Palestinian case is a very good example of such practices prevalent in the Arab world. In the next chapter I will discuss historically the prospects of democracy in Palestine through examination of the relationship between the media and different rulers in Palestine.

## Chapter 3

### **From Ottoman to Palestinian Authority: media and democracy in Palestine in a historical context**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the prospects of democracy in Palestine through the examination of the relationship between the media and the different rulers in Palestine in a historical context. It will provide an overview of the media development, censorship and media control during different stages of Palestinian history. Examining the history of the Palestinian press, the chapter will demonstrate how the press reflected the struggle over the Palestinian identity. The press served as an instrument for political communication and thus a tool for political mobilization. Palestinians have lived under the control of different powers and as a result of this foreign domination the Palestinian media have tended to be more political than commercial. This political dimension was also visible in the way the Palestinian press gave equal if not more significance to covering pan-Arab issues rather than focusing solely on Palestinian nationalism. The history of Palestinian media can be seen as a struggle against various censorships such as Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian. By tracing Palestinian media history and digging through its past, examining the circumstances and the factors that affected its development, we can have a better understanding of the importance of media institutions in the contemporary Palestinian context.

#### **3.1 Ottoman hegemony and the Palestinian media 1876-1917**

Despite being a sacred location for the three monotheistic faiths, the first printing press was established in Jerusalem by Nesim Beyk, a man of Jewish faith publishing religious material in 1830 during the Ottoman period. Furthermore, Jewish printers remained in control of the printing presses in Palestine until 1846, the year when the first Arabic printing press was established in Palestine. The printing was mostly religious in nature (Suleiman, 2009a). Turkish censorship did not encourage Arabic publications to be established as the official printing press in Palestine (Sabaat, 1966). Instead the Ottoman government published *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* (Nobel Jerusalem) in 1876 in both Arabic and Turkish. *Al-Gazal* was another newspaper published in the same year. Indeed, the newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* heralded the establishment of Palestinian

press. It should be noted that the printing press in Palestine also contributed substantially to the enrichment of the cultural and social life of Palestinians (Abu Shanab, 2001).

*Annafire Al-Othmani* (The Ottoman Clarion) newspaper was established in Alexandria in 1904 by Ibrahim Zaka, and then moved to the Palestinian city of Jaffa to continue its publication for one year. After the proclamation of Ottoman constitution in 1908, the newspaper moved to Jerusalem and Elia Zaka, the brother of Ibrahim Zaka, became the owner and changed its name to *Annafire*. During the Ottoman era, Palestinian editors had to supplement their incomes by undertaking other non-journalistic work, since journalism did not pay enough. For instance, Yousef El-Isa, the editor of *Falastine* (Palestine) newspaper, was a government employee, and Elia Zaka, the owner of *Annafire*, was teaching Arabic language to Jewish students (Yehoshua, 1974). Elia was close to the Jewish cause, publishing articles in favour of Jewish settlements. Such closeness made commercial sense, as both the main advertisers and subscribers of *Annafire* were mostly Jewish. *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, which was owned by Bandali Gharabli, also defended Jewish settlements in Palestine.

The Ottoman government proclaimed the constitution in 1908 which was, in essence, a reinstatement of the principles of the 1876 constitution. This constitution was based on the principles of liberty, equality and justice. The Palestinians took advantage of such liberties approved during that period and started to publish newspapers. Prior to 1908, Ottoman bureaucracy restricted the Palestinian press, as it was very difficult to obtain a license to publish a newspaper. But after the proclamation of the 1908 constitution, a more liberal system allowed ordinary citizens to publish newspapers. Moreover, the constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and criticism which led to the development of the Palestinian press. One indication of this change was the growth in the number of newspapers during this period (Abu Shanab, 2001).

The large number of newspapers which appeared in this period contributed to the emergence of a new commercial printing press in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa. Georgi Hananiyya established his printing press in 1894. He started printing even before gaining an official license, which he did not acquire until 1906. He was the first journalist to establish a private printing press in 1908 and was the owner of the *Al-Quds*

newspaper. It took him nearly ten years to obtain a license to start his newspaper. In 1911, Isa El-Isa and his brother Yousef El-Isa established their private printing press in Jaffa and their newspaper *Falastine* (Palestine) (Mara'ashli *et al*, 1984). According to Yehoshua (1974), the newspaper supported the Jordanian King Abdulla and endorsed his view that Palestinians should be part of an expanded Jordanian Hashemite Kingdom. The newspaper encouraged the Palestinians to accept Jordanian citizenship and to realize that there was little opportunity for the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

The liberalization which was provided by the constitution had created a space for the emergence of a political press. Many Palestinian intellectuals realized the importance of the press in mobilizing the masses. Therefore they made serious efforts to establish an independent Palestinian press. However, both Jewish-Palestinian and Arab-Palestinians were struggling to establish a political press. According to Suleiman (2009a), 'Historians attribute the reason for the increase in the number of printing presses owned by Jews was due to the migration of Jews from Europe to Palestine, and the desire of the Zionist movement to revive Hebrew as a language for the Jews through printing in Hebrew' (p. 85).

Arabic press succeeded in bringing the Ottoman government attention to the Zionist movement and its intention of occupying Palestine and establishing agricultural settlements. This concerned some Jewish writers and intellectuals who started to think in terms of establishing an Arabic-Jewish newspaper to promote their cause (Yehoshua, 1974). Accordingly, Shamoun Moyal published the Arabic-Jewish newspapers *Saout Al-Othmaneya* (Ottoman Voice) in 1914 to defend the Jewish settlement in Palestine and to confront the propaganda of the Arabic press. It suffices to note that, after the Ottoman constitution and the freedom of expression, Arab journalists started to establish newspapers to respond to Jewish newspapers and to condemn Zionist movement. Furthermore, Arabic newspapers owned by Arabs attacked the two Arabic newspapers *Annafair* and *Al-Akhbar* which supported the Jewish settlements. Palestinians sought to establish anti-Zionist newspapers: Najib Nassar established *Al-Karmil* newspaper in 1908 (Mara'ashli *et al*, 1984). Nasser was one of the most active and courageous journalists who wrote regularly and critically in his newspaper about the growing Zionist threat to Palestine and was responsible for launching campaigns



against Zionists (Neville, 1976). *Al-Karmil* and *Falastine* were among the leading Palestinian newspapers which played an important role in reviving Arab nationalism and opposing Jewish immigration (Ayalon, 1995).

Given the low literacy rate in Palestine at that time, the number of printed newspapers was very limited. Ordinary people looked to newspapers to find out about their rights. While few copies of newspapers were distributed in villages, newspapers were read loudly in coffee houses (Yehoshua, 1974). The editor of the newspaper *Falastine* wrote in an editorial on 29 May 1913: ‘...We consider the chiefs (Mukhtars) of all villages’ natural subscribers to this newspaper, and we have been sending free copies for a while now to every village in the district with a population of more than one hundred. The purpose of that is to allow the farmer to learn what is happening in the kingdom (Mamlaka) on the one hand, and to learn about his rights on the other’ (ibid, p. 19).

Thanks partly to the newspapers, the Palestinians began to realize the dangers posed by the extensive Jewish immigration to Palestine, threatening their territories (Ferguson, 1973). Palestinian newspapers started to write against Zionist movement and raise awareness among Palestinians about the intentions of the new migrants from Europe. The advocacy of pan-Arab and Arab/Palestinian nationalism among many Palestinian journalists also contributed to the opposition to the Jewish colonization of Palestine. Consequently, Palestinian Jews began to realize the influence of the Arab Palestinian press on the Arab public opinion. Therefore, they requested the Ottoman government to suppress the expression ‘Palestinian nationalism’ used by the Palestinian press. Their protest against the articles in some Palestinian newspapers resulted in the temporary suspension of a few titles (Asa’ad, 1972). Such actions and the fear among journalists that this created clearly showed that there were definite limits upon freedom of expression.

The censorship of Arabic press made it very restrictive, prohibiting any word against the government. Some journalists were harassed or even arrested for anti-government writings, forcing many to migrate to Egypt where there was a greater degree of freedom of expression. In such an environment, newspapers were constantly threatened with closure and cancellation of their licenses, making many newspapers avoid writing politically charged stories – or in some cases, stop writing about politics altogether

(Yehoshua, 1974). Despite such strict restrictions on editorial content and instability emanating from political and economic turmoil, the number of printing presses increased. During the First World War, printing presses had stopped and most newspapers were closed. They were resumed after the war and the defeat of Ottoman power, but were not able to develop given the instability in the Middle East triggered by the political circumstances that followed these (A'akad, 1966).

### **3.2 Democracy versus censorship: British Mandate 1917-1948**

The Palestinian press had ceased to exist during the First World War, which indicates the difficulties it had gone through during that period. After Palestine became a British Mandate, the British tried to allow some freedom of expression which resulted in the rise of new spheres in education and culture. This national movement contributed to a civil struggle between the Palestinians and Jews (Abu Shanab, 2001). The newspapers which had stopped publications during the First World War resumed, and at the same time many new newspapers emerged in the marketplace. The number of daily and weekly newspapers increased as did their variety: literary, economic and religious newspapers appeared and in many languages - Arabic, English, Hebrew, Greek, French, and German. Many Jewish journalists and printers started to publish newspapers in Arabic language. During this period the total number of newspapers in Palestine was an impressive 241 (A'akad, 1966).

This increased journalistic activity provided a new lease of life to journalists and helped revive national awareness. Furthermore, these developments also contributed to the creation of Palestinian media institutions. As the press and its institutions became more vocal, journalists and political activists started to criticize the British Mandate calling for independence and resisting Jewish migration. Palestinian intellectuals started to form national resistance, as well as consolidating Palestinian groups that shared common aims against the British Mandate and the Zionist movement. Such mobilization worried the British Mandate authorities, who were informed about the trends in Palestinian nationalism often by Jewish settlers who would be able to read articles they considered provocative. Consequently, restrictions, censorship, and suspensions against the press were implemented. Indeed, initially the British depended on Ottoman laws to control the press (Yehoshua, 1974). The mandate authorities also

banned Arabic press from entering Palestine; historians point out that as many as 46 Arabic newspapers were banned during the years 1934-1939 (Suleiman, 2009b).

On the one hand, the British government severely curbed the Palestinian press, which criticised the government, and on the other it sought to influence the Palestinian public opinion through favourable media (Barakat, 2009). British military leadership published a trilingual newspaper in Cairo, offered to Palestine in English, Arabic and Hebrew. The English newspaper was called *The Palestine News*, the Arabic newspaper was titled *Palestine Newspaper*, and the Hebrew one was named *Hadashot MeyHaaretz* (Yehoshua, 1974). In June 1921, the British government established another Arabic daily newspaper called *Lisan Al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue) which was edited by Ibrahim Al-Najjar, a Lebanese journalist.

For the first ten years of the British Mandate, Palestinian press performance was not like any other press in the Arab world. The press played an important role in forming public opinion and exposing the Zionist project of occupying Palestine. In addition, it contributed to promoting political and cultural life (Khouri, 1976). Jewish organizations realized the power of the press and sought to confront the Palestinian propaganda and advocate the Jewish policy via the medium of such Arab-run newspapers as *Annafair* and *Al-Akhbar* as well as establishing Jewish-owned and managed Arabic magazines and newspapers (Yehoshua, 1974). The period during the British Mandate witnessed rapid development in journalism, partly because the British authorities had worked on reviving the Palestinian education in order to improve their image among the Palestinian people (Sawafiri, 1975; Nakhla, 1983). The period also witnessed the rise of private political newspapers, owned by various Palestinian factions.

During the Ottoman period, there were no newspapers in Gaza, as it did not have the requisite capital or adequate literacy which the press required. Another important reason which obstructed the establishment of the press in Gaza was the high competition between newspapers in Jerusalem and other cities in Palestine. Furthermore, newspapers were distributed only in the big cities due to logistic difficulties (Abu Shanab, 2001). Jerusalem was the centre of Palestinian press during the Ottoman period and at the beginning of British Mandate. It hosted the central government offices, the centres for the Arab national movement, offices for the Zionist movement and Christian

missionaries. Many newspapers such as *Al-Quds Al-Sharif*, *Al-Aqsa*, *Lisan Al-Arab*, and many other Arabic, English, French, Greek and German newspapers were printed in the city. During the years of 1939-1948, Jerusalem tried to retrieve its pioneering position as a centre of journalism in the region. During the British period Palestine witnessed economic, social and cultural development and newspapers started to appear in such places as Gaza and A'aka cities. As these new centres emerged, Jerusalem started to lose its leading position (Terban, 2009). Because of their location on the sea, cities like Gaza and Jaffa witnessed rapid development during the British Mandate. Harbours and industrial areas were established facilitating transportation networks. This situation was conducive to printing presses as distribution became more organized, making Jaffa the centre of the Palestinian press. Gaza too witnessed the emergence of the Palestinian press. Historians point out that the first Gazan to establish a newspaper was the lawyer Fahmi Al-Husaini who in 1923 published *Majalat Al-Hokok* (Law Magazine) which was printed and distributed in Jaffa for five years and subsequently moved to Gaza. During the British Mandate only five newspapers were established in Gaza. These newspapers were *Al-Sharq* (The East), *Sout Al-Haq* (Voice of Right), *Sout Al-Shabab* (Youth Voice), *Al-Shorouq* (The Rise), and *Sout Al-Oroba* (The Voice of Arabism) (Abu Shanab, 2001).

In the early 1930s different Palestinian political parties had disagreements regarding what actions should be taken to curb the Zionist intention of evacuating the original residents of Palestine. Most Palestinian parties had their own newspapers, while many journalists belonged to political parties. Political and ideological disputes were developed in newspaper columns and editorials, with some newspapers calling for reliance on political leaders to solve the problem and others demanding popular revolt (Porath, 1977). Disputes among newspapers led to internal divisions within Palestinian political groups, while some Palestinian journalists emphasised the need for reviving national unity and national reconciliation.

Different Palestinian groups used the press to provoke the populace against the Jewish intention of occupying Palestine. What made the situation worse was the growing illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine. Accordingly, in 1929, the Buraq riots occurred, inflaming the public consciousness which escalated to clashes between the Palestinians and Jewish groups and culminated in the Arab rebellion of 1936-1939 (Terban, 2009).

The clashes and the resultant instable security situation forced the British government to devise new and more stringent press laws. The Shaw Commission, set up by the colonial office in September 1929, blamed the press for aggravating public sentiment. The commission recommended the implementation of legislation which became the press ordinance of 1933. The new law gave the high commissioner the power to suspend any newspaper which was deemed to have published an 'offensive' article (Ayalon, 1995). Therefore, restrictions, prohibitions and other intolerances were imposed on journalists and newspapers and many journalists were jailed because of their writings and opinions relating to their political beliefs.

During 1933, the year in which the British passed the press ordinance, the Palestinians established 26 new newspapers. In addition, the statistics show that about 147 newspapers and magazines had been published during the period between 1933-1948 (Suleiman, 2009b). This large number of publications indicates the importance of journalism at that time. Indeed, several Arabic newspapers, notably *Al-Difa'a* (The Defence), established in Jaffa in 1934 by Ibrahim Shanti, supported the Palestinian struggle against Zionist plans, and adopted a militant position which contributed to the growth of the Arab nationalist movement (Khoury, 1976). Such militancy also had a role in riots during the period between 1936-1939, when some newspapers functioned as a tool in spreading anti-Zionist messages and raise public awareness of the threat to Palestinian territories. As the criticism of them increased in the press, the British authorities imposed further restrictions upon it. Accordingly, on August 7, 1936, a royal commission was appointed to investigate the reasons behind the 1936 riots (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991). The tightening of the press censorship followed with the banning of 34 newspapers, while 11 others received warnings of closure (Terban, 2009).

Such an environment also contributed to factionalism within newspapers. As the Palestinian journalists and intellectuals were associating with different political parties, disputes between them occupied most of the newspapers' pages. However, there were also efforts made to forge a unified position against British authorities as well as Zionist groups. This had reflected in their writings during the rebellions of 1929, 1933 and 1936. Bill's commission report mentioned that Palestinian journalists and newspapers had agreed on conducting a general press meeting on 27 May 1936. The meeting proclaimed a strike for three days after discussing the British government policy

towards Jewish immigration and the new press law and its impact on the future of the press in Palestine (Suleiman, 2009b).

Harsh wartime censorship was introduced by the British authorities after the outbreak of the Second World War. This included censorship of all information going in or out of Palestine as well as all severely censoring all newspapers, especially those in Arabic. This was part of the Emergency Regulations, announced in 1945 and in which censorship was embodied (Najjar, 1975). Only two moderate and pro-British Arab newspapers *Falastin* and *Al-Difa'a* were able to continue being published during this period (Musallam, 2008). After the end of the Second World War and the British Mandate, a new war started between Palestinians and Jews and the press entered a new age of conflict. After the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, for reasons related to the war, Britain found itself obliged to establish a government-run radio station in 1940. The government named the radio as *Al-Sharq Al-Adna* (Near East Radio) and appointed a British officer as its director (Abu Shanab, 2001). The station started broadcasting in 1941 from Jenin (a city in the West Bank) and subsequently moved to Jaffa. Among its tasks was to re-establish the Palestinian-British relationship which had been spoilt because of the government repression of the Palestinians as a reaction to disturbances in 1939. The radio also worked on enhancing the Palestinian confidence in the government and its commitment for the development of Palestinian society. The government had adopted Arabic as an official language for broadcasting, and appointed Palestinian journalists in various posts. Cultural programmes were given prominence in the station, giving opportunities for several poets, writers and artists to introduce their work to the Palestinian people (Suleiman, 2009b). However, with the outbreak of the 1948 war between Jewish and Arab Palestinians, the station had to stop broadcasting.

According to Abu Shanab (2001), the establishment of radio in Gaza was influential political propaganda against the newly formed state of Israel. Broadcasting equipment was brought from Egypt and installed in Gaza, but by the 1967 war against Israel, these attempts had been unsuccessful. By that time, Gazan villagers were gathering in coffee shops or homes to listen to international radio broadcasts. In the 1950s, attempts were made to establish *Eza'at Falastin* (Palestinian Broadcast) and to be related to Voice of

Arab radio station in Egypt, later replaced by the Palestine Radio Broadcast Programme through Voice of Arab station, broadcast daily from Cairo.

Radio was a particularly effective tool for communication with the Palestinian population – most of whom were illiterate. The medium also contributed to the consolidation of the Palestinian national heritage. In 1936, the radio *Jerusalem Calling* started broadcasting from Jerusalem. The famous Palestinian poet Ibrahim Toqan was the manager of the station and later replaced by the Palestinian politician Ajaj Nwaihed who was instrumental in providing a powerful platform for many Arab writers and artists. The station broadcast a news bulletin in Arabic, English and Hebrew, in addition to other programmes. During the 1948 war between Israel and Arab Palestinians when Israel occupied West Jerusalem, the station was attacked several times, forcing it to move its office from Jerusalem to Ramalla (in the West Bank). It continued to broadcast there until Jordan annexed the West Bank and the station moved to Jordan (Abu Shanab, 2001).

### **3.3 Media under Egyptian rule of Gaza 1948-1967**

After the 1948 war and the defeat of Arab armies in Palestine, Palestinians did not accept the results of the war and the establishment of the Israeli state. Later in 1949, governments of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon signed a truce agreement with Israel. Accordingly, Gaza came under Egyptian administration and it was announced that the legislative and administrative procedures which were in place before 1948 would continue. Accordingly, press and censorship laws, enacted during the British Mandate, were reactivated.

During the British Mandate, the civil population in Gaza was high, but after the 1948 war, residents of villages and cities fled and became refugees. The changing population structure affected social and economic life, leading to poverty and unemployment. Yet, despite refugee status, people were connected to their families and had other affiliations. This led to the appearance of new political entities such as the Palestinian Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood movement – both also active in the field of journalism. The Palestinian communists were the first political group to emphasise the need for a socially relevant press to fill the media vacuum in light of the conditions which existed in the Gaza Strip after 1948. Accordingly, communist activists started to

contact investors in Gaza in order to persuade them to start a local newspaper, which would not only play an important political role at a national level, but also be a profitable investment commercially. However, they abandoned the idea when told by powerful Egyptian officials that they would not be allowed to publish the newspaper unless it was overtly pro-Egyptian.

Politically too, the Egyptian administration in the Gaza Strip disapproved of the presence of the Palestinian Communist Party and it was banned. After this was announced in 1953, the Palestinian Communist Party established its secret newspaper which was called *Al-Sharara* (The Spark), and subsequently, in 1955, its name was changed to *Al-Jamaheer* (the Public) (Suleiman, 2009c). During the Egyptian Administration in Gaza, 12 newspapers had been established, with four new newspapers launched just in one year -1954 (Abu Shanab, 2001). The war against Egypt in 1956, and the occupation of Gaza Strip, affected Palestinian newspapers in such a way that they stopped publication and resumed only after the withdrawal of the Israeli forces in 1957. After that, the press gradually recovered and the Palestinian political and cultural life had witnessed a remarkable development. Accordingly, the Palestinian communist party started to work publicly and established their newspaper *Al-Tahrir* (The liberation). In addition, the printing press gradually expanded and began to flourish. This reflected the awareness of a need to pay attention to the development of mass communication. Furthermore, the emergence of new political parties assisted the development of the press and the establishment of new magazines and newspapers. This margin of freedom helped to create a public sphere and shaped Palestinian society. These newspapers and magazines were important in creating the first move towards a democratic society. During the Egyptian Administration in the Gaza Strip, a large number of magazines and newspapers were established; some existed for many years and had an important impact on various aspects of Palestinian life while others were forced to stop publication for political, economic or other reasons.

### **3.4 Palestinian media and Jordanian rule 1948-1967**

On 14 May 1948, Israel declared the establishment of the State of Israel based on the UN Partition Plan. By the end of 1948 the war between Arabs and Jews ended and Jordanian forces took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On April 3, 1949, Israel and Jordan signed an Armistice Agreement which allowed Jordanian forces to



keep control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Qahwaji, 1972). Jordan thus annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem and granted all Palestinian residents Jordanian citizenship. Palestinians were struggling over what constituted their identity, a theme dominant in the Palestinian press.

Despite political and social confusion, the Palestinian press, especially in the West Bank, thrived under the Hashemite rule. Jordanian Government considered the West Bank as part of Jordanian territories, thus benefiting Palestinian life there. Historians agree that under the Jordanian regime the period between 1951 and 1957 was of relative prosperity for the Palestinian Arab press. As literacy grew, more people were engaging with newspapers and magazines, including those which focused on literary, cultural and aesthetic issues. At the same time, Jordanian authorities also sought to control the Palestinian press when questions were raised in the press about the legitimacy of Hashemite rule over the West Bank. Many Arab countries distrusted King Abdullah of Jordan and suspected him of being in league with the Israelis, claiming that he had no intention of resisting the partition of Palestine. While visiting Jerusalem in July 1951, King Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian. King Husain came to power in May 1953 and appointed Dr. Fawzi al-Mulki, considered a liberal towards the press, as his prime minister. Al-Mulki suspended the Emergency Regulations which were passed in 1945. The relaxation of restrictions contributed to the escalating press, as many new newspapers and magazines were launched while others were restarted (Aruri, 1972).

During the Hashemite rule in the West Bank, the Palestinians opposed the close ties between Jordan and the United States. This tension was also visible in the media and the Jordanians authorities were careful to impose restrictions so that anti-American or anti-Western rhetoric did not enter the public sphere. The Palestinian frustration towards their Jordanian and other Arab leaders, made them realize that their salvation lay in their own hands. Therefore, in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established: Jordan resisted the establishment of the PLO and imposed restrictions on its publications. Opposing King Husain and his rule was the main focus of some Palestinian newspapers which enraged authorities in Amman. For example, Bashir Al-Barghuti, editor in chief of *Al-Taliaa* (The Frontier) newspaper and owner of *Al-Jamahir* (The Masses) newspaper, was imprisoned by the Jordanian government who refused to grant a license to his newspaper (Abu Shanab, 2001).

Despite such restrictions, Palestinian politicians recognized the importance of the press, as it became a direct means for expressing their concerns and aspirations. In 1953, Mahmoud Abu Alzoulof established *Al-Jihad* (The Struggle) newspaper in Jerusalem. Other newspapers to emerge included *Al-Manar*, while two others - *Al-Difa'a* (The Defence) and *Falastine* (Palestine) - were restarted. Later, *Al-Jihad* (The Struggle) and *Al-Difa'a* (The Defence) merged under the new name *Al-Quds* while *Al-Manar* and *Falastine* were merged under the name of *Al-Dustur* (The Constitution) (Terban, 2009). The Palestinian press struggled to represent the Palestinian identity, experiencing different degrees of political use and misuse as well as creating a social space within which a Palestinian public sphere could develop. However, all these newspapers were forced to stop after the Israeli government occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967.

### **3.5 Media and Palestinian diaspora 1948-1994**

After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian Administration and the West Bank was ruled by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Palestinian people fled to neighbouring Arab countries and became refugees in their own homeland. This tragedy galvanized many Palestinian intellectuals to set up political movements to highlight the problems faced by the people of Palestine. Some of these had an impact on both the Arab and the international arena. In this context, Palestinian media practitioners played a leading role in influencing the media agenda. Apart from the official newspapers and magazines of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) such as *Falastine Al-Thawra* (Palestine Revolution), *Falastin Al-Mohtala* (Occupied Palestine) and *Sout Al-Belad* (Voice of the Country), there were non-official newspapers and magazines for Palestinian factions such as *Al-Estiglal* (The Independence) and others.

Following the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, and appointment of Ahmad Al-Shukiri as its president, the PLO was concerned about communicating with the Palestinian peoples not just in Gaza and the West Bank but also those living in the Palestinian diaspora, scattered all over the Arab world. Therefore, in 1965, he ordered for the establishment of *Eza'at Sout Falastin* (Voice of Palestine Broadcast), which was considered to be the official voice of the PLO. At the

beginning, it was broadcasting from Cairo as a two hour daily programme on the short wave of Middle East Radio. Though the station played an important role in uniting the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation, its occasional criticism of the Egyptian government did not go down well with the authorities in Cairo. Consequently, the station was subjected to closure several times. Subsequently, the station moved to Baghdad and then to Beirut to continue its broadcasts (Abu Shanab, 2001).

The trials and tribulations of the media mirrored the social reality of Palestinians. After the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Palestinians were divided; some people were still living in Palestinian territories (The Gaza Strip and West Bank) under the occupation while others fled to refugee camps established by the United Nations in the neighbouring Arab countries. Despite the dispersal of the Palestinian people in refugee camps and extremely difficult living conditions, they were able to organize and develop political movements to effectively put the Palestinian issue onto the global media agenda. Palestinian intellectuals and journalists recognized the importance of media in communicating their struggle and sought to establish newspapers in the service of the Palestinian cause. The newspapers in exile were run by Palestinian factions who lobbied to bring together anti-Israeli forces to highlight the Israeli occupation of their territories (Totry, 2005). The reason behind deploying all means of information and communication was to influence international public opinion in favour of the Palestinian cause and to put continued pressure on decision-makers to make the Palestinian issue the centrepiece of international community's attention.

Palestinian movements employed the mass media to demonstrate the suffering of the Palestinian people and to highlight the injustice caused by the Israeli occupation as well as to counter the Israeli propaganda. Initially, this work was done by different newspapers and other media, but in 1969 the Palestinian National Council decided to consolidate the media into a single entity. The aim was to focus on the importance of advocacy to address the question of Palestine against Zionist propaganda. Furthermore, the entity was responsible for monitoring the Palestinian media and develop a unified opinion to promote the Palestinian cause (Abu Shanab, 2001). Accordingly, the Fatah Central Committee in 1972 decided to establish the Central Information Council (CIC) for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The CIC included all Palestinian media offices and radio stations operating from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia,

Kuwait and Libya. It also established *Falastin Al-Thawra* magazine (Palestine Revolution) which was a platform for all and provided a unified media perspective. Although CIC's main aim was to form a unified Palestinian opinion, not all Palestinian factions were committed to participate, and many continued to publish their own newspapers and magazines (ibid).

With the acceleration of technological progress, the Palestinian Liberation Organization felt the need for a news agency to collect and distribute news to local and international media. Accordingly, in 1972, the decision was made to establish the Palestine News Agency (WAFA) (Abu Shanab, 1988). It started to broadcast from its headquarter in Beirut and subsequently opened branches in many countries. WAFA focused on the dissemination of news all over the world and worked on providing a true picture of conditions at home and abroad of Palestinians, as well as reporting Israeli violations against the Palestinian people. In 1982, after Israeli forces invaded Lebanon, the Palestinian resistance movements were expelled from Beirut. Consequently, WAFA headquarters moved to Tunisia, and other magazines and newspapers such as the *Falastine Al-Thawra* (Palestine Revolution) magazine moved to Cyprus. Later in 1995 and as part of the Oslo Agreements and the return of the Palestinian Authority, WAFA and other media activities started to work from the Palestinian territories.

### **3.6 Media and Israeli occupation 1967-1994**

The Israeli war in 1967 led to the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. Consequently, Palestinian newspapers had stopped publications. To fill the media void in the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel sought to establish its Arabic newspaper *Al-Yaom* 'Today'. The newspaper was the voice of Israeli government and therefore not popular among Palestinians. Eventually, Israel realized that the newspaper was not reaching its intended audience and therefore, in 1968 Israeli government closed the newspaper and replaced it with *Al-Anbaa* (the News) newspaper (Yehoshua, 1974). This new newspaper was less hostile and more interested in the problems and conditions of the local people, but in 1985 this too ceased publication.

Most of the Israeli media supported Israeli government policies, justifying its military actions, while the Palestinian media reported the violations committed by the Israeli

occupation. Israeli government was concerned that the Palestinian factions were using the mass media as a tool in the struggle for freedom and therefore imposed limitations on freedom of expression which were implemented by military force. Jamal (2003) affirmed that Israel through its military procedures had manipulated every dominion of Palestinian public and private life. These procedures have had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of Palestinian people and have violated their basic human rights.

The 1967 war was a turning point for the Palestinians as it profoundly affected economic, social, political and cultural life. Palestinian press too faced many difficulties including Israeli attempts to thwart any new publications, and yet despite this, secret newspapers emerged, calling for resistance (Abu Ayyash, 1987). Eventually, the occupying power started granting licenses for newspapers and thus *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), *Al-Fajr* (the Dawn), *Al-Sha'ab* (the People), *Al-Ahed* (the Covenant) and other newspapers and magazines were established (Abu Shanab, 1988). However, under Israeli occupation both television and radio was restricted (Kuttab, 1993). Thus print media was the dominant medium for resistance and mobilization. During this period some Palestinian media was owned by various Palestinian factions, some based outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Nossek and Rinnawi stated that: 'There were three basic types of Palestinian media ownership during the period under Israeli military rule: (1) media wholly owned and controlled by Palestinian political parties inside and outside the PLO, and therefore lacking in independence; (2) independent media indirectly controlled and partly funded by either the Jordanian regime or the PLO; and (3) media wholly owned and managed by the Israeli military regime' (Nossek and Rinnawi, 2003, p. 187).

In 1968, Abu Alzoulof was able to merge *Al-Jihad* (The Struggle) and *Al-Difa'a* (The Defence) and to obtain an operating license from the Israeli Ministry of Interior to restart the newspaper under the new name *Al-Quds*. This newspaper enjoyed the widest circulation among the Palestinian daily press. Initially, most of its content was copied from other publications, and its news coverage for local issues was very limited (Terban, 2009). It maintained the mainstream of public opinion, and was eager to give space to Palestinian journalists and writers of all political affiliations. Despite its claim of independence, *Al-Quds* supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization during peace negotiations with Israel (Jamal, 2001).

During the occupation, Palestinian press in Gaza and West Bank experienced a series of arbitrary actions, including issuing a series of orders and sanctions, which limited the freedom of journalistic work. Norman (2005) noted that 'there is widespread popular support for democracy in Palestine, but the development of institutions to exercise the public will has been frustrated by both internal and external factors, most significantly the occupation' (p.1). Israeli authorities considered the Palestinian press as a tool for political incitement and therefore sought to prevent publishing newspapers. In addition, they also regularly closed the borders, thus preventing other Arab newspapers from entering the occupied territories. However, Palestinians have had access to other sources of media which broadcast to the occupied territories. They could watch Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli - both terrestrial and satellite - television. By beaming its programmes to the Palestinians, the Israeli authorities wanted to demonstrate the power they wielded in the region (Kuttab, 1993).

In 1972, the PLO established the weekly newspaper *Al-Fajr* (the Dawn), started by Yousef Naser and in June 1974, the newspaper became a daily. The Israeli authorities were exercised by the political nature of this particular newspaper and they kidnapped its chief editor Naser who was succeeded as chief editor by Mohammed Batrawi. Apart from its political role, *Al-Fajr* was also close to its readers and showed deep concern about their local problems. During the early 1980s *Al-Fajr* started publishing supplements such as *Al-Fajr* English, *Al-Fajr* Hebrew, and *Al-Fajr Al-Adabi* (Literature) (Abu Ayyash, 1987). The PLO continued supporting the newspaper, but in 1993, due to financial problems, the newspaper had stopped. *Al-sha'ab* (The People) newspaper, which began its publication in 1972, was also supported by the PLO (Shinar and Rubinstein, 1987). Ali Al-Khatib and Akram Haniya were among its founders and editorial staff. The paper was more radical in its tone and openly called for self determination for the Palestinian people. Consequently, Israeli authorities deported the two editors. The newspaper continued to be published until 1993 when it closed down after the PLO suffered from financial hardship. The militant newspaper *Al-Taliaa*, which openly criticised Israeli occupation and exposed military oppression, was started in February 1978 by Ilyas Nasrallah and Bashir Al-Barghuti. However, due to its criticism, Israeli government had forbidden the paper from distribution in the West Bank and Gaza (Idrees, 1987). In 1987, Palestinian journalists succeeded in establishing

a Journalists Association with Akram Haniya as its first chairman until Israel deported him to Jordan. Later, Radwan Abu ayyash led the Association but he too was arrested many times by Israeli authorities (Abu Ayyash, 1987).

In Gaza the press was even more limited, though by the 1970s, some newspapers and magazines had emerged. Zohair Al-Rayis was able to publish *Al-Oloum* (the Science) magazine while in 1978, Mohammed Khass started his *Al-Shorouq* magazine. This was a weekly publication which concentrated on investigative reporting about the political situation in the Gaza Strip (Suleiman, 2009c). However, the difficult conditions and restrictions were taking many forms including temporary or permanent closure, restrictions on distribution and regular detention of journalists. According to Najjar (1997), Israeli authorities resurrected the two main regulations imposed during the British mandate of Palestine: the 1933 Press Ordinance and the 1945 Emergency Regulations. The strict censorship imposed by Israeli military regime severely limited the journalistic activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Israeli authorities also pressurized the Palestinian journalists to pursue the official political line but generally failed to implement this policy. Israeli military continued to monitor all Palestinian media to verify that they did not contain any hostile message against the state of Israel (Friedman, 1983).

One consequence of such censorship was that the Palestinian journalists failed to do their jobs properly and did not link up with the public or to report their problems and therefore largely failed to function as a local press. Self censorship obliged journalists to write about international news instead of local news while Israeli censorship was encouraging the Palestinian press to mostly cover social conditions and habitual practices. Publishing under the Israeli occupation raised concerns among Palestinian journalists and intellectuals who argued that such coverage can propagate the myth of Israeli democracy, and social news about the Palestinians activities would provide information for Israeli intelligence. Moreover, it was argued that Israel was not even bearing any criticism for its illegal actions. Ali Yai'ish, the publisher of *Al-Sha'ab* newspaper, was threatened by Israeli military for criticizing the Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank while editors of *Al Fajr*, the most nationalist newspaper, which called for fighting against the Israeli occupation were censored by the Israeli government (Ashour, 1995). According to Friedman (1983) in August 1982, the Israeli government

confined the editors of the three East Jerusalem publications *Al-Fajr*, *Al-Sha'ab*, and *Al-Talia*, and imposed restrictions on their editors. In November 1982, the Israeli military court jailed Samaan Khoury, the editor of *Al-Fajr* English edition, and forced him to pay a \$100 fine. These actions were taken against him because he had published two issues of the bulletin of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1986, the Palestinian journalist Zeyad Abu-Zeyad started the first Palestinian newspaper in Hebrew language (Terban, 2009) while in 1987, Abu-Zeyad started a pro-Jordanian newspaper *Al-Nahar* (The Day) (Shinar and Rubinstein, 1987; Abu Shanab, 2001). During the negotiations between the PLO and Israel, the newspaper criticised the PLO for not coordinating with Arab countries, especially with Jordan. This led to the closure of the newspaper when the Palestinian Authority took control of the West Bank (Jamal, 2001). According to Abu-Shanad (2001), by 1987, about 22 newspapers, some weekly and others dailies, had received a license to publish. During the 1987 first Intifada, the Israeli government accused the Palestinian newspapers of inciting popular opinion against Israeli occupation. This situation led to Israeli banning some newspapers permanently and others temporarily. According to the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, during the first Intifada as many as 39 Palestinian journalists were detained (JMCC, 1989).

In 1977, Palestinian journalists sought to establish a Palestinian Press Service (PPS) office in Jerusalem. The PPS was pro-PLO and tended to provide information for local and foreign press in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Shinar, 1987). The aim was to provide an alternative to Israeli news coverage of events in the occupied territories. The press offices functioned as a local news agency; it distributed news to local and foreign correspondents and international newspapers and news agencies. However, Israeli occupation continued suppressing Palestinian journalists and press institutions, forcing some newspapers to transfer their offices from East Jerusalem to the West Bank. In addition, Israeli authorities implemented a need for permission to enter Jerusalem or to provide press cards and thus in some cases denied Palestinian journalists access to Jerusalem, where most of the press offices were located. Consequently, many journalists lost their jobs. Despite the daily conflict with Israeli military, Palestinians continued to bring their side of the story to the world. During the intifada, Palestinian used the media to achieve international solidarity and raise awareness among the international community about the plight of the Palestinian people fighting for their



freedom. This had irritated Israeli authorities and they sought to impose further restrictions to control the media. Moreover, with the news of intifada reaching the world's news rooms, Israel realized that it was getting a bad international press, therefore, as a pretext of providing security and protection to foreign press crews, its governmental press office sought to accompany international journalists in pre-planned trips to selected areas.

Israeli occupation directs all sectors of Palestinians life, including media institutions. Israeli rule of the Palestinian territories is characterized by the military regime. Therefore, military censorship is applied to media institutions, affecting how the media function in all of its processes, from news production to circulation. Israeli censors not only impose restrictions on terms used by Palestinian journalists, but also provide alternative terms and expressions as requirements for publication. The editors are obliged to accept censored terms or abandon the whole article. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights 'The Israeli government's harassment of independent media coverage has taken several forms: Violence against Palestinian and international journalists; interference in confiscation of news material; harassment and intimidation of journalists; and arbitrary closure of news organizations and independent media outlets. In their abuse of personnel, Israeli authorities have threatened, interrogated, detained, beaten, fired at, and shot journalists and other media personnel. They have also shelled and destroyed media institutions, confiscated press equipment and press cards, and occupied foreign media offices' (PCHR, 2000).

Israeli control of Palestinian media can take various forms: administrative custody, closure of newspaper offices, raids of journalists' houses, deportation of journalists, equipment confiscation, and detention without charge or detention with the charge of belonging to banned Palestinian factions. According to the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre foreign press can also be subjected to daily harassment (JMCC, 1989). Israeli occupation practices against Palestinian and foreign journalists represent violation of international conventions. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the right to freedom of expression as a fundamental human right, and the right to search for and receive information without restriction is essential to guarantee the exercise of the freedom of expression. In addition, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 affirms in Article 19 that 'Everyone

shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice' (UNHCHR, 1966). Moreover, Article 79 of the additional protocol of the Fourth Geneva Convention 1949 on the protection of victims of international armed conflict, granted journalists protection when it considered 'Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians...', and affirmed that 'They shall be protected as such under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians...' (ICRC, 1949).

Even though military censorship obstructed the Palestinian press, Palestinian journalists have developed a number of ways to subvert the censorship, including formulating new words, choosing soft language or using simple images. According to Diamond (1999), democracy is a guarantee of human rights, and the role of media in promoting democracy is to reveal abuses against human rights. In this context, Palestinian journalists were able to report human rights violation committed by Israeli occupation. Over the years, they have built a relationship with human rights organizations working in the Palestinian Territories and they report abuses for publications around the world. Consequently, these reports from human rights organizations represent good material for the international media and human rights activists.

### **3.7 Media under Palestinian Authority**

According to the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel had to withdraw from Gaza and Jericho city of West Bank. As a result in 1994 the Palestinian Authority (PA) had been established and returned to take over the Palestinian territories. This situation has made the Palestinian media expect to work freely and enjoy the freedom from the Israeli censorship. In addition, the PA had committed to respect freedom of expression and Human rights. But the expectations have failed where the Palestinian Authority have to suppress the freedom of speech in order to satisfy the US Administration and to commit with its agreements with Israel.

The creation of Palestinian Authority formed a new socio-political situation. The political groups were divided into two main parties; one that supports the PLO and its

negotiations with Israel and others that refuse and condemn the agreements. Realizing the importance of the media in mobilizing public opinion, each party tried to use its own media to shape the public sphere and to succeed in gaining the public support. There was race to control and own the media in the Palestinian Territories. The PA started two newspapers *Al-Haya Al-Jadida* (The New Life), and *Al-Ayyam* (The Days). Started in November 1994, *Al-Haya Al-Jadida* replaced the official PLO newspaper *Falastine Al-Thawra* (Palestine Revolution) and continued to represent the official PA political line while *Al-Ayyam* started in December 1995 and represented new editions of *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn) and *Al-Sha'ab* (The People), which were linked to the PLO and had been recently closed.

The other parties which condemned the negotiations with Israel are the Islamic parties, led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. These parties sought to own the media to mobilize the public and gain their support (Jamal, 2005). Hamas established its weekly newspaper *Al-Watan* (The Homeland) and criticised the Palestinian Authority for its agreement with Israel and subsequent actions. Another newspaper, *Al-Resala* (The Message), started in 1996, presented Hamas views and also criticised the PA. The Islamic Jihad founded their newspaper *Al-Estiqlal* (The Independence) which reflected the party position and criticised the Palestinian Authority's strategies. The appearance of such critical voices irritated the Palestinian Authority and they began to harass the newspaper. According to Jamal (2003) the Palestinian Authority has cancelled the licenses of *Al-Watan* and *Al-Estiqlal* and closed eight television stations in the West Bank.

At the beginning of the Palestinian Authority period there were two newspapers in the Palestinian territories, *Al-Nahar* and *Al-Quds*, in addition to other weeklies and periodicals. The former was pro-Jordanian, criticising the PLO for negotiating with Israel and signing the Oslo agreement. Such an editorial line contributed to the closure of the newspaper in July 1994, ordered by the Palestinian Authority, after a lengthy campaign of repression against the newspaper and its staff. The second newspaper, *Al-Quds*, supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization in its negotiations with Israel and avoided any criticism of the PA or of Israel (Jamal, 2001). Though the Palestinian Authority claims that it believes in democracy, its actions against journalists and media organizations opposed to it paint a different picture. To deal with such drastic

measures, many Palestinian newspapers started to practice self censorship in order to avoid harassment and closure.

It should be noted that soon after Arafat became the head of PA he started to establish national institutions in Gaza and the West Bank. He and his close colleagues managed to control all official Palestinian institutions, prevailing over every level of decision-making by appointing people loyal to him in central, sensitive positions. Arafat was acutely aware of the power of the mass media and in July 1994, the PA started the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), to be led by his appointee, Radwan Abu Ayyash, a former head of the Palestinian Journalist Association in the West Bank. Abu Ayyash, a Fatah activist and an Arafat loyalist, also ran a public radio station, Voice of Palestine, which started broadcasting in July 1994. Its objectives were to spread the message of solidarity and to create harmony among Palestinians in order to achieve an independent Palestinian state. The television station started broadcasting in 1996 from its main office which was located in Gaza at Arafat's headquarters and was run by Hisham Micki, another Arafat loyalist.

Outside the PA media system, there was also a boom in television as more and more Palestinian factions sought to establish local private cable television stations to express their views. The large number of private television and radio stations reflects the freedom of expression that the Palestinians have acquired under the PA. In this context, the Ministry of Information in Palestine referred to these stations as allowing 'people to express themselves in matters concerning their daily life. The authority should not monopolize information about cultural, intellectual, and political activities. This deepens democracy and the public freedom and creates a large space for argumentation between different ideas' (Al-Bayader Assiyasi, 1997, p.54).

Despite the large number of private television and radio stations in the Palestinian territories, there were no broadcasting laws to arrange its functions. Though plans have been made to issue such laws, they have not been finalized even in 2011. The question of spectrum and radio frequencies for the Palestinian territories is still being negotiated between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. However, a small number of frequencies have been granted to the Palestinian Authority (Sakr, 2007).

In the context of state-building, the interdependence of the media and the dominant elite is essential; it works as a constructive tool and contributes to the success of national development. However, in the case of the PA – which controls much of the media – this relationship has been deeply problematic, with the media functioning as a mouthpiece of the PA elite, who use and abuse it in order to present their views and defend their political agenda (Jamal, 2001).

Despite PA's apparent commitment to protect the freedom of the press, many media offices have been closed and Palestinian journalists jailed. In addition, different forms of censorship continue to take place. The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the decision of the Palestinian Authority in July 2009 to close the Aljazeera office in the West Bank after the channel aired a contentious interview with one Fatah member (CPJ, 2009).

The creation of the Palestinian Authority symbolised the establishment of a mini-state with its ministries and a bureaucratic system. The Ministry of Information was established in June 1994 to deal with the media, the press and the right to freedom of expression, according to which all Palestinian factions could own media entities (Nazzal, 1999). Moreover, the Palestinian press law was signed by President Arafat and issued in June 1995. This law replaced the 1933 Press Ordinance and the 1945 Emergency Regulations which were adopted by Israel during its rule in the Palestinian territories. Arafat was aware of criticism by local and international human rights organizations. Therefore, he frequently spoke publically about democracy and freedom. In an interview with Larry King on CNN, Arafat affirmed that the Palestinians have a free press and that they can even criticise him and his government because criticism and disagreement was part of the Palestinian experience. He added, 'it is part of my power and part of democracy'. However, there was a clear gap between what Arafat declared and what was being implemented on the ground.

According to the International Centre Against Censorship and the Centre for Media Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, 'the law provisions are not compatible with Palestine's international commitments to respect and protect freedom of expression' (Article 19, p. 2). Given this context, freedom of expression is an essential element of democracy. This has been accepted by many international organizations. The

United Nations Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights 'Freedom of expression, to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas are essential both (i) to the individual's self-fulfilment and thereby the person's quality of life; and (ii) one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress' (Greve, 2007).

In order to gain public support, the Islamic movement Hamas launched its *Al-Aqsa* TV station in Gaza. The launch was in January 2006 and came a few days before Palestinian legislative elections. The station reflects Hamas views and demonstrates the positive aspects of a movement considered a terrorist organization by the US and Israel. Just three weeks after the launch, the Palestinian Authority closed the station on the grounds that it did not have the proper license to broadcast. The head of the station Raed Abu Dayer admitted to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights that the station could not have the license because the Ministry of Information did not accept its application (PCHR, 2004).

Away from this political battle over control of the airwaves, the Palestinians are watching TV through satellite dishes which have become affordable. Indeed, even before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the construction of television and radio stations, Palestinians were watching Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian programmes (Kuttab, 1993). The Palestinian Authority barely established a public broadcasting service as the Israeli occupation restricted TV and radio stations during its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Even though the broadcasters started airing, there were restrictions over what should be broadcast. They were obliged to support the Oslo agreement so as to stabilize the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Palestinian politicians took advantage of the new medium to promote their interests: it was normal to see programmes supporting the Fatah party, represented by President Arafat.

Despite restrictions by the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian businessmen, political factions and other groups were able to start their own TV and radio stations. The proliferation of these stations led to a remarkable shift from a state-owned media system to one hostage to the plurality of the market marketplace.

Some of these stations presented the voices which opposed the Oslo agreement and criticised Palestinian Authority practices. Consequently, the Palestinian Authority sought to close many unauthorized stations. Later, after the start of the Second Intifada in 2000, the PBC served as a tool of struggle against the Israeli occupation. The PBC covered the Israeli invasion and attacks on Palestinians extensively. This coverage irritated Israel and Israeli troops attacked the PBC and its correspondents (PCHR, 2002).

In January 2006, Hamas won the legislative elections in Gaza, indicating the end of the Palestinian Authority rule there. Clashes between Fatah and Hamas factions led to the creation of two authorities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In 2007 all Arab efforts to form a national unity government failed. Consequently, the tensions had risen to the level of an armed conflict during which Hamas took over the Palestinian Authority institutions in the Gaza Strip. This political conflict between Fatah and Hamas also affected freedom of expression. Many journalists and media entities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had witnessed several attacks. A number of radio and television stations as well as newspapers were attacked and their equipment confiscated (MADA, 2009b). The dispute between the two factions led the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank to ban Hamas newspapers; meanwhile Hamas prohibited Fatah newspapers from entering Gaza. In addition, Hamas raided Palestine Television and confiscated its equipment. The Palestine Television office in Ramallah was taken over while the Al-Aqsa television station continued broadcasting.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

As the above overview of the historical development of the media and Palestine shows that the press has always been a highly politicised institution in the region. The Ottoman powers attempted to be democratic through the constitution they proclaimed in 1908. This constitution allowed for the emergence of a political press. There were disputes over the media between the Arab-Palestinians and the Jewish groups who were living in close proximity in Palestine. The role of the democratic media is to survey state actions, however during the Ottoman period media performance was aligned with the state.

As was the case with other colonial systems, the freedom of expression was extremely limited under the Ottoman Empire, which proscribed any criticism of the colonial

power. Media outlets and journalists were subject to constant threats. Ottoman rulers came into power without election and thus were anti-democratic, and people were unable to participate in the decision-making process. During the period of the British Mandate, the press experienced relative openness, leading to rapid developments in the field of journalism. However, the British Mandate also sought to impose restrictions over the press.

Palestine is a conflict zone because of its position geographically and historically as a holy place for the world's three major religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The media in Palestine has been a target of all the powers which have ruled over it during the last century. Independent media remained an illusion and varying forms of censorship and self-censorship continued to shape journalism. The different forms of censorship prevented journalists from taking part in promoting debate and democracy in Palestinian society. During the Egyptian period, the government adopted a press law which was first enacted during the British Mandate. This increased censorship and obstructed the media from functioning fully. Even during the Jordanian regime the government imposed restrictions upon the Palestinian press, despite its relative prosperity. The press in the diaspora had made use of several mediums and played an important role in uniting the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. The diaspora – with its access to media outlets in different countries - also contributed to bringing the world's attention to the cause of Palestinian freedom.

Political instability and continued Israeli occupation also severely damaged the evolution of democracy in Palestine. Palestine is at an early stage of state-building. Therefore, media independence and the protection of human rights are essential tools for the execution of democracy. Israel too sought to influence Palestinian opinion by establishing newspapers specifically aimed at the Palestinian population. However, the venture failed. Israel was deeply aware of the importance of the media in exposing its abuses of Palestinian rights; consequently, it imposed several forms of censorship on both the Palestinian and international media operating in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian press in Gaza and the West Bank experienced a series of arbitrary actions against them during the occupation. However, despite such restrictions the press was able to maintain a close relationship with the Palestinian people. Despite the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian press was able to galvanise public sentiment against the



occupation. It must be remembered that the crucial role of the media in a democratic society is to reveal human rights violations. Accordingly, Palestinian and foreign journalists in the Palestinian territories were able to report human rights abuses committed by the Israeli occupation.

Unfortunately, the situation of the media under the Palestinian Authority was not particularly better. The institutional structure of the Palestinian Authority was highly bureaucratic and, in addition, the dominant role of the Palestinian elite had a major impact on the media system. The Palestinian Authority committed to the Oslo agreement, to peace with Israel and tried to absorb the Islamic parties, but they have been uncooperative. Both sides were struggling to own the media to gain public support and therefore started to establish media institutions. Palestine Television had to back the Palestinian Authority and its programme features had to support the Oslo agreement. This did not correspond with the policy of opposing Islamic parties which continued to resist the Israeli occupation. Therefore, the Islamic movement Hamas established its TV station prior to the 2006 Palestinian elections and tried to compete with Palestine TV. Consequently, the PA closed the station because it did not have a license, and imposed restrictions on the media. After Hamas won the legislative elections, the conflict between the PA and Hamas has intensified. Subsequently, Hamas took over and controlled Gaza. Different media outlets engaged with this political struggle, with each party trying to use the media as a means to electoral gains. In such a polarized political situation, the media – especially television - has been used to realise political projects. Ultimately, the Palestinian media failed to fulfil its duty and lost some of its credibility in Palestinian eyes. The next chapter will describe the methods that I deployed as I approached my field research and collected data from Palestinians in order to answer the key research questions in this thesis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the methods I deployed as I approached my field research and collected data in order to answer the key research questions in this thesis. These questions aim to explore the extent to which the two leading Palestinian television channels, Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV, enhance democratic communication. They also aim to explore the perceptions of the Palestinian people of the two television networks and their role in state-building. The two channels, which are allied to the main political parties, Fatah and Hamas, seek to influence the public sphere and both channels have played an important role in the socio-political development of Palestinian society: consequently their contribution to state-building deserves special attention.

It is also essential to look into the ideologies and policies of both channels to see to what extent these influence coverage of particular events. This provides an understanding of the nature of the media organizations operating within Palestinian society - a society making conscious moves towards the establishment of a democratic political system. It is essential to triangulate a number of methodological strategies and so both qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed. Social survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were combined in order to examine the questions raised in this thesis. Indeed, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods can be very useful and result in enriched data (Winslow et al., 2002). The strength of data collected through each method combined to provide an opportunity to triangulate the results. Combining these methods was also a useful tool for investigating the relationship between media and democracy in the context of state-building.

After the justification of the rationale for my methodological choices, it is important to shed some light on the different ways in which these methodologies have been deployed. Different approaches were employed to develop a scientific set of data that reflects the stratified structure of Palestinian society. This chapter discusses the variety of research approaches, divided into three sections, each dealing with one of the

methods used in this thesis. The first part will concentrate on focus groups, the second will discuss semi-structured interviews, and the third will focus on survey methods.

#### **4.1 Research challenges: media research in a war zone**

Conducting academic research in politically difficult circumstances such as those prevalent in the Gaza Strip was a major challenge for the researcher. On the one hand, there is state censorship, bureaucracy and harassment and on the other there is suspicion among many towards researchers. This can create a lack of willingness to participate in discussion and a lack of honesty when answering research questions. In such circumstances researchers need to overcome interviewees' suspicion and to build rapport and trust (Clark, 2006). Clark's study showed that conducting qualitative research in Arab countries is a big challenge, especially any research related to authoritarian political situations.

Given this context, I was aware of the problems I might encounter as I embarked upon my research. In addition, I was aware of the need to find a way to deal with or to avoid such difficult circumstances. I would have to avoid traditional sensitivities and provide a comfortable environment for my informants. Indeed, being a Palestinian myself and having grown up in Palestine was a huge help. My existing social network helped me to overcome some of the problems, for example those involving such issues as trust and confidence – a crucial dynamic between a researcher and his informants. Moreover, using the snowballing method, especially through my social contacts, I managed to create trust among my informants and avoid harassment from the bureaucratic establishment.

Being a male researcher was another challenge as it was not always easy to meet and interview female informants in Gaza. Indeed, most females will not agree to meet with men in public places. Clark's study showed that most female researchers found that being female was helpful when conducting research related to, or involving interviews with, women (Clark, 2006). Therefore, in some areas of my research it was necessary for me to seek female assistance to help recruit female participants for focus groups.

#### **4.2 Socio-political contexts of Palestinian society**

Being a Palestinian facilitated the task of interacting with Palestinians from different backgrounds. Being an insider from the same background meant I understood expected cultural norms and could avoid offending people through ignorance of their circumstances and culture. The residents of the Gaza Strip are currently living through a very difficult period, especially since the war of 2008. The internal political divisions and rivalries within various Palestinian factions have further compounded problems. Living conditions are dire: there is no fuel, and electricity is available for only about eight hours a day. The number of unemployed young people is constantly rising and, to compound the suffering, there are regular Israeli attacks on towns and villages in Gaza. Not surprisingly, most people are desperate. In addition, the takeover of political power in the Gaza Strip by Hamas in 2006 and the resultant Israeli siege have made the life of Gazans even more challenging. Therefore, my research trip to Gaza to conduct fieldwork presented a range of difficulties. After the Hamas movement succeeded in extending its control over Gaza in June 2007, Israel closed the borders and prevented civilians from entering or leaving the Strip. Entering Gaza was, for me, a real problem. The British Consulate had arranged my exit from Gaza in 2008 when I joined the PhD programme at the University of Westminster, so I asked my supervisor to write a letter to the consulate in Jerusalem in order to arrange my entrance to Gaza to do my field work: the consulate had responded to my request saying they would do their best, but were unable to make any guarantees.

It is important to note that in 2008 human rights organisations in Gaza, Israel and the European Union had pressurised Israel to allow students from Gaza to be allowed to leave the territory to pursue higher education. The result of this was that Israel had an agreement with European embassies in Israel that each embassy had to make arrangements for the students studying in its country. Thus a representative from the British Embassy had to come to the Gazan border and escort me through the Israeli territories to Jordan. So my return journey for this research was from Jordan to Gaza, where an embassy representative had to meet me at the Jordanian border to accompany me through the Israeli territories to the Gazan border. Eventually, I succeeded in entering Gaza.

Once I had completed Israeli formalities and entered Gaza, I had to deal with the Hamas security system. Hamas soldiers stopped me once I was through the border and took me to a room where I was to be searched and questioned. Needless to say, Hamas soldiers are usually suspicious of anyone entering from the Israeli territories. After they searched all my bags and questioned me, I was released. Some days later my telephone rang. A Hamas official was on the phone asking me to go to their office: after a lengthy interrogation, I was released during the night.

In Gaza Strip, Hamas has banned the Fatah movement and arrested its members in response to Fatah actions against Hamas members in the West Bank. Consequently, residents have to be very cautious when they talk to researchers. But being Gazan has helped me to create mutual trust with people I interviewed during my fieldwork. This trust allowed them to speak to me without any constraints caused by lack of trust. I heard comments such as, 'What democracy we can talk about while our people are fighting', or 'Our democracy is better than any other country: in elections the president gets 99.99%', or 'The two television channels are like fighting between a man and his wife'. I spent a great deal of time learning about people's hopes and ideas for the future of Palestine and the role of the media in state-building.

While doing my fieldwork in Gaza I was regularly monitoring the two channels, Palestine and Al-Aqsa. The content of these channels enabled me to understand their policies, ideologies and principles and to assist my research I recorded some news programmes. While I was recording I encountered many problems: on occasion electricity was cut off and there was regular disturbance of satellite signals. This meant I could not follow the news regularly. Israeli drones (spying flights) interfere with television signals: these drones are routinely used in the skies above Gaza to track Palestinian militants. The drones work through digital signals which interfere and intersect with satellite signals. This situation results in very bad satellite signals in which watching television becomes impossible.

Despite the difficult circumstances of my research, I tried to provide the participants with a secure and non-threatening environment. This included assuring my informants I would not mention their names in this thesis, in accordance with their requests. Although most participants were personal contacts, the main challenge was to overcome

their suspicions as the research topic is largely, if not completely, political. Yet my informants were initially cautious about sharing their real views and opinions. I was careful to explain myself and the purpose of my research to the participants, clarifying my need to record their responses but promising maximum privacy for them and promising that the data would be used only by me and for my research. To ensure this, I asked each to choose an alias to be used instead of real names.

Exit from Gaza after completing my research was another challenge. After the incident in May 2010, in which the Israeli navy attacked a ship and killed nine Turkish activists, the world pressurised Israel to end its siege of Gaza and to open the borders to allow humanitarian aid to enter. Subsequently Israel had allowed some humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. In addition, Egypt had opened its borders to allow people and aid to enter Gaza. When I finished my field work and decided to exit Gaza, I again contacted my supervisor requesting a letter to the British Embassy in order to arrange my exit. This letter had reached the embassy, but they refused to arrange my exit. Their explanation for this was that the Egyptian borders were open and they could not pressure the Israelis to give permission.

The only way to exit Gaza then was to pass through Egyptian borders. On 24 July 2010 I packed my luggage and went to the Egyptian border. All Palestinians who pass through Egypt have to be questioned by Egyptian intelligence. Thus, I was questioned about my activities in Gaza and where I was going, what I was doing in London, and the subject of my PhD. In addition, Egyptian security gather all Palestinians intending to pass through Egyptian territories and deport them by bus, guarded by security personnel. I reached Cairo International Airport after six hours of travelling and the next day I took my flight to London. Even at Heathrow Airport problems seem to continue: when I submitted my passport to the immigration officer, I was asked many questions, especially after the official knew that I had been in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, he called a colleague to examine my passport and to interrogate me. The officer identified himself and started to ask me about my visit to Gaza, the purpose of my visit to London and the nature of my research work. He insisted that I tell him all about my PhD, including my methodologies and why I went to Gaza. I was even asked whether I had interviewed anyone from Hamas, and was questioned about the general political situation in Gaza.

My passport was stamped and I was allowed entry only after the official was satisfied with the answers I gave during a prolonged interrogation session.

#### **4.3 Focus groups pilot study**

As focus groups are a relatively new phenomenon in the Arab world (Clark, 2006), I decided to conduct two pilot focus groups. These groups were to test the questions and to see how participants would respond and participate during the discussion. Ultimately, I managed to establish two groups of university students representing both sexes. Each group consisted of six members; three male and three female. Conducting these focus groups was very useful as it was the first time I had conducted interviews in such small groups. Moreover, it took me a while to get the discussion going with the first group. I also discovered how some students from both groups were trying to dominate the discussion while others responded only when asked specific questions. In addition, some questions had to be rephrased to make them clearer and more concise.

#### **4.4 Focus groups as a social laboratory: recruitment difficulties**

Winslow *et al* (2002) note that focus groups can provide rich data and enable the researcher to learn more about participants' feelings. In addition, focus groups generate interaction among group members, in which they validate, verify or challenge one another (Morgan, 1996; Hollander, 2004; Berg, 2007). Participants in focus groups considered the main source of information about themselves and issues affecting their lives. In this thesis focus groups are the main means of information gathering. For my focus groups, I decided to use the snowballing method to choose the participants. It suffices to note that snowball sampling is defined as a technique where the researcher finds members by establishing an initial contact who then contacts a second potential participant, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). However, the snowballing method is a non probability sampling technique used to locate participants with certain characteristics necessary in a study of a particular population (Berg, 2004). It was important to choose this method because participants knew each other which created a secure environment. This was essential, especially as my research involved sensitive topics. Indeed, conducting research in complex circumstances such as those existing in Gaza was very challenging. Therefore, participants needed to feel completely secure and able to trust each other when talking about political issues.

In total, eight focus groups were conducted in different parts of the Gaza Strip. It was very difficult to go to the West Bank, the other part of the Palestinian Territories, because of the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities. The focus groups included Palestinian university students, human rights activists and journalists as well as Palestinians from a range of backgrounds. I chose universities because students are a key target of Palestinian political factions, which consider the educated young to be an important constituency among which they seek to extend their political base. The Palestinian political factions consider universities to be good places to practise politics and conduct political campaigns. In addition, these factions are very much concerned to have a presence within universities in order to attract new converts to their cause. It is not surprising then that a majority of university students are politically affiliated and to find representatives of all political factions in the universities.

I also consulted some NGOs in Gaza as these are places where training courses, workshops and conferences are regularly conducted in which people of all economic, social and political backgrounds participate. The main reason for this was to choose people with diverse backgrounds and from different locations within the Gaza Strip. All focus group discussions were recorded on my mobile phone which was placed in the centre of the table. In addition, all discussions were conducted in Arabic and then translated and transcribed into English. I have manually transcribed, translated, analysed and selected quotations to present the data in this thesis.

Each focus group consisted of at least eight participants. The groups targeted eight sub-groups categorized as follows:

- Fatah faction, both sexes (two groups)
- Fatah and Hamas faction, males (two groups)
- Fatah and Hamas faction, females (two groups)
- All factions and independent, both sexes (except Hamas and Islamic faction) (two groups)



#### **4.5 Recruitment of participants for focus groups**

Many Palestinians, like other Arabs, are not familiar with focus group techniques. This view is supported by Winslow et al (2002), who noted that focus groups are used widely with western populations but in only a limited way in cross-cultural research. This means that western populations are more familiar with focus groups, while in the Arab world they are a relatively new phenomenon. The advantages of conducting research based on focus groups are many: it can give participants time to recall and reflect on their experiences while discussion takes place. This may prompt further discussion as others agree or disagree and introduce experiences of their own.

In Gaza Strip, I have good contacts which helped me to recruit participants from different political backgrounds. I had chosen universities and NGOs as the basis for my focus groups because of the nature and significance of these two forums in Palestinian politics. Most universities and NGOs in Gaza are considered to be a very good arena for politics. For example, Al-Azhar University, a well-known university in Gaza, has various Palestinian factions represented among its staff and students. Every major faction has its own community within the university. These communities conduct political activities such as elections, workshops and conferences. I decided to approach the university to establish my focus groups research. Initially, I pursued the institutional route, for example requesting permission from the university administration office to conduct focus groups within the university. The university authorities were suspicious of researchers and worried about anyone talking about the political situation. Therefore, they refused to give permission. Ultimately, I decided to approach a contact who works as a lecturer at Al-Azhar University. I asked him to put me in contact with a student with an affiliation to Fatah and another student from Hamas. Later, I asked the students to recruit others from their factions. I had a meeting with the students and explained the purpose of the research to them. We agreed to set two different dates for the groups' discussion outside the university where I had to find a location to conduct the sessions. Indeed, these groups were the hardest to set up, because it was very difficult to gather students representing Fatah and Hamas together in one place. But eventually the two groups agreed after my contact at the university and I reassured and convinced them of the importance of the research. I asked the students to meet outside the university because it was difficult to discuss political issues on the campus. However I was able to find a venue: I asked one of my friends, who owns a restaurant, 'Délice', to arrange a

quiet space for us. Finally, two male groups from Fatah and Hamas were established. These groups were very challenging to manage: members of each faction tried their best to show the ugly side of the other and justify its own actions. The tension was very high, but I tried to control the situation.

Given the political situation in Gaza, it was difficult to consult groups within civil society without having proper contacts. Therefore, I decided to approach a friend who works for the Society Voice Foundation in the city of Gaza. Society Voice Foundation is a well-known NGO which has played a leading role in empowering women, youth and children and has contributed to the development of Palestinian civil society. The centre runs programmes and workshops to enhance women's and youth's capacity-building and improve their participation in civil society activities. Indeed, there was a workshop running about violence against women in marginalized places in Gaza. I asked my contact to help me in recruiting male and female participants from independents and all other factions. After we managed to recruit the participants, my contact and I set the dates and explained the intention of the research to those who had agreed to come and participate in the discussion. We used the centre's conference room to deliver the session. My contact inaugurated the session then I introduced the discussion. I managed to conduct two mixed groups of both sexes from independent and all other factions. The first group consisted of nine participants, while the second group had eleven participants as staff working in the centre joined us.

Similarly, I used my contacts at the Palestinian Centre for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development (PANORAMA), a well-known centre in Gaza, to organize another focus group. PANORAMA works in many areas such as democracy dissemination, community development and training and capacity-building. I had experience of working at the centre previously as I used to lead training courses and workshops for participants from different backgrounds, ages, and sexes in the Gaza Strip.

While I was in Gaza during my field trip, I learned that there was a training course about good governance which the centre was organizing. I requested the centre's director to connect me with one of the participants from Fatah faction. He was able to recruit other participants from both sexes for the two groups. After confirming the

names of participants for the two groups – each comprising of ten participants - I managed to set dates for the two sessions. The plan was to target an equal number of males and females in each group, but unfortunately two participants from the first group had to leave the session during the discussion, so the first group ended with eight participants. Eventually, two mixed groups from Fatah faction took part in the discussions. The participants were initially very suspicious, as Fatah faction in the Gaza Strip is restricted. But ultimately they became more relaxed when I reassured them that their names would not be mentioned and my research was solely for academic purposes.

In the case of the female groups for both Fatah and Hamas, I had chosen Al-Aqsa University to conduct my focus groups sessions. As a lecturer working at the university, I managed to have all the facilities to conduct my sessions. I contacted one of my students from Fatah faction and another from Hamas. I asked these students to recruit others from their respective factions. I managed to sit with the students and explain the purpose of the research then they all agreed to the dates that we set. Ultimately, two female groups from Fatah and Hamas were conducted. It is important to note that as the students are studying different disciplines, democracy to them meant only elections so I had to explain the term democracy in order to proceed with the discussion.

#### **4.6 Focus groups: methodology and difficulties**

Managing the focus groups in the Gaza Strip was difficult, in the sense that you cannot control other factors such as time, people's concentration, adjustment, behavioural pattern and attitudes towards politics. Indeed, my field experience was very different from what I had expected from my own studies of academic literature on how to moderate focus groups. I already accepted that people's cultures differ but managing focus groups has trained me to be patient and have more respect for cultural conventions and traditions. Before beginning the session at PANORAMA centre I asked the participants to switch off their mobile phones. They explained this would not be possible as they were working and have colleagues, friends and families who want to be in touch with them during the day. During the session, two participants had to respond to calls. I had to pause the session and wait, then restart again after they finished. Such disruptions inevitably affected the flow of debate and discussion.

Another unexpected situation occurred when I conducted the two male groups in ‘Délice’ restaurant. It is expected that when you invite people to a restaurant they will be given some refreshments so I provided snacks. However, while I was carrying out the discussion with the first group, two friends of a student came and joined us. Stopping these students from joining the group would have been culturally inappropriate. Thus the first group ended up with ten participants.

The commitment of participants to the focus groups was also sometimes an issue. Female participants were very committed: their attendance was regular and they could be relied on to be punctual. But male participants were less reliable – some in the groups would arrive late and I then had to repeat the topics under discussion. This took extra time and disrupted the flow of the discussion.

#### **4.7 Groups as a social laboratory**

The term ‘social laboratory’ is used by Lindlof and Taylor to refer to focus groups in which ‘interpretations, perceptions, and personal experiences’ are taking place (2002, p.182). It has been suggested that in focus groups, ideas and experience will be expressed by each individual and interactions and exchange will occur. Individuals express their views and add their own observations, and the most interesting aspect is the local language they produce. Indeed, the notion of ‘social laboratory’ was very successful in my focus groups. The interactions between the participants contributed to valuable data which gave me perspectives into Palestinians' views of media, democracy, state-building and the future of Palestine. These are some of the main questions asked in the focus groups.

- What do you think about the general policy of Palestine TV?
- What do you think about the general policy of Al-Aqsa TV?
- How do you evaluate freedom of expression in the two television channels?
- Do you believe people’s participation in decision making (or criticism of the authority) could lead to building trust between the government and the governed?
- Do you think either Palestine TV or Al-Aqsa TV is capable of empowering the plurality of citizens?

- Do you think either Palestine TV or Al-Aqsa TV has a democratic purpose of enhancing the political effectiveness of different social groups?
- How do you think the two TV channels could contribute to the process of state-building?
- Do you think the two TV channels' policies are affected by their political leaders?
- What do you think about democracy in Palestine?
- How can television contribute to promoting democracy?
- Do you think the two TV channels fairly covered the recent election campaign?
- How would you evaluate the current status of democracy and human rights in Palestine?
- Do you think Palestine TV acts as a fourth estate and monitors democratic procedures during election time?
- Do you think TV channels cover human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority or any other factions?
- How do you think the Israeli occupation affects media performance?

#### **4.8 Interviews**

Arksey and Knight (1999) argue that qualitative interviews are used to understand the interviewee's actions and 'to examine the context of thought, feeling and action... and exploring relationships between different aspects of situation' (p. 32). Interviews also allow people to express themselves and convey embedded feelings and thoughts, and 'it allows answers to be clarified, which is not the case with self-completion questionnaire' (ibid). However, '...A semi-structured interview allows more opportunity for probing and gives respondent considerable freedom to extend on a given question' (Huitt and Peabody, 1969, cited in Peabody et al., 1990, p. 452). Overall, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with leading Palestinian journalists, human rights activists, political analysts, academics and officials. These were:

- Hani Habib, a well-known political analyst and general director of Al-Dimocrati (Democratic) magazine;
- Khaleel Abushamallah, General Director of Al-Dammer Human Rights Organization;

- Hamdi Shaqoura, General Director of the Palestinian Human Rights Organization in Gaza;
- Eyad Abuhjayer, Deputy manger of the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution;
- Fathi Sabah, Independent Palestinian journalist and correspondent of *Al-Hayat Al-Landaneya* (The London Life) newspaper in Gaza Strip;
- S.Q., Programme General Director at Palestine Television (wishes not to be named);
- S.K., Director of newsroom at Palestine TV (wishes not to be named)
- Emad Zaqout, Programme Manager at Al-Aqsa TV;
- Samer Abumuhsen, Political News Manager at Al-Aqsa TV;
- Dr. Zohair Abed, Deputy Dean of Media College at Alaqsa University;
- Hasan Abubhashish, Director of governmental media office at the Ministry of Information in Gaza Strip;
- Emad Eaid, Independent journalist and director of Mann News Agency in Gaza;
- Lana Shahin, Independent journalist;
- M.S., Independent journalist (wishes not to be named);
- S.E., Independent journalist and BBC TV correspondent (wishes not to be named);
- W.Y., A Palestinian journalist working for Palestine TV and Al-Hurra TV correspondent (wishes not to be named);
- Emad Draimly, Independent journalist and director of China News Agency in Gaza;
- Sami Abusalem, Independent journalist;
- Dr. Ahmed Abusaid, Academic lecturer at Media College at Al-Aqsa University.

The interviews with the above-mentioned revolved around issues concerning Palestinian media and society, media and democracy in Palestine, human rights and freedom of information, media and politics in Palestine, and the Palestinian state-building process. The objective of these interviews was to enrich and to support the theoretical framework

of the thesis with debates taking place among Palestinians. However, government bureaucracy was an obstacle that I encountered when I asked to interview an official at the Ministry of Information. I had approached the office to arrange an interview with the director of the Governmental Media Office (GMO). The secretary questioned me about my background, occupation and the intention behind the interview. In addition, he asked me to submit an application to meet the director or another official. I was told that they would contact me within two or three days, if the director agreed to meet me. I waited for an entire week, but there was no response. Subsequently, I decided to approach one of my contacts who had access to the director. With his help, I managed to organize a meeting with the director of GMO.

Meeting with journalists in the Gaza Strip also proved challenging. As Gaza is a conflict zone, journalists work under tremendous pressure and constant tension. I had to call the director of the newsroom at Palestine TV many times to set up an appointment for an interview. I managed to make an appointment, but at the last moment he apologized and cancelled the appointment. I then called him several more times and managed to set up another appointment in his office at which I was able to conduct the interview successfully. Another problem arose when I planned to meet the directors of Al-Aqsa TV, a partisan and fundamentalist channel which takes orders from the Hamas leadership. In addition, they are discouraged from speaking to any researcher or journalist from outside the organization. I was trying very hard to get permission to conduct the interviews. I had been advised to contact the public relations office to arrange the interviews so approached them and submitted a request. The office insisted that I submit my questions before arranging the interview, and specifically asked me if there were any political or sensitive questions. I had to explain that the questions were not fixed because I was planning a semi-structured interview in which I could modify and/or add supplementary questions. In addition, I also mentioned that if the interviewee did not want to answer any question that he thought was too sensitive, that was his prerogative. I was told the office would contact me to inform about the interview appointment. I waited the whole week and there was no response. Finally, I was able once again to make contact via an intermediary who arranged the interviews with the programme general director and also with the general director of political news.

#### **4.9 Unstructured interviews**

During my fieldwork, I spoke to ordinary people about their opinion of the media in Palestine and how they see the future of the Palestinian state. In addition, I explored their opinions about television, democracy, the human rights situation and freedom of opinion. These people showed respect when I told them about my PhD research, revealing to them my identity as a researcher. However, they were very suspicious of anyone asking about the situation in a direct way. I went to considerable trouble to ensure I did not offend people's sensitivities. Sometimes, I found people who would talk at length about political issues, but at the outset I always had to build a relationship of trust.

I had chosen public cafés as places where I could talk to people. In these cafés, I had to sit with people smoking Hubble bubble (shisha) and smoke with them in order to build trust. I used to go there during the evening when most people visit for a coffee, a chat and a smoke. As I entered the public space in the cafés, I learnt more about the political and social situation in Gaza as well as people's perspectives on television channels and the future of democracy in Palestine. Indeed, I was interested to hear the local language of the people when they talk informally and made a point of using simple language and letting them talk without interruption. At least three people sat at each table. It was difficult to jump from one table to another, and discussion with a group took time, as people had to interact with each other. Therefore, each table took one evening. Overall, I visited four different cafés. I had to record the talk, but because of the crowds and the noise it I also had to take notes. In addition, I have carried out interviews with people working for NGOs in different places in the Gaza Strip.

People who are associated with the world NGOs tend to have a good overview of the situation in the Gaza Strip. These NGOs, as I found out, were another important public forum for democratic discourse. I managed to visit four different NGOs in different places in the Gaza Strip. However, doing interviews in different places in Gaza taught me that politics is a social phenomenon and an invasive part of Palestinian culture. Within these NGOs, I deployed an overt policy where I introduced myself as a researcher and the intention of my research was explained to the participants. Wherever I have been, I always had my mobile phone for recording and my notebook for writing notes. Even though I am Gazan and familiar with terms that people use, I usually record



events and people's responses. As Palestine is a conflict zone, Palestinians are interested in politics and always following political developments – domestically as well as in the region. Many people I interviewed had a vision of the future of Palestine and were deeply aware of the daily struggle with Israeli occupation and blockade. The data from the interviews, which will be discussed in a separate chapter, shows that the Palestinian has definite views about the future of democracy in Palestine and the role of television in achieving this.

#### **4.10 Social survey**

This part of my research represents the quantitative aspect which was intended to provide statistical data to support the key research questions of this thesis. The advantage of using a questionnaire was to save time and cost. This view is supported by Sapsford and Jupp (2006), who noted that the survey saves researcher's time and allows for much larger sets of data to be collected. However, Ruddock (2001) argued that 'surveys are often used to ask people about their reactions to the media in general' (p. 54). They can also be a tool to involve people in answering questions in a manner that is appropriate for statistical analysis.

My social survey was designed to target Palestinians from different places in the Gaza Strip. Before distributing the questionnaire, a pilot of twenty questionnaires was conducted in different places in Gaza to give me an idea about the suitability of the questions. Conducting the pilot questionnaire was very helpful in the sense that I had to rephrase some questions for the real questionnaire as these questions were not clear to the pilot participants. In addition, I realised that I had to add extra questions related to the situation regarding freedom of opinion in the Gaza Strip.

The questionnaire was divided into six parts, each with a different focus:

- to provide information about Palestinians' consumption of the two satellite television channels;
- to find out about television, politics and democracy in Palestine;
- to find out about television independence and freedom;
- to discover the role of television as a public sphere;
- to learn about control of media and censorship;

- to discover the role of television as a fourth estate.

The survey targeted 500 Palestinians in different places in Gaza such as sports clubs, universities and internet cafés. I chose two sports clubs, two internet cafés and one university. In addition, the questionnaire had been distributed to the participants in the focus groups. These places were chosen to be representative of different political affiliations and different areas in the Gaza Strip. For example, Namaa Sport Club is related to Hamas faction and is situated in the north of the Gaza Strip; Gaza Sport Club has links with the Fatah faction and is located in the middle of the Gaza Strip; Al Quds Open University represents a mixture of political factions and is based in southern Gaza Strip, 'Internet Al-Maktaba' is an internet café which is located in Gaza City and 'Internet For You' is another internet café situated in northern Gaza City.

These places are mixed in gender terms (males and females) except the sports clubs and 'Internet For You' which is for males only. I used male and female research assistants to help me distribute and collect the questionnaires. I distributed 200 questionnaires at the sports clubs, 100 at the university, and another 200 in internet cafés. However, when I distributed some of the questionnaires, I could not distribute them all in one visit. Therefore, research assistants had to visit these locations several times and distribute questionnaires in order to get the maximum number of participants. Ultimately, I managed to get about 450 questionnaires from these locations and about 36 questionnaires from participants of focus groups. Finally, the SPSS programme was used for storing, coding and manipulating the survey data. In addition, the tables and statistics included in this thesis were based on SPSS analysis.

#### **4.11 Strengths and limitations of research methodologies**

The responses obtained through questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews in this thesis only represent a tiny sample of Palestinian opinion. Despite a wide ranging sample of Palestinians among those in the focus groups and those who responded to the questionnaire from different parts of the Gaza Strip, it is not a large enough sample to permit valid generalizations about Palestinians' perceptions of media and democracy. Moreover, Israel's movement restrictions have made it impossible to conduct research in the other part of Palestine; the West Bank. However, the data which

emerged through this sample is intended to enable the integration and interpretation of results in order to present an overview and valid interpretations. While representativeness is not an object in qualitative research, it is important when making generalization to aim for a fair representation of variation within the Palestinian population. Therefore, I tried to make my sample as representative as possible, thus covering a wide range of socio-economic and socio-political backgrounds and geographical regions. Needless to say, I am aware of the limitations of generalization concerning the Palestinian population. It is not my intention here to use the research findings in order to represent Palestinians as homogeneous society, but to present an indication of the situation, views and opinions of a representative section of the Palestinian population in Gaza.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

The qualitative and quantitative methods which have been used in this study were designed to investigate Palestinians' perspectives about media, democracy and state-building. In the interviews, focus groups and the questionnaires, I deliberately targeted people from different socio-political and socio-cultural backgrounds to reflect their perceptions of media, democracy and the Palestinian situation. These methods have helped me to understand their feelings and recognize their views and perceptions about the structure of the Palestinian state. In addition, these methods were deployed to answer the key questions raised in this thesis. The triangulation of the data has enriched my thesis and deepened my understanding of the complex relationships between media and democracy in a conflict zone such as Gaza. The next chapter will provide findings from a questionnaire-based which aimed to examine the perceptions among Palestinians of the two Palestinian television channels – Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV – and their contribution to the enhancement of democratic communication in Palestine.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Social Survey: Findings and Analysis**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings from a questionnaire-based survey which targeted 500 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, representing different ages, geographical areas and political affiliations. The questionnaire aimed to examine the perceptions among Palestinians of the two leading Palestinian television channels – Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV. It inquired about the perceived contribution of the two rival channels to the enhancement of democratic communication and the development of state-building processes. The findings highlight the respondents' media consumption and their views of television's reliability and independence; they also pose questions about the freedom of opinion and expression in Palestine. In addition the respondents were asked about their views on television as a fourth estate and its role in promoting democracy and human rights in Palestine.

The survey had a very good respondent success-rate: 486 out of 500 questionnaires were returned. It does not however in any way claim to be representative of the whole of Palestine or even of the Gaza Strip. The survey was designed to reflect respondents' political affiliations, media consumption, views about the status of democracy and human rights and their perceptions of how the two channels contribute to the situation. Different places such as sports' clubs, universities and Internet cafés were targeted in a range of areas throughout Gaza Strip. Namaa Sports Club, for example, which is identified with the Hamas faction and situated in the north of Gaza Strip, was targeted in order to reflect perceptions among members of Hamas, one of the main political parties in the Palestinian arena. On the other hand, Gaza Sports Club, affiliated with the Fatah faction and situated in the middle of Gaza Strip, was targeted to reflect opinions among Fatah members, the other major political party in the area. The other places such as universities and Internet cafés are environments in which members of all factions and none interact.

The survey provides a useful overview of the prospects for media and democracy in Gaza. It is one of the three empirical aspects of this thesis: the findings of the other two – the focus groups and interviews – are discussed in the preceding chapter. The results from the survey show that 94% of the respondents said that the status of democracy and human rights in Palestine is in poor shape. Nearly all, 98%, said that independent television channels help to create democracy, although 99% believe that the two existing television channels would not contribute to the process of nation-building. A vast majority of respondents - 97% - expressed the view that freedom of expression is not guaranteed on the two channels, while 89% felt that the Palestinian Authority imposes censorship in the Palestinian Territories. There was overwhelming support - 91% of those questioned - for the view that the channels do not discharge their fourth estate functions as a watchdog while 96% believed that the channels worked as a mouthpiece for Fatah and Hamas.

This chapter is divided into six parts: the first part deals with findings related to media consumption, the second with television, politics and democracy in Palestine, while the third sheds light on findings related to the independence of television. The fourth part focuses on findings related to television as a public sphere, the fifth is concerned with television control and censorship, while the final section reports findings related to television as a fourth estate.

## ***5.1 Mapping Media consumption in Gaza***

### **5.1.1 Watching television**

The survey illustrates that 51% of Fatah respondents watch television for more than three hours daily, 43% watch for between one and two hours, while only 5% watch television for less than one hour. This significantly high level of viewing among Fatah members is explained by the fact that they have been prevented from going out to work since Hamas took over the Strip. On the other hand, 43% of Hamas respondents said that they watch television for more than three hours a day, 40% watch for between one and two hours, and 14% watch television for less than one hour. In addition, 71% of independents said that they watch television for more than three hours, whereas 30% of other factions said that they watch television from one to two hours daily.

It is important to note that during the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, Palestinians were not allowed to have their own television stations. This situation existed until 1994 when the Palestinian Authority took over the Palestinian Territories and established Palestine TV. Before this time Palestinians were watching Jordanian, Israeli, and Egyptian television channels (Kuttab, 1993).

### **5.1.2 Watching Palestine TV**

The survey shows that 48% of Fatah members said that they sometimes watch Palestine TV and 46% said that they watch the channel regularly. This result is not unexpected, as Palestine TV is controlled by Fatah and its programmes reflecting the Fatah perspective. It is only to be expected that members of the faction would watch its programmes. The survey also illustrates that 86% of Hamas members do not watch Palestine TV. The growth in this figure is due to the establishment of Al-Aqsa TV which reflects Hamas ideology. Furthermore, its programmes are dedicated to promoting Hamas principles as an Islamist ideology (Zaqout, 2009). The results for independents and other factions are varied: 54% of other factions said that they do not watch Palestine TV, while 38% of independents said they sometimes watch the channel. Such an attitude could be explained by the quality of programming: a study conducted by Al-Abadlah in 2009 showed that Palestine TV programmes are not professional and do not meet Gazans' demands (Al-Abadlah, 2009).

### **5.1.3 Watching Al-Aqsa TV**

The survey demonstrates that 94% of Fatah members do not watch the Al-Aqsa television channel. In addition, 60% of other factions and 60% of independents said that they do not watch Al-Aqsa TV. In an interview with Habib (2010), a political analyst and director of Al-Dimocrati Magazine noted that Al-Aqsa TV is considered to be provocative and is seen to function as a tool for the Hamas movement. In June 2010, France's broadcasting watchdog ordered satellite operator Eutelsat to stop broadcasting Al-Aqsa TV because its programmes violate French law, as it is perceived to be promoting ethnic hatred and religious aggression (Feldner, 2010). Human rights' organizations in Gaza Strip have condemned the decision, calling on the European Union to stop the implementation of the order (Al-Mezan, 2010a). However, the survey shows that 86% of Hamas members watch Al-Aqsa. Moreover, 5% of Fatah, 24% of other factions and 27% of independents responded that they sometimes watch Al-Aqsa

TV. This small number of respondents who watch Al-Aqsa reflects Gazans' need for local news. Indeed, after Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and banned Palestine TV, Al-Aqsa TV became the only local television channel in Gaza that was able to cover local stories.

#### **5.1.4 Fulfilment of requirements**

This survey illustrates that 62% of Fatah members said that Palestine TV fulfils their viewing requirements. On the other hand, 72% of Hamas members said that Al-Aqsa meets their viewing needs. This result shows that members of each party favour their own television channel. The higher numbers watching Palestine TV among independents and others show that it is more popular than Al-Aqsa. This may be explained by the fact that Palestine TV has recently developed and implemented a new plan to develop its staff and improve programming (Habib, 2010). However, we can see the variety in numbers of respondents who said neither television channel fulfils their requirements. For example, 38% of Fatah members, 29% of Hamas members, 66% of other factions, and 66% of independents said that neither Palestine TV nor Al-Aqsa TV provide what they require as audiences. These two channels are seen to be serving only the interests of political factions (Sabah, 2010), and this explains why many Palestinians are watching other channels and ignoring locally-generated programmes. Indeed, Palestine TV is a government channel and maintains good relations with the President's office. Al-Aqsa TV is closely associated with Hamas and broadcasts information about all Hamas government activities in Gaza.

## 5.2 Television, politics and democracy in Palestine

### 5.2.1 Television's perceived reliability

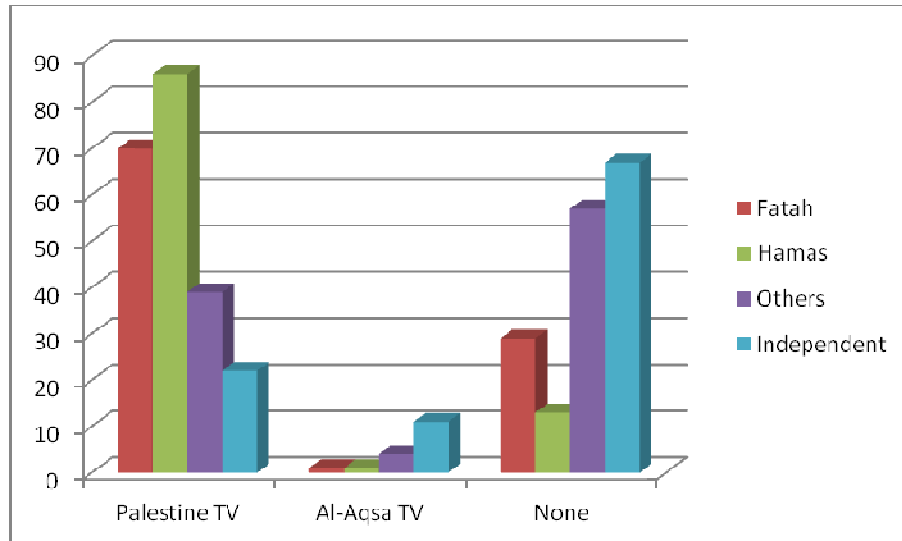


Figure 5.1 Responses to the question, ‘Which television station is reliable?’ by political affiliation (%)

Figure 5.1 shows that about 70% of Fatah members trust Palestine TV, while they do not trust Al-Aqsa TV. It also shows that about 86% of Hamas members trust Al-Aqsa and not Palestine TV. The opinions of members of other factions and independents vary: about 36% of other factions trust Palestine TV and only about 6% trust Al-Aqsa, while about 22% of independents trust Palestine TV and 11% trust Al-Aqsa. The significant levels of Fatah members trusting Palestine TV and Hamas members in trusting Al-Aqsa TV are because these channels reflect their political views and thus meet their demands. According to S.K.<sup>1</sup> (2010), Palestine TV programmes support the president while Zaqout (2009) noted that Al-Aqsa policy is to support the Palestinian resistance. It serves the people from religious as well as political perspectives.

It is important to note that the trust among independents and others towards Palestine TV, rather than Al-Aqsa TV, is due to the recent developments at the channel. These

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<sup>1</sup> S.K. is an alias for the director of newsroom at Palestine TV. He asked me not to use his name because of the Hamas security forces.



began in January 2009 when the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appointed Yaseer Abedrabbo, secretary of the executive committee of PLO, to be head of Palestine TV. In addition, the president recently issued a declaration to turn the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation from a governmental to a public institution with administrative and financial independence (Alwatanvoice, 2010). At the same time, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has approved the formation of a non-governmental media entity to create an independent body responsible for the sector, replacing the Ministry of Information. In spite of this, the chart also illustrates that about 54% of other factions and 66% of independents do not trust either channel due to their partisan nature.

### 5.2.2 The perceived state of democracy and human rights in Palestine

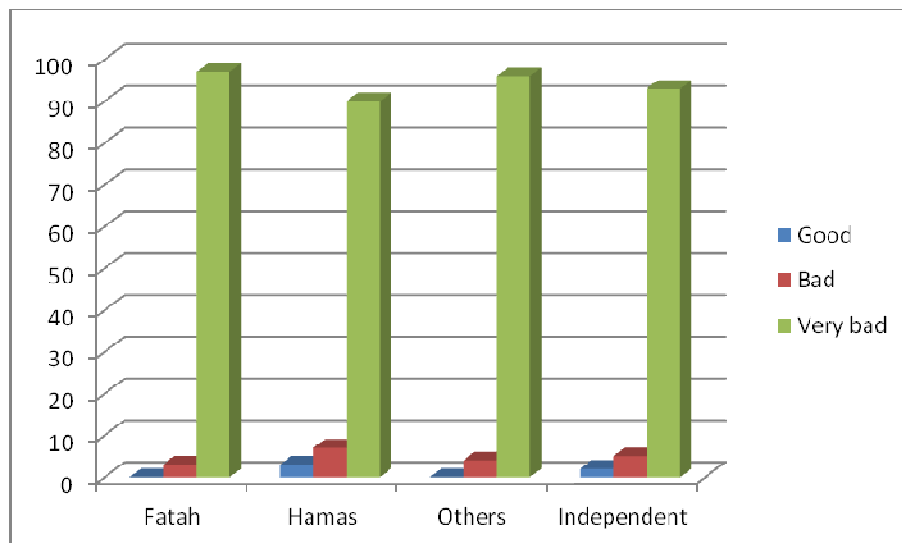


Figure 5.2 Perceived state of democracy and human rights in Palestine, by political affiliation (%)

Figure 5.2 shows that about 97% of Fatah members, 90% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions, and 93% of independents said that the status of democracy and human rights in Palestine is very bad, and a further 3% of Fatah members, 7% of Hamas members, 4% of others and 5% of independents said that the status of democracy and human rights in Palestine is bad. The high level of negative opinion among Fatah members is explained by the violations carried out against them by the Hamas government in Gaza Strip. A mission from the Human Rights' Council sent in 2009 to investigate the Gazan human rights' situation asserted that Hamas security services carried out violence, including physical abuse and killings, against Fatah members in Gaza. The mission concluded that the actions of Hamas represented a severe violation

of human rights as well as being counter to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Palestinian Basic Law (HRC, 2009). Other political factions and independent civilians have also suffered from the actions of Hamas security forces.

A recent report by the General Assembly of the United Nations showed that the human rights' situation in Palestine is critical and witnesses to further deterioration (General Assembly, 2009). The Human Rights' Council of the UN expressed its concern about the Israeli occupation's violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights' Law in Occupied Palestinian Territories (HRC, 2009). Moreover, many human rights' organizations in the Palestinian Territories have expressed concern over the recurrence of attacks by the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank (PCHR, 2010; Al-Mezan, 2010b). The situation with regard to human rights worsened significantly after the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip. During the Israeli occupation of Gaza in December 2009, civilian properties were destroyed, hundreds of Palestinians were killed and a blockade was imposed (HRW, 2010).

### **5.2.3 Possibility of conducting elections**

The survey shows that 97% of Fatah members, 97% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions, and 93% of independents do not think it is possible to conduct elections. This significant level of pessimism among all factions is due to the mistrust towards Hamas and Fatah, the two main parties in Palestine, and their consequent lack of credibility. It also shows that Gazans do not believe in elections at the present time, especially since democratic elections happened in 2006. Habib (2010) noted that Hamas participated in the election after the USA administration agreed to create a democratic state. But after Hamas won the elections, he noted: 'the world rejected the election's result for the satisfaction of Israel' (Habib, 2010). After Hamas took over the Strip and arrested Fatah members, they refused to conduct elections, despite repeated calls from the Palestinian president for elections.

The Hamas faction's view is that they won the 2006 election legally and hence have the right to rule Palestine. The Fatah faction, however, questions the legal basis of Hamas rule. In addition, Hamas does not recognize international and bilateral agreements signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The quartet of the USA, UN, EU and

Russia have already made it clear that they refuse to open a dialogue with the Hamas government as long as they refuse to renounce terrorism and honour the agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority. Hamas also refuses to recognize Israel as an independent state, thus making it difficult for the international community to do business with it. However, it is important to note that Hamas's victory in 2006 elections 'can be explained in large part by the corruption and negligence shown by Fatah while it governed the fortunes of the PA' (Moniquet, 2006).

#### **5.2.4 Television and dialogue among parties**

This survey shows that about 99% of Fatah, 97% of Hamas, 60% of other factions and 60% of independents do not think that television could contribute to facilitate dialogue between parties in Palestine. The high proportion of those who do not believe television has such a role is because of the belief that the two television channels are controlled by competing factions. According to Jamal (2005), politicians use the media for their own interests. Each of the two parties uses its channel as a mouthpiece (Habib, 2010) as well as an instrument to denigrate opponents. Programmes on Palestine TV are deliberately pitched against Hamas and its misrule in Gaza, while Al-Aqsa TV highlights Palestinian Authority abuse against Hamas members in the West Bank. Consequently, Gazans believe that as long as television channels are related to political factions, they will not be able to contribute to any meaningful dialogue between parties.

The study by Habib (2010) reinforces this belief. He noted that Fatah and Hamas control the two television channels and thus shape and promote the media message and discourse. He added:

I can see that the two parties are using their television channels to critique each other and initiate propaganda campaigns against each other. In addition, since the division is not ending and parties control the channels, political level would continue influencing these channels. Therefore, I do not think the two channels can contribute to the dialogue (Habib, 2010).

On the other hand, 40% of other factions and 38% of independents believe that television channels could have a role in facilitating a dialogue among parties in

Palestine. W.Y.<sup>2</sup> (2010) suggested that television could contribute to a dialogue if Fatah and Hamas would stop using the channels for aggravating their differences and instead broadcast programmes calling for reconciliation.

#### **5.2.5 Television's policy and internal conflict**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah members, 97% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions' members and 98% of independents think that the two television channels are affected by the conflict between Fatah and Hamas. Such high levels are due to the content of programmes which Gazans see on their screens on a daily basis. The majority of programmes on the two channels are partisan and propagandist, aimed at inflaming public feeling against their respective opponents. According to Abushamallah (2010), the two channels affect and are affected by the struggle between the two parties and their leaders. This also demonstrates that the two channels are heavily dependent on decisions taken by political leaders.

It should be noted that the problems between the two parties stem from the lack of trust between the Hamas and Fatah leadership. Hamas feels that Fatah leaders should not be negotiating on behalf of Palestinians as they do not represent all Palestinian factions, while the Fatah leadership accuses Hamas of representing a minority view and one which is unrealistic within the current geo-political and security situation in the region. It is important to note that media disputes between the two parties have created pessimism among Palestinians.

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<sup>2</sup> W.Y. is an alias for a Palestinian journalist working for Palestine TV and Al-Hurra TV correspondent. She asked me not to use his name because of the Hamas security forces.

### 5.2.6 Role of television in promoting democracy

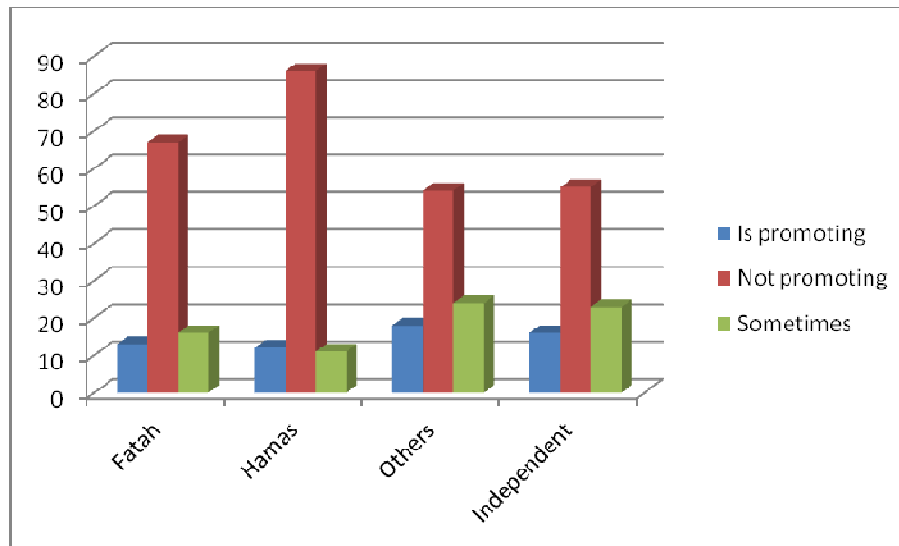


Figure 5.3 Responses to question ‘Is television promoting democracy?’, by political affiliation (%)

As Figure 5.3 indicates, 67% of Fatah, 86% of Hamas, 54% of other factions, and 55% of independents think that the debates conducted on the two channels are not promoting democratic culture nor contributing to the creation of a pluralistic society. Fatah members I interviewed (see chapter 6) said that Al-Aqsa TV does not conduct social debates, and even when talk show programmes are broadcast, guests are from the Hamas faction and people who are participating are all from Hamas. Thus, there is no platform on which people from a range of backgrounds participate in debate. On the other hand, Hamas members said that Palestine TV is totally biased and controlled by Fatah. Accordingly, the debates conducted on the channel are biased against Hamas.

Evidence indicates that these debates are indeed biased, in the sense that Palestine TV broadcasts debates that promote Fatah ideology and focus on Hamas shortcomings, while Al-Aqsa TV conducts debates that promote the ideology of Hamas and highlight the faults of Fatah. In an interview with Khaleel Abushamallah (2010), a human rights’ activist and director of Al-Dammer Human Rights’ Organization in Gaza, I asked about the debates broadcast by the two channels. He answered that: ‘I believe the two channels are tightened with certain policies by which social debates are monitored. In

addition, the two channels do not provide a democratic platform for debate in order to contribute to create a pluralistic society.’

In addition, Sabah (2010), a well-known independent journalist and correspondent of *Al-Hayat Al-Landaneya* (London Life) newspapers, said that debates conducted on the two channels are designed only to serve the two political parties. People are not benefiting from these debates. Consequently, the two channels are neither promoting democratic culture nor contributing to the creation of a pluralistic society. In fact, as we learned from Curran (2005), media are generally considered an arena for debate: it needs to provide channels to link people with the government and enable them to express their views. This leads us to ask serious questions about the Palestinian media and its functions.

A small proportion, about 13% of Fatah members, 12% of Hamas, 18% of other factions, and 16% of independents, do believe that social debates conducted on the two channels promote a democratic culture and contribute to the creation of a pluralistic society. More recently, Palestine TV has begun to develop programmes including talk shows in which guests from other factions and independent citizens have participated. S.Q.<sup>3</sup> (2010), General Director of Programmes at Palestine TV, noted that the channel has changed its policy, committing itself to providing a range of opinions on topics under discussion. In addition, citizens are allowed to participate and can criticise government policies. In other words, the freedom of opinion is respected. Respondents from Fatah 16%, 11% from Hamas, 24% from other factions, and 23% from independents said that social debates do sometimes promote a democratic culture and thus contribute to the creation of a pluralistic society. Indeed, Gazans believe it is essential that the two television channels should be independent in order to contribute to promoting a democratic culture. Sometimes Palestine TV broadcasts programmes which provide a platform for citizens to contribute to political debates (Abed, 2010).

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<sup>3</sup> S.Q. is an alias for the programmes general director at Palestine TV. He asked me not to use his name.

### **5.2.7 Occupation and television's performance**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah members, 100% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions, and 98% of independents think that the Israeli occupation affects television's performance in Palestine. Evidence demonstrates that this occurs in many ways, including the bombing of television buildings, confiscation of equipment, the arrest of journalists, and the restriction of their movements. For example, Al-Aqsa TV was bombed by Israeli forces on 28 December 2008 (Al-Mezan, 2009).

Palestinians have been living under Israeli occupation since 1967, and the Palestinian Authority has ruled the Palestinian Territories since 1994, in accordance with the Oslo agreement, and yet the Israeli occupation continues to undermine the authority. The Israeli blockade of the Palestinian Territories has had a negative impact on Palestinian media performance (see chapter 7), as media organisations suffer from a lack of equipment for broadcasting, photography and other essentials for television journalism (Al-Mezan, 2009).

Interviews with Palestinian journalists revealed that Israeli occupation has resulted in multiple forms of violation against individual journalists and media organisations in Palestine. These violations include arrest, murder, beating, direct targeting and shooting, the confiscation of press equipment, destruction of media institutions and the restriction of freedom of movement (Abusaleem, 2010, Draimly, 2010, Eaid, 2010). These factors limit the ability of the Palestinian media to function: according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights' report (2009), the Israeli occupation targets its violations against local and international journalists and media institutions.

### **5.2.8 Television and state-building**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah members, 100% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions' members, and 98% of independents do not think that the two television channels could contribute to the process of state building. The high level of these values is because all Palestinian factions, including independents, acknowledge that the two television channels are politically controlled. As we learned from Jamal (2003), media plays an important role in the process of state building, but the sovereignty of the media are an essential part of this process. According to Abed (2010), media disputes which take place on Palestinian television channels are adversely affecting the Palestinian

political agenda. Accordingly, these channels are contributing to the deepening of Palestinian divisions. In addition, as long as television channels continue to feed the division among parties, there will be no state. Habib (2010) noted that:

TV does not create policy, but it covers the policy which is practised by the authority and creates public opinion, in order to play a role in political participation. In the process of state building, some elements have to be maintained. These elements are independence of media, political, social and economic structure. In Palestine, the new Prime Minister Fayyad is creating the state elements by building institutions, promoting industries and supporting sponsorships. However, television in state building stage is an important element and plays the role of promoting and not creating policies.

In an interview with Abuhjayer (2010), Deputy Manager of the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution, I asked about what role the two channels can have in the process of state building. He answered that:

Television has two roles in the process of state building; one is educating and the other is monitoring. The role of educating is to inform citizens about their rights, and the role of monitoring is to monitor government's activities and keep checking on the state performance. But, as long as provocation is going on the two channels, then it is state destruction and not state building.

### ***5.3 Television independence and freedom***

#### **5.3.1 Palestine television channel partiality**

The survey shows that 91% of Fatah, 100% of Hamas, 96% of other factions, and 93% of independents think that Palestine TV is not impartial. Previous research has demonstrated that Palestine TV is controlled by the Fatah faction (Jamal, 2003; Terban, 2010). Indeed, political factions in Palestine consider media a very important method of reaching the people, and so they are struggling to control it. Abuhjayer (2010) noted that:



The two stations, Palestine and Al-Aqsa are partial, in the sense that Palestine TV is related to Fatah movement and Al-Aqsa TV is related to Hamas movement. Both channels are manipulating and seducing the people, as their programmes, news, guests, all are calling for provocation. They contributed greatly in deepening the Palestinian division and the internal fighting. Their role is very negative because they are part of the political system.

Interviews with Gazans (see chapter 6) revealed that there is no doubt among respondents that Palestine TV is biased. Indeed, according to what Gazans see on Palestine TV programmes, the material broadcast represents only Fatah views. According to Jamal (2003), Arafat as a head of the Palestinian Authority had established Palestine TV and appointed a loyal member of Fatah as head of the channel. In addition, Palestine TV headquarters was located in Arafat's compound in Gaza Strip and decisions about programme content were taken at Fatah political level.

### **5.3.2 Al-Aqsa TV partiality**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah members, 65% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions, and 98% of independents think that Al-Aqsa channel is biased. The high numbers of respondents believing the channel to be biased is due to the control of Hamas over news coverage in Gaza Strip. It is important to note that, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, they banned Palestine TV and arrested its correspondents. Therefore, Al-Aqsa TV became the voice of the Hamas government. Gazans believe that programmes which are broadcast on Al-Aqsa TV support the Hamas faction. Sabah (2010) thinks that Al-Aqsa TV is biased because there is no diversity in its programmes and it functions as a mouthpiece for the Hamas faction. Despite international media working in Gaza, there are no other governmental channels operating in the Strip. The Hamas government in Gaza realized the importance of media, and so, through its media messages, it is trying to establish the legitimacy of its government and to influence Palestinians and the Arab-Muslim world against the Fatah government (Abed, 2010).

On the other hand, 32% of Hamas members think that Al-Aqsa is not biased. In an interview with Abuhashish (2010), Director of the Governmental Media Office in Gaza Strip, he states that Al-Aqsa TV is not partial and does not represent the government, but is a private channel which simply works with the Hamas government. Abumuhsen

(2010), director of political programmes at Al-Aqsa TV, claimed in an interview that the channel is not biased and is unrelated to the Hamas government, although it functions in harmony with it and supports resistance strategy.

#### **5.3.4 Freedom of expression and opinion**

The survey illustrates that 97% of Fatah members, 97% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions, and 98% of independents think that freedom of expression and opinion is not practised by either of the two channels. Most faction members believe that the two channels are politically affiliated. The Palestinian political division has had a negative effect on the various rights and freedoms that the Palestinian citizens should enjoy. Both Fatah and Hamas have committed violations and abuse against journalists and others working in the media. The Hamas government has made it very hard for Palestine television and other media to operate from the Gaza. Similarly, the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank has prevented Al-Aqsa TV from operating from there. In addition, the PA has closed the newspapers *Palestine* and *Al-Resala*, both considered politically close to Hamas. Many human rights' activists such as Shaqoura (2010), Abushamallah (2010) and Abuhjayer (2010) affirmed that the two channels are consolidating their political agenda. Habib (2010) noted that:

Recruitment policy in Palestine television is according to political affiliation and nepotism, not according to professionalism. Fatah faction is controlling Palestine television channel which affected the media message. On the other hand, Hamas government in Gaza Strip is controlling Al-Aqsa television which is pro Hamas and its government. Thus, Hamas and Fatah members are participating in their channels respectively. Independents and other faction members have tiny space for freedom of opinion.

In a report by Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights (2009), journalists and citizens in the Gaza Strip and West Bank became victims of political difference between Fatah and Hamas and of abuse against freedom of expression. Eaid (2010), an independent journalist and director of Maan News Network, noted that freedom of expression is restricted in the two television channels because the recruitment of staff to both channels is based on political affiliation, and even talk shows are skewed to serve political ends. Thus, ordinary people are not able to express their opinions.

Only 3% of Fatah, 4% of Hamas, 6% of other factions and 5% of independents think that the two channels demonstrate freedom of expression and opinion. S.Q. (2010), director of programmes for Palestine TV, claimed that the channel had begun to change, offering a variety of programmes, while Zaqout (2009) commented that Al-Aqsa TV has no issues with freedom of expression; all citizens are welcome to participate in talk shows and other programmes.

### **5.3.5 Independent television and democracy**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah, 97% of Hamas, 96% of other factions and 98% of independents think that independent television channels help to create democracy. This indicates that Gazans are aware of the role of independent media in creating democracy by providing information and acting as a forum for public debates. However, independent media needs a democratic constitution which provides guarantees of freedom of expression and the right to access information. If the media are controlled by political factions and used as a mouthpiece they can be anti-democratic, contributing to divisiveness and social mistrust. It is commonly accepted that for democracy to survive, an independent media are a principal condition. Habib (2010) noted that: 'Independent media can work as an alternative to the parliament. It can spread the information which is related to democracy, it can enhance democracy through defending the freedom of speech, freedom to reach and to access information'. In the Palestinian case, an independent media are much needed in order to promote democracy and build a Palestinian state. This view has deepened by Shahin (2010) who argues that, if the two channels were independent, it would benefit Palestinian communal interest, not just the factions' interest. In addition, it would play a role in reconciliation and reduce Palestinian divisions.

## **5.4 Television as a public sphere**

### **5.4.1 Television and people's participation**

The survey illustrates that 64% of Fatah, 4% of Hamas, 24% of other factions and 22% of independents said that Palestine TV allows people to participate and circulate controversial opinions. It is not surprising that Fatah supporters believe that their

channel places a greater emphasis on people's participation. It is true that the channel has introduced new programmes that allow a greater degree of public participation. The channel started to change its strategy after Yaseer Abedrabbo, the secretary of the executive committee of PLO, became its head (Abed, 2010). W.Y. (2010), a journalist working in Palestine TV, commented that she can see the changes in which new programmes were introduced and talk shows started to host people from different political factions including Hamas. On the other hand, only 2% of Fatah, 60% of Hamas, 24% of other factions, and 22% of independents said that Al-Aqsa TV allows people to participate and circulate controversial opinions. In addition, other factions' members and independents had similar opinions about both Palestine and Al-Aqsa channels.

However, participants' views were varied regarding public participation: 35% of Fatah, 40% of Hamas, 54% of other factions, and 60% of independents said that neither Palestine TV nor Al-Aqsa TV allow the public to participate and circulate controversial opinions. During my interviews, I interviewed an independent journalist, M.S.<sup>4</sup>, who noted that Palestine TV is controlled by Fatah party, and Al-Aqsa TV controlled by Hamas, and both are biased. Furthermore, Palestine TV is allowing public participation but only to a limited extent. These restrictions ban participants from speaking against the government or Fatah faction and from harming anyone. M.S. added that:

Palestine TV is trying to develop its programmes by adopting new approaches to improve its image and get more Palestinian viewers. On the other hand, despite having good staff and programmes, Al-Aqsa does not have a huge number of viewers in Gaza. This is because you cannot see variety in programmes. In addition, independents and other factions' members do not appear on Al-Aqsa channel in order not to legitimate Hamas government in Gaza. Therefore, people participation is not as strong as Palestine television. Yet, their programmes clearly support Hamas and its government, and there is no circulation of controversial opinions (M.S., 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> M.S. Is an alias for a Palestinian independent journalist. He asked me not to use his name because of the Hamas security forces.

Previous research has demonstrated that the participation of citizens is considered a basic principle of democracy (Hatem, 1996; Habermas, 1989). Public participation through media channels enables the exchange of information and open debate. According to Hatem (1996), a democratic media ensures active participation of individuals and diversity of opinions. Abed (2010) noted that there is a change on Palestine TV in which programmes such as talk shows include officials as well as ordinary citizens who are allowed to participate and question officials.

## ***5.5 Television control and censorship***

### **5.5.1 Government censorship in Gaza**

The survey shows that 99% of Fatah, 4% of Hamas, 84% of other factions and 82% of independents think that Hamas government in the Gaza Strip imposes censorship. Such high values among Fatah members, independents and other factions' members shows how much Gazans, especially journalists, suffer from Hamas censorship. Indeed, Fatah, independents and other factions' media outlets are suffering from Hamas-induced abuse against their journalists and media institutions. This became clear that after Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, when they prevented many newspapers including *Al-Haya*, *Al-Ayyam* and *Al-Quds* from entering Gaza, exerted pressure on journalists, attacked and banned Palestine TV and arrested its correspondents, and attacked and confiscated the equipment of many radio stations. Hamas security forces had raided all media outlets that were linked to the Palestinian Authority such as Palestine News Agency (WAFA) and State Information Service and seized their equipment. Journalists have to deal with censorship on what they can report from the Gaza Strip, making their work very challenging. When I interviewed Sabah (2010), he said: 'We all practise a strict self-censorship in order to avoid collision with Hamas security forces'. Human rights' organizations in Gaza have monitored a significant deterioration in press freedom in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza in its annual report (2009) said that:

The period of the study had witnessed an escalation in violations of freedom of opinion and expression and the right to peaceful assembly. The majority of violations are attributed to the continuing of political division between Gaza and

the West Bank after the decisive military action carried out by Hamas in Gaza Strip in June 2007 (PCHR, 2009a, p.7).

The centre called the two governments in Gaza and the West Bank to take serious actions to put an end to the increasing attacks on human rights and public freedom, including the violation of the right to freedom of expression and attacks on journalists and the media.

Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights in Gaza in its report (2009) noted that ‘...a sense of fear and hesitation has spread among Palestinian journalists in Gaza when covering events and circulating information because of their worries of killing or chase, which enhanced self-censorship and limited their ability to cover objectively. This has resulted in absence of the truth and objectivity when covering events’ (p.30). In an interview with S.E.<sup>5</sup> (2010), a BBC correspondent in Gaza Strip told of a report he broadcast of a man in Gaza who made homemade wine. The following day, when the report was broadcast on BBC TV, Hamas security forces called him for investigation, accusing him of betrayal and supporting the enemy.

It should be noted that Hamas security forces in Gaza chase journalists who cover events organized by Fatah and other factions. On the other hand, 3% of Fatah, 97% of Hamas, 12% of other factions, and 16% of independents think that the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip does not impose censorship. I interviewed Dr. Abuhashish (2010), Director of the Governmental Media Office in Gaza Strip, and asked him about the censorship in Gaza.

To be honest there is nothing called absolute freedom. Your freedom ends when you violate others’ freedom. We are working according to press laws of 1995. This law regulates the relationship between the government and the journalists. During the Palestinian Authority rule, there was self censorship. I do not deny that there is a self censorship, but this is because of the situation that we are

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<sup>5</sup> S.E. Is an alias for an independent journalist and BBC TV correspondent. He asked me not to use his name because of the Hamas security forces.

living now. We know that some news agencies are focusing on Gaza. Therefore we are aware of what they write (Abuhashish, 2010).

### **5.5.2 Palestinian Authority censorship**

The survey shows that 81% of Fatah, 94% of Hamas, 90% of other factions and 93% of independents think that the Palestinian Authority imposes censorship in the Palestinian Territories. These high levels are due to the actions of the Palestinian Authority against journalists, media institutions and the freedom of expression. The Palestinian Authority's regime of censorship has been implemented since the Israeli occupation, when Israel ruled the Occupied Territories. It is important to note that the Palestinian President Yasser Arafat had signed the press law in 1995 without the Palestinian Legislation Council's approval. The law is an amendment of the 1933 Press Ordinance and the 1945 Emergency Regulations which were adopted by Israel during its rule in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) in its recent report (2009b) noted that, despite the press law and the Palestinian basic law commitment to protect the rights of freedom of opinion and expression, the Palestinian Authority had the ability to ignore these rights.

Palestinian Authority rule can be divided into two periods: the first when the Palestinian Authority was controlling the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the second period when Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip and expelled the Palestinian Authority to the West Bank. A report by the Palestinian Centre of Human Rights (2006) accused the Palestinian Authority during its rule in Gaza of imposing restrictions on freedom of expression and publications and adopting a set of procedures that restricted the right of citizens to express their opinions. In addition, the PA arrested many citizens because of their opinions or political backgrounds. It imposed restrictions on the press, arrested journalists and closed many media institutions. The report also stated that the Palestinian security forces were abusing and arresting journalists. Media institutions under the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank are Palestine TV, Palestine News Agency (WAFA), and the newspapers *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Jadeda*. The Palestinian Authority sought to ban *Al-Resala* and *Falastin* newspapers, which were considered to be close to Hamas. It also blocked Al-Aqsa TV in the West Bank and arrested its correspondents. It is clear that the Palestinian Authority has almost succeeded in

establishing control over the Palestinian media through its censorship mechanism. A small proportion of respondents, 19% of Fatah, 4% of Hamas, 6% of other factions and 5% of independents, think that the Palestinian Authority does not impose censorship. Indeed, with the growing internal and external criticism against its practices of censorship, the Palestinian Authority has taken some steps to review legislation that governs the right to freedom of expression and press freedoms. But these steps are not enough to allow journalists and citizens to enjoy the right of freedom of expression.

### **5.5.3 Television functions as a mouthpiece**

The survey shows that 94% of Fatah, 97% of Hamas, 96% of other factions and 93% of independents think that the two television channels function as a mouthpiece for Fatah and Hamas. This indicates that the two factions use the two television channels to influence and provoke the public. Evidence shows that the two factions had launched smear campaigns against each other in the media. Al-Aqsa was referring to the Palestinian Authority security forces as ‘Abbas Gangs’, whereas Palestine TV was referring to Hamas forces in Gaza as ‘Hamas Militia’. The Palestinian media environment reflects the struggle of both factions.

I think both TV stations are working as a mouthpiece for both parties. Palestine TV since its establishment was dominated by Fatah members who were loyal to Arafat. Therefore, I believe Palestine television channel is spreading Fatah agenda. It is a partial television. On the other hand, Al-Aqsa television is completely partial television because you cannot see the diversity in its programmes. All we see is religious programmes plus some other programmes. But, all programmes in both channels are meant to serve the political party (Sabah, 2010).

However, Gazans believe that when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and the divisions in Palestinian politics became more pronounced, the two factions turned the media into a forum for the struggle for political and ideological supremacy.

Abuhjayer (2010) notes that: ‘When Palestinian division started in June 2007, in which Gaza Strip and the West Bank were divided, the two parties Fatah and Hamas used their television channels as a mouthpiece to legitimate their policy and defend their actions’.



A very small percentage of respondents – 5% of Fatah, 4% of Hamas, 6% of other factions and 5% of independents – believed that neither of the two television channels functions as a mouthpiece for either Fatah and Hamas.

## ***5.6 Television as a Fourth Estate***

### **5.6.1 Television functions as a fourth estate**

The survey illustrates that 91% of Fatah members, 90% of Hamas members, 96% of other factions members and 82% of independents think that the two television channels do not function as a fourth estate. The editorial policies of the two channels are dictated by their respective political leadership. Palestine TV focuses on covering violence committed by Hamas against Fatah members in Gaza Strip, while Al-Aqsa highlights violence committed by Fatah and the PA against Hamas members in the West Bank. In an ideal situation, in which media functions as a fourth estate, government transparency would be guaranteed. However, to guarantee this function, the media have to be financially and editorially independent (Kumar, 2006) - a situation which clearly does not exist in the Palestinian situation.

Habib (2010) noted that it is the main role of media to function as a fourth estate to watch authorities' activities. But it has to be independent, and staff recruitment policy should be based on professionalism rather than being influenced by political affiliation or nepotism. He gave two examples of the two television channels and their coverage of violent actions. The first example was when Hamas members organized a demonstration in the West Bank against the Israeli war in Gaza. The Palestinian security forces had attacked protesters with bullets, tear gas, and beaten them. At that time, Palestine TV, in the West Bank, did not cover the event. Al-Aqsa TV had, however, covered the event in collaboration with other channels. The second example was when Fatah members held a memorial ceremony for the late president Yasser Arafat in Gaza Strip, Hamas security forces attacked Fatah members and arrested them. That incident was not covered by Al-Aqsa, but Palestine TV covered the event with other news agencies in the Gaza Strip.

Needless to say, the level of freedom in the two channels is small. Both Fatah and Hamas governments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are exerting pressure on the independent media in order not to expose the governments' violations. Consequently, the role of the independent media are small. Batrawi (2001) noted that Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had sought to control Palestine TV because of political and financial considerations as had Al-Aqsa in the context of Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. According to Al-Abadlah (2009) neither channel meets the public's demands, instead focusing on partisan political issues and activities. Abuhashish (2010) commented that Palestine TV does not function as a fourth estate and therefore does not monitor Fatah government activities in a critical way. Neither does Al-Aqsa TV discharge a watchdog function in relation to Hamas government activities. According to Abumuhsen (2010), 'there is a sense of harmony between the channel and the government'. Consequently, the channel will not criticise the government or even watch its activities, thus undermining its credibility and limiting its role in building trust between government and citizens.

Just 8% of Fatah, 11% of Hamas, 6% of other factions, and 16% of independents think that the two television channels function as a fourth estate. This very low level of confidence among respondents indicates that the two channels just occasionally broadcast programmes for people's interests, rather than for the government. Zaqout (2009) noted that Al-Aqsa TV policy is supporting the Palestinians. He added that: 'In Al-Aqsa television channel, we started to change our policy in order to end the Palestinian division. We started to change the language to create a climate for reconciliation'. At the same level, SK (2010) noted that Palestine TV has recently changed its policy and started to raise issues which concern the daily lives of Palestinians, bringing these to the notice of the authorities.

#### **5.6.2 Television criticises those in power**

The survey shows that 94% of Fatah, 97% of Hamas, 96% of other factions and 98% of independents think that Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV cannot criticise those in power in the Palestinian Authority and Hamas respectively. Undoubtedly, both Fatah and Hamas are using the media as a tool for political manipulation. Gazans believe that both political parties rely on stories and programmes in the media to sell their ideas, while the two television stations have become a part of the power structure of the political

parties and are relentlessly used to spread their ideologies. This means that media criticism is absent. As we learned from Kumar (2006), an independent media are essential for democracy as it can adopt a strategy of monitoring governments and criticising those in power. Gazans believe that the two television channels are not independent and therefore it is hard for them to criticise those in power.

With regard to Palestine TV, Jamal (2000a) notes that ‘political affiliation and personal allegiance appear to be an important factor in Palestine Broadcasting Corporation (Palestine TV) staff appointments, and few decisions, even of a very routine nature, are made without direct authorization from the very highest levels’ (p. 54). Shahin (2010), an independent Palestinian journalist, notes that the two television channels are defending their respective governments, and the two governments control what is published and prohibit any media criticism of ministries and government officials. Despite the press law and the Palestinian basic law, freedom of expression is not implemented by the two channels. In addition, there is a gap between what is claimed and what is the reality in the two television channels. Sabah (2010) notes that Palestine TV is not considered to be representative of Palestinians; it represents the government and those in power. Therefore, it will not be able to criticise them. At the same time, Al-Aqsa TV is linked to Hamas and spreads its ideology. He adds: ‘It is not independent and most of its programmes are related to Hamas faction. Therefore, it is impossible to critique those in power’.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the situation of the two television channels Palestine and Al-Aqsa in Palestine from the Gazans’ point of view. Respondents believed that each of the two channels are used as proxy by its controlling party – Fatah and Hamas – in the battle between the rival political groups. They introduce divisiveness rather than harmony, hatred instead of rational debate, and suspicion rather than social trust among Gazans. This undoubtedly leads to the undermining of media credibility, public mistrust and debasing of democratic structures. Yet the two channels cannot avoid their responsibility for shaping public opinion, building peace and social consensus. It is important to note that at this stage of state building, the two television channels can

function as a fourth estate, promote democracy by encouraging tolerance among various factions, and protect human rights. But their actions so far, as noted by Gazans, are insufficiently democratic as they are not even able to promote reconciliation between the two factions. As a result of these conditions, respondents have characterized the two channels thus:

- They do not perform a watchdog role or check on the government's performance;
- There is a lack of coverage of human rights' violations by both governments;
- There is insufficient public discussion and expression of diverse opinion;
- There is a lack of independence and the free flow of information;
- There is little critical coverage of those in power in the two factions.

The next chapter will provide an overview of comments and views expressed by the participants during the focus group sessions about the two channels and their contribution to enhance democratic communication in Palestine and towards processes of state-building.

## Chapter 6

### Focus Groups: Data Analysis

#### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the results from the discussions of eight focus groups which were conducted in different parts of the Gaza Strip. As stated in Chapter 4, most of the participants were recruited through the snowballing method with the help of my social contacts. The purpose of using this method was to avoid harassment by the authorities and to create trust among focus group members. The participants were taken from different groups – university students, human rights activists, journalists and non-governmental organization (NGO) employees. My intention was to target both the politically affiliated and independents in order to examine their perceptions of the television channels Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV and their perceived contribution to the democratization of Palestine. This chapter provides an overview of comments and views expressed by the participants during the focus group sessions in response to a set of questions (see chapter on Methodology). The comments are organised in five themes that emerged from the discussions.

#### 6.1 Key themes and sub-themes

The first theme, *Palestinian television and public participation*, examines the role of Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV in providing a platform for open discussion of divergent opinions and a consideration of whether the two channels create an arena for different groups to communicate freely with each other. In addition, it explores the views of Gazans on whether they have the freedom of expression to participate in debate and their perceptions of how the structures of the two channels influence this.

The second theme, *Political dimensions of television in Palestine*, arises from the comments and views expressed by the participants which demonstrate how the two channels relate to both political parties – Fatah and Hamas – and function as a

mouthpiece for the factions. It will also explore to what extent these channels help in bridging or expanding the political divide in Palestine.

The third theme, *Television performance and promotion of democracy*, will discuss the participants' comments about the role of the two television channels in fostering democracy, in relation to the three functions of media in a democracy: information, forum and critique. This will show to what extent the two channels are seen to promote these three functions.

The fourth theme, *Television's role in monitoring government actions*, arises from participants' perceptions of the role of the two channels in monitoring government activities. I will try to elicit from the focus groups' responses to what extent these two television channels function as a fourth estate, able to take a stand against government corruption and to criticise those in power.

The fifth and the last theme, *Television and the project of state-building*, will illustrate how the control of the two channels affects the state-building process, and the importance of an independent media at this stage. In addition, it will illustrate practical evidence of how the measures against the media and restrictions on journalists affect the process of state-building.

## **6.2 Theme 1: Palestinian television and public participation**

The discussion in the focus groups showed that public participation could mean several things. For some, it meant that the media had to provide channels for discussion, while for others it was the arena in which different social and political groups presented their views. Most agreed that it was the role of the media to provide citizens with an arena to discuss different issues and that citizens should have free access to media channels to present their views.

### ***Groups 1 and 2: Fatah faction, mixed gender, students and NGO workers***

These two mixed gender groups came from different backgrounds: students (aged 18-22) and professional workers in their 20s and 30s. However most of them referred to public participation in television channels as *Musharaka Fe Al Araa*, meaning 'opinion

participation'. Most of the group members had critical comments to make about public participation in both television channels, but Al-Aqsa TV received more criticism because it is run by their opponents, the Hamas faction.

For university students, Al-Aqsa TV was seen as radical in its orientation, serving Hamas and its political agenda. For the professionals, the objective behind public participation was to enable greater involvement of citizens. But both channels allowed only their own members to participate in their programming. A female university student described Al-Aqsa TV as a Hamas monopoly: 'Since its establishment, Al-Aqsa Television channel only allows Hamas members to participate in discussions on the channel' (18-year-old female Fatah supporter).

A male journalist described how participation was affected by those who controlled the channel:

Both television channels are controlled by political factions, therefore, members of each faction participate in the channel which belongs to them. If anyone from Fatah participates in Al-Aqsa Television channel, they will simply fade out his phone call. The same with the Palestine Television channel. They will not allow anyone from Hamas to participate (28-year-old male Fatah supporter).

However, one female participant suggested that sometimes the channels provided their opponents with space to express their opinions:

I think both television channels would not allow anyone to criticise any political party. The freedom of someone ends when it harms others. Their editorial policy is not allowing anyone to criticise. When they hear any criticism, they end the call. I agree that for some time when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, Palestine Television channel allowed people to participate and insult Hamas. On the other hand, when Al-Aqsa Television was covering Hamas taking over the Gaza Strip they allowed people's participation (25-year-old female Fatah supporter).

Gazans, especially Fatah members, believe that the Hamas movement is radical and fundamentalist.<sup>6</sup> A male from Fatah described Al-Aqsa Television as ‘radical and fundamental; we cannot express our opinions freely. Many thanks for Palestine Television channel’ (24-year-old male Fatah supporter).

***Groups 3 and 4: Male Fatah and Hamas students***

These two groups were all students from Al-Azhar University with ages ranging between 18 and 24, from different backgrounds. The students from both groups were either politically affiliated to or supportive of the Hamas or Fatah faction. In both groups, Fatah members had the same view of public participation in relation to Al-Aqsa TV. At the same time, Hamas members had equal perceptions of Palestine TV in terms of public participation. Fatah members described participation in Al-Aqsa TV as impossible for themselves and other people, while Hamas members said they were not allowed to participate in Palestine TV, although it is supposed to be the national television channel.

Both groups disagreed about the two channels’ policy towards the political division of Palestine and recognised the role of the two political leaderships in feeding this division through their television channels. A Gazan student from the Fatah faction described Al-Aqsa TV as biased: ‘Al-Aqsa Television is totally partial; it does not represent the Palestinian people, and does not allow them to express their opinions (21-year-old male Fatah supporter).

Another Fatah member, who criticised Al-Aqsa TV policy and described it as a servant for Hamas ideology, said:

Al-Aqsa Television channel attacks all Palestinian parties. All its news focuses on Fatah faults. Its policy is only to serve Hamas faction. They don’t tolerate any criticism. Therefore, they don’t allow people to participate (19-year-old male Fatah supporter).

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, they have tried impose an Islamic agenda. One incidence which led to huge criticism among Palestinians was when, in July 2009, Hamas took the decision to impose the wearing of headscarves and robes on female lawyers. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights condemned it as illegal and an unwarranted interference in the lawyers’ affairs involving serious prejudice to personal freedom and women’s rights (PCHR, 2009b).



Indeed, the language used by the Fatah members shows how much they were against Al-Aqsa TV policy. A young Gazan man from Fatah, in his description of Al-Aqsa TV, asserted that: ‘When Al-Aqsa Television channel is conducting talk shows, they purposely choose their guests. They don’t allow anyone to call during the show, especially if it is a live programme’ (18-year-old male Fatah supporter).

However, Hamas members’ criticisms of Palestine TV were also harsh. A member from the Hamas faction argued that Fatah controlled Palestine TV and imposed its own agenda:

I can say that Palestine Television channel is partial, serves the Fatah political party, does not focus on Fatah violations and faults, functions as a mouthpiece for Fatah, and attacks other parties. Only Fatah members and who support them can participate during their programmes (23-year-old male Hamas supporter)<sup>7</sup>.

Another member of Hamas criticised the Palestine TV channel, especially its performance in the recent past:

As a national television, Palestine TV channel should unite Palestinians. It should reflect the Palestinians’ aspirations and end Palestinian division. But, it seems the opposite. Fatah controls Palestinian institutions, including television, and prevents others. This increases animosity and deepens the Palestinian division (20-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Hamas members saw Al-Aqsa TV as an alternative to Palestine TV which represented the Palestinians and their aspirations for the freedom of Palestine.

#### ***Groups 5 and 6: Female Fatah and Hamas students***

These two groups were all students from Al-Aqsa University with ages ranging between 18 and 24, from different backgrounds and locations in the Gaza Strip. They were

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<sup>7</sup> All the Hamas participants prefaced their comments with ‘In the name of God’ as a mark of respect but this is not reproduced here every time.

politically affiliated to and supportive of either Hamas or Fatah. These groups were quieter than the Fatah and Hamas male groups. In terms of participation, their answers focused on channel content and programmes that allowed public participation. However, they also perceived bias in the approaches of the two channels.

A female student from Fatah accused Al-Aqsa TV of selectivity in its programmes: 'In Al-Aqsa Television channels, when they invite someone from Hamas for a talk show, they don't allow others to participate. They choose their guests and callers from outside' (19-year-old female Fatah supporter).

Another student from Hamas talked about the bias evident on both channels. She acknowledged that guests and callers broadcast on channels were politically biased:

In both TV channels, I can see the partiality by which guests who are invited to talk shows are related to political parties. Callers who participate in these talk shows or any other programmes are also from the same political party (20-year-old female Hamas supporter).

However, some thought that participation in television could be liberating if people were given a space to express their opinions and discuss issues related to their lives. But when a media channel becomes a monopoly for governments or political factions, public participation is undermined. A female student from Fatah described how much Al-Aqsa TV was controlled by Hamas and how this affects public participation:

Al-Aqsa Television does not raise sensitive issues which relate to, for example, their rule in Gaza. They raise issues which are against the Palestinian Authority and Fatah. They discuss these issues in talk shows in order to have more participants and to open the platform for their members to criticise. And the people who participate are all supportive of their ideology (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

For Hamas participants, Palestine TV is not seen as a credible source of information. They trust Al-Aqsa TV and participate in its programmes because they believe it reflects their aspirations. They mention how Al-Aqsa TV focuses on the criminality of

the Israeli occupation and how the Hamas military wing defends Palestinian rights. A student from Hamas expressed her view of Palestine TV when she criticised its contents:

I believe Al-Aqsa Television channel reflects our traditions and values. As a conservative people, I think we need to stick to our religion and enhance our traditions. Palestine Television broadcasts some programmes which are against our traditions. My values do not allow me to participate in or even watch the Palestine Television channel (22-year-old female Hamas supporter).

On the other hand, a student from Fatah argued that Al-Aqsa Television served Hamas ideology:

I believe we have more freedom of expression on the Palestine Television channel. Even its programmes are more moderate, and we can participate. In fact, what we watch on Al-Aqsa Television is either religious or political programmes. There is no variety as on the Palestine Television channel (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

***Groups 7 and 8: Mixed gender and faction and independents***

The participants in these two groups were in their 20s and 30s, from different backgrounds and locations within Gaza. There was also a mix in terms of political backgrounds; there were participants related to Fatah, the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestinian (PFLP), the Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), and independents. There was no-one related to Hamas or any other Islamic political party because conservative females usually do not mix with males, but that did not mean there was no-one expressing support for Al-Aqsa TV.

The groups' discussions and their concepts of public participation reflected their variety of backgrounds, revealing different comments and views from other groups. The concept of public participation among participants was embedded in ideas of liberty, freedom of expression and the right to communicate. These groups believed that the media should not be political, promoting a political agenda, but there should be a public channel working for the public interest. In addition, the state should not seek to

monopolise any media channel and should regulate the situation with laws that protect public broadcasting. A male from Fatah described how Hamas had the monopoly over Al-Aqsa TV: 'As a Fatah supporter, I can see the lack of freedom of expression on the Al-Aqsa Television channel. No-one can criticise government actions or anything related to Hamas. If anyone criticises the Hamas government in Gaza, they simply arrest or shoot him' (26-year-old male Fatah supporter).

Comments from independents varied: some favoured Palestine TV while others were supporters of Al-Aqsa TV. In addition, some participants criticised both channels. Indeed, what distinguished their comments was that their concept of public participation within the two channels was related to the structure of political parties and how they were seen to be trying to influence public opinion. A female human rights activist revealed her views about Palestine and Al-Aqsa Television channel and the differences between them:

We like Palestine TV, but when we compare it with Al-Aqsa, it does not have a strong message like Al-Aqsa channel. Al-Aqsa TV channel is very successful in its media message. It has huge potential because it is financially supported by Hamas. Its contents are very professional. But, when it comes to participation, I think we can participate, but we cannot critique Hamas' actions. So, there are limits for this participation (33-year-old independent female).

It is important to note that Palestine TV is officially defined as a national institution. According to its definition:

Palestine Broadcasting Corporation is a public national institution that constitutes a major and significant component of the national structure of the Palestinian society in its march towards achieving its basic rights of liberation and independence and the establishment of its independent state over its homeland (PBC, 1994).

As we can see, this definition states clearly that it is a public national institution and should reasonably be expected, therefore, to work for the public interest and provide a platform for public debate. But there is a contradiction between this definition and the

reality as experienced by those questioned. A female participant from DFLP argued that Palestine TV is monopolized by the Palestinian Authority:

It is supervised by Fatah elites. Indeed, being a government channel has prevented the channel progressing. That is why it's not widely watched. As a national television, Palestine Television channel has to be pluralistic and ensure public participation. Furthermore, the PA does not only control Palestine Television channel, but also other media institutions such as Palestine News Agency (WAFA), the voice of Palestine radio station, and other websites. I think the government should not monopolize any media channel and should regulate laws that protect public participation (29-year-old female DFLP supporter).

The political parties' control over media channels has been criticised by many scholars and non-governmental organizations (Al-Mezan, 2009; Hammad, 2010; Okal, 2009). Not only do they fail to provide a platform for public debate, the two channels could not ensure freedom of expression for all citizens irrespective of their political affiliation (Abed, 2010). According to Sabah (2010), both Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV are manipulated by the two political parties. Opinions and comments which are expressed by their members on the two channels are promoting hatred and hostility. However, Sabah believes that the right to participate should be maintained.

### **6.3 Theme 2: Political dimensions of television in Palestine**

It is important to note that after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian media flourished. Accordingly, Palestinian political parties sought to compete to establish their media channels to monopolize the public sphere. But the Palestinian Authority had to prove its ability in governing the local opposition group and so they set limitations on media channels.

After violence erupted between the two main political parties, Fatah and Hamas resorted to using the media to justify their actions. Specifically, they used television channels as a tool to hide or fabricate facts to achieve their goals. Indeed, Hamas' control over the Gaza Strip and Fatah control over the West Bank has led to encroachment on media institutions that goes against their policies. In addition, journalists who have an affiliation to a political party have engaged in an open war that

reflects their ideology in an attempt to win public support. Moreover, all forms of media, including television, radio stations and websites have engaged in that war. This is borne out by participants' comments on how the two television channels are related to Fatah and Hamas and whether they function as political mouthpieces. I will analyse how the two factions used their media channels in the internal conflict and how that affects media performance.

Political parties in Palestine have realized the importance of mass media in psychological warfare and winning public support. In recent years, each has focused on establishing its media infrastructure to be able to utilise it in their media war. For example, Hamas owns a large number of mass media outlets such as radio stations, newspapers, electronic forums, websites, and satellite television channels, while Fatah is trying to catch up and establish its own media channels to counter the strong influence of the Hamas media.

***Groups 1 and 2: Fatah faction, mixed gender, students and NGO workers***

Participants in these two groups were very disappointed by Al-Aqsa TV and its contribution to ending the Palestinian division. They criticised the way in which Hamas monopolised the channel. A female participant accused Al-Aqsa of fundamentalism and discrimination. 'The Al-Aqsa television channel is using abusive words which should not be used in media. In addition, there are no programmes related to women. There are no female announcers. It is more fundamentalist, and there is no space for others' (28-year-old female Fatah supporter).

The Hamas faction considered that the official media represented by Palestine TV did not meet people's demands. They found that there was a huge vacuum in the media system run by the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, they focused on establishing their own media and created the necessary infrastructure to build a strong media system. This has been backed by supporters from inside and outside the Palestinian Territories. One of the participants expressed his view about Al-Aqsa Television and how it serves Hamas. 'I feel that the Palestine Television channel has more credibility than the Al-Aqsa channel. It is clear that Al-Aqsa functions as a mouthpiece for Hamas and a guide for their political struggle' (27-year-old male Fatah supporter).

The media carries a great responsibility for reducing conflicts and disputes between communities but it must have credibility and objectivity when reporting events. Moreover, journalists have responsibilities in relation to serving the public, to provide a broad scope for discussion to inform public opinion and to provide a basis for political development. A female participant criticised Al-Aqsa TV for being neither responsible nor credible:

I think Al-Aqsa Television channel should be more responsible. It has played a major role in fuelling the conflict when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip. Indeed, it aimed to influence the public opinion to justify Hamas actions. It was not objective when it presented the events and the images of Hamas taking over the Strip; what Hamas did was in the interest of the Palestinian people (24-year-old female Fatah supporter).

***Groups 3 and 4: Male Fatah and Hamas students***

Both Fatah and Hamas participants admitted that the two channels served the two factions politically and function as a mouthpiece but at the same time they claimed that each gives a space for people to express their opinions. However, each party member expressed criticism of the other party's channel. A male participant from Hamas described Palestine TV as biased and only recruiting Fatah members. 'In Palestine Television channel, the recruitment of people is restricted to Fatah members, and the channel controlled and dictated by the elites in Fatah party. This has clearly appeared by the low level of journalistic performance especially when the television occupied the role of being the main tool in the struggle' (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

On the other hand, a participant from Fatah responded to this view by saying:

... you can't deny that all people who work in Al-Aqsa Television channel are members of Hamas. I admit that the recruitment in Palestine Television channel is restricted to Fatah, but at the same time you find other people from different factions. But in Al-Aqsa television, it is impossible to find a member of staff who is not from Hamas (23-year-old male Fatah supporter).

The internal conflict in Palestine has taken up a significant amount of broadcasting time in the media. This has affected the coverage of other important topics such as the suffering of people and issues of conflict arising out of the Israeli occupation. The media have played a provocative role in putting out inflammatory broadcasts and has reinforced the existing atmosphere of accusation and mistrust. There was clear evidence that the political parties were using the media as a tool of struggle. A male participant from Hamas claimed that Palestine TV was using provocative language.

I don't trust Palestine Television channel because it was clearly partial when they described Hamas as a 'black militia'. The channel is clearly functioning as a mouthpiece for Fatah. It covers the events that serve the Palestinian Authority and Fatah. In addition, any recruitment for Palestine Television channel is based on their political affiliation, which means he or she should be from Fatah, and if not, they have to work according to the channel policy (20-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Another participant from Fatah responded by saying:

I don't trust Al-Aqsa Television channel too. Their policy is based on 'if you are with us then you are against them'. They described the Palestinian president as a traitor and the Palestinian police as 'Abbas Gangs'. It is good that you admit that Palestine Television recruit people from Fatah and other parties. But Al-Aqsa Television recruits people only who are very loyal to Hamas (20-year-old male Fatah supporter).

#### ***Groups 5 and 6: Female Fatah and Hamas students***

Since its establishment, the Palestinian Authority has tried to control the media in the Palestinian territories. However, politicians always seek to control the media in order to present their views (Randall, 1998). A female member from Hamas reflected on the extent to which Fatah elites have influence on Palestine TV.

I think Palestine Television is manipulated by the Fatah party as it has to reflect the party's goals. Elites in Fatah are keen to have such a channel because they seek to reflect their opinions. The channel office is located in the President's



compound; the orders are given from the President's office to the channel director. The channel gives favourable treatment to the President and Fatah party members (23-year-old female Hamas supporter).

Another female from Fatah argued how on the other hand Hamas leaders intervened in Al-Aqsa TV.

Al-Aqsa Television channel is manipulated by the Hamas party; it has been launched by party support. The party determines what programmes should be broadcasted. I am sure the hierarchy system in the channel does not allow any member working in the channel to take decisions. The decisions are being taken by the high position leaders in Hamas. In fact what we see on the screen reflects Hamas political message about power control and the replacement of the Fatah regime (22-year-old female Fatah supporter).

It is important to note that Hamas has established its own media in the Gaza Strip to control and influence the information broadcast from Gaza. There is no doubt that both parties consider the media to be a function of their authority and believe that the media should not be overseeing their actions. A member from Fatah expressed her view about Hamas control of media in Gaza:

Hamas has concentrated all the media ownership in its hand to hold the information that is disseminated to the public. By doing this, they guarantee that all the media work under their control. They use all media forms as a mouthpiece to spread their ideology. These forms are television channels, websites, newspapers and radio stations (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

However, regular interventions in the conduct of the media have created a major threat to the professional activities of journalists and the credibility of media channels. A participant from Fatah described how the Hamas government seized journalists' work in Gaza.

The Hamas government attacked all radio stations in Gaza and shut it down and confiscated Palestine Television equipment in order not to reveal the truth about

their taking over the Strip. In addition, they prevented Palestine Television channel journalists from covering events in Gaza. They arrested all journalists who wrote against them. They used to call journalists and offer them to work with them or otherwise they would be arrested (24-year-old female Fatah supporter).

A female from Hamas responded to that: 'Fatah represented by the Palestinian Authority has done the same thing in the West Bank; they arrested journalists and closed many television stations. They closed Al-Aqsa Television channel and arrested its journalists' (22-year-old female Hamas supporter).

***Groups 7 and 8: Mixed gender and faction and independents***

There is no doubt that the continuing situation that created the political division between Fatah and Hamas, as well as the use of media channels in smear campaigns against each other, has had a negative impact on sympathizers with the Palestinian cause. Indeed, the media campaigns between the two parties have contributed to increasing the tension and caused clashes that led to many victims on both sides. An independent participant articulated the situation of both channels:

On the Palestine Television channel, they continually mention that Hamas was responsible for attacking the Palestinian Authority and the death of innocent civilians when they took over the Strip. On the other hand, Hamas on Al-Aqsa Television channel repeatedly accuse the Palestinian Authority of betrayal and illegality. This shows how much both parties are using their own media as a propaganda tool and to defend their actions. I think they have to stop manipulating the media because people do not trust these channels. They have to be reliable and function for the people's interest and not for their party's interests (35-year-old independent female).

Another independent participant explained how the two factions used the media to favour their leaders and to defend their views.

I think both television channels in their coverage are favouring their parties. The official Palestine Television channel gives favourable coverage to the

Palestinian president and Fatah party and on the other hand, Al-Aqsa Television channel gives favourable coverage to Ismail Haneya ( Hamas prime minister and head of government in Gaza) and the Hamas party. I think none of them are independent; employees in both channels are paid by their governments. They usually use it as a propaganda tool to defend their views and gain the public support (28-year-old independent female).

Another politically-independent participant voiced his opinion about both factions and the way they use the media.

Fatah have created a Ministry of Information and Hamas government have established the Governmental Media Office by which they control and regulate all the media in Gaza Strip. I think it is one way of censorship. They give license to any media channel that operates with their political line or they shut the channels that are against their policy. By broadcasting programmes that support their political agenda, they are trying to influence the Palestinian people and the Arab world. But these programmes are expanding the Palestinian division. I think using such channels like Al-Aqsa and Palestine as a trumpet for their factions is a big mistake (31-year-old independent male).

A participant from PFLP described how Fatah and Hamas control television channels for their own interests:

In fact both Palestine and Al-Aqsa Television channel function as a mouthpiece for both political parties. Since its establishment, the Palestine Television channel is controlled by Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority elites sought to impose their orders to broadcast programmes related to Fatah achievements. It is a governmental channel. Thus, the first article in the news is about the president. At the same level, Al-Aqsa Television channel is owned by Hamas. Hamas sought to gain more support from both the Arab and Muslim world. Therefore, they broadcast programmes supporting resistance

against Israeli Occupation and religious programmes. I think both television channels have to give a space for the people to express their opinions (27-year-old female PFLP supporter).

However, some participants were in favour of the concept of a single public broadcasting channel instead of multiple partisan channels, while others preferred multiple media channels as a form of liberalization. One participant commented on the role of the public broadcasting channel and how it should function:

If we have multi television channels where each channel related to one political party, they would function for each party interest and use it as a mouthpiece to spread their political agenda. But if we have only one public channel, it would work for the public interest and ensure public participation (31-year-old male PPP supporter).

He was interrupted by another participant:

I think if we have multi channels, we would have different opinions and views. But if we have only one channel, it could be manipulated by the government, and then we will have only the government point of view. In addition, we will not be able to participate or have access. To be honest, I don't think there is an independent channel in the real world, but different views are better than one view (26-year-old female PFLP supporter).

#### **6.4 Theme 3: Television performance and the promotion of democracy.**

This theme explores how the participants' comments about the two television channels raise questions about the relationship between media and democracy. Nordenstreng (2001) defined three key functions of the media in a democracy. These functions are information, forum, and critique: individuals have the right to access information in order to make informed choices and to enhance their contribution in decision-making regarding issues affecting their lives. The basic principle of democracy is that individuals have a right to have the information that affects their lives and to be guaranteed participation in decision making (Hatem, 1996). The reference to a 'forum'

highlights the requirement for media to provide a platform for debate, so that different opinions can be aired and discussed and rational outcomes reached which are based on democratic dialogue. The objectives of democratic media are to ensure active participation of individuals, diversity of opinions, and the extension of public participation from the grassroots. The third function, 'critique', refers to the role of a democratic media in monitoring state actions and reporting violations committed by those in power against individuals.

***Groups 1 and 2: Fatah faction, mixed gender, students and NGO workers***

There is no doubt that the Palestinian media, especially television channels, have been affected by political circumstances arising from the Israeli occupation, Palestinian Intifada, internal division, and the freezing of the democratic process. All these factors have played and continue to have a significant role in the development of Palestinian media. A member from Fatah pointed out how Hamas censors the information being broadcast: 'Only their television channel in Gaza is allowed to cover the local news. They are doing this because they want the local news to be covered from their point of view' (22-year-old male Fatah supporter).

When the two movements resorted to the media to conduct their disputes, many intellectuals and journalists rejected a media discourse lacking objectivity and professionalism, and called the two movements to keep away from the media and to look after the country's interests. Although there are many newspapers and foreign agency correspondents in the Palestinian Territories, they are not usually free to cover events. In many cases, the security forces of the two governments deal directly with journalists. Their practice is to send veiled threats to journalists telling them to keep away from the sensitive topics that affect their security and safety. A member of Fatah expressed her view about the relationship between Hamas and journalists and how this affected journalists' work in Gaza:

Politicians and elites in Hamas are trying to maintain good relationships with journalists in order to present their views. This would decrease the criticism. On the other hand, if journalists do not cooperate, they will try to harass them. By doing this, they monopolize what is broadcasted or printed which is considered anti-democratic (26-year-old female Fatah supporter).

When Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, their security forces raided Palestine Television and radio stations that belonged to other factions and closed them. In addition, they confiscated media equipment and arrested journalists who tried to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. A female participant from Fatah described how much the Hamas closure of media institutions affected the dissemination of information:

When Hamas took over the Strip, they closed all radio stations and television channels in order to prevent any information being disseminated that could harm them. I think withholding such information and preventing people knowing is considered anti-democratic and against basic human rights (23-year-old female Fatah supporter).

It is worth noting that Hamas considered ‘Jihad in media’ as a real Jihad in its war against the Israeli Occupation. Recently they have recruited people who are fluent in Hebrew to attack Israeli websites and send warning messages to the Israelis that Hamas is strong and capable of fighting the Israeli military.

Their policy against media institutions is an attempt to force the media to work for their interests, and to prevent the dissemination of truth. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, journalists are too afraid to write about violations committed by the two factions. Hamas has resorted to violence against Fatah journalists and its media institutions in Gaza Strip. Fatah too has practised restrictions on Hamas media institutions and arrested its journalists in the West Bank. Undoubtedly, these actions do not meet international standards for the freedom of the press and many reports have been issued by human rights organizations describing the violations carried out by the two governments (MADA, 2010; PCHR, 2010).

#### ***Groups 3 and 4: Male Fatah and Hamas students***

The two factions have launched media campaigns in a process of intimidation to smear their opponents. Participants in these two groups were very tense when criticisms from both factions’ members were revealed and showed how much they were trying to justify their factions’ actions. The discussion was polarised among two members from the first group when a member from Fatah said: ‘Hamas violates freedom of expression for both

citizens and journalists. They think that their actions can be hidden from the public' (22-year-old male Fatah supporter).

A member from Hamas responded by saying:

It is not only Hamas. You have to admit that Fatah government in the West Bank is also violating freedom of expression and opinion. It's not just that, they also undermine freedom of media, arrest journalists, and impose censorship. This is to show that they are able to control the situation and to satisfy the Israelis and the West. The Palestine Television channel is not capable of offering the platform for the people to criticise the government because it is controlled by the Fatah party (23-year-old male Hamas supporter).

The way that the two governments deal with journalists has been criticised by local and international human rights organizations. Journalists are not allowed to criticise or write about the two governments. In this context, many journalists have confirmed that they were not able to capture images of the tortures, beatings, and arrests that citizens and defenders of freedoms have suffered (Eaid, 2010; Sabah, 2010). This is because their lives are at risk, as they receive threats of detention, torture and death. A member from Hamas articulated the situation in the West Bank and how the Palestinian Authority deals with journalists:

I think there is no protection for any journalist who writes against the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. They don't respect the law. The judicial authority is unwilling to oppose the executive power. The military forces decide what is harmful and what is not; they take decisions about freedom of expression and how to deal with it (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Another member of Fatah responded by commenting on how the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip violates press law:

The Hamas government doesn't implement the press law in the Gaza Strip; they have established a Governmental Media Office to deal with media institutions and the journalists. This office decides what is legal and what is not. The

authorities violate constitutional rights and impose sanctions according to their interests. All these actions are against democracy and freedom of expression (24-year-old male Fatah supporter).

***Group 5 and 6: Female Fatah and Hamas students***

The Palestinian media are characterized by their partisan nature and non-objectivity because of the financial support required from their supporters. This has led to a diversion from protecting national interests to protecting their faction's interest, and consequently they have lost their credibility. While this media dispute is taking place between the two parties, any adherence by the media to generally accepted values and ethics of journalism has become very difficult. This is because the media cannot function as a propaganda tool and a tool for knowledge dissemination at the same time.

Members of these two groups had very useful interactions in which they tried to analyse the situation in Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A member from Hamas illustrated the situation of media institutions in the West Bank:

Fatah has concentrated all media channels in the West Bank under its control. They have the Palestine Television channel, Palestine News Agency, Voice of Palestine radio, and Al-Hayyah newspaper. In addition, they cooperate with other media channels related to Fatah such as Al-Ayyam newspaper. All this ownership concentration is preventing others freely establishing new independent media. Therefore, Fatah represented by the Palestinian Authority is not just undermining democracy and freedom of media, they also violate constitutional rights, monitor the media, and restrict journalists' work (22-year-old female Hamas supporter).

A member of Fatah responded by noting Hamas ownership of media institutions:

We have to be realistic. Hamas also owns the media in the Gaza Strip. They have created their media empire in Gaza and prevented others to create their own media. Their media include Al-Aqsa Television channel, Al-Resala newspaper, Falastine newspaper, radio stations, and several websites. They employ all these tools for the confrontation battle between them and Fatah. They



consider it as part of the struggle between them and Fatah. They have prevented the media from anti-Hamas coverage. But their anti-democratic actions have been exposed by international media working in Gaza (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

The freedom of journalists in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is greatly restricted, in some cases virtually absent. They are not able to report what is going on in the streets, because the security forces consider certain areas to be a closed military zone. Security forces are taking repressive actions against journalists and media institutions, if they dare to cover stories which show citizens being tortured. These actions are aimed at imposing a complete blackout on news of what is happening and at preventing citizens from knowing the truth. In this context, human rights organizations have urged the two governments to respect freedom of opinion and expression and to stop journalists' arrest and torture, allowing them to practise their profession freely.

***Groups 7 and 8: Mixed gender and faction and independents***

In these two groups, independents and members of other factions confirmed how much the two governments control the media channels so that these channels do not provide a platform for citizens to express their opinions. An independent male argued this clearly:

I think free and independent media are the key for democracy. These television channels are not free and not independent. We as Palestinians have the right to freedom of expression. But the two television channels are not implementing this right. I as a member of Palestinian society and independent person do not have the right to express my opinion freely in either channel. For example, I cannot criticise any of the two government's policies or any other action which I don't like (35-year-old independent male).

Another member from the Palestinian People's Party (PPP) confirmed the view expressed by his colleague:

I believe that for democracy to survive, both television channels have to provide the platform for people to express their opinions. The two channels provide this

to their members only and restrict others to participate. In this way, it is very clear that both governments undermine freedom of opinions in Gaza Strip and the West Bank (29-year-old male PPP supporter).

A member of the Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine expressed her opinion about how press laws restrict the journalist's work in Palestine and how the two governments deal with journalists:

The Palestinian press law was passed by the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat but has not been approved by the Palestinian legislative council. It has many articles that violate freedom of opinion and freedom of expression. It also restricts journalists' work and offers harsh punishment for offenders who write against the government. I think these articles are totally unacceptable and against democracy (33-year-old female DFLP member).

Many human rights activists have affirmed that neither of the two television channels is independent and they get their orders from the political wings of both factions (Abuhjayer, 2010; Abushamallah, 2010). A member of Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine criticised Palestine TV and expressed his view about how the channel should fulfil its role as a national television station:

Palestine Television should broadcast programmes that encourage citizens to interact with officials in the government. ... I think for democracy to function, the media have to be independent. Palestine Television as a national television is not independent. It is a governmental channel, financially supported by the government. Therefore, in financial terms, we don't expect it to be independent. But, at least it should act in public interest and reflect citizen's problems (31-year-old male PFLP supporter).

#### **6.5 Theme 4: Television as a Fourth Estate: monitoring government actions**

After the Oslo Agreement and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, the new media experience that emerged expected to witness a new era of freedom and to be a real influence in the development of democracy. The Oslo Agreement imposed an obligation

on the Palestinian Authority that it should restrain opposition parties in order to moderate criticism of Israel or the United States. The weakness of the Palestinian Authority in the face of external political pressure resulted from its dependence on Western donor countries.

During the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian media experienced severe restrictions in terms of freedom of expression, but the arrival of the Palestinian Authority led to the establishment of a great many media channels. The Oslo Agreement also created a very difficult situation for those opposition groups representing other Palestinian parties who refused to participate in the government. Because of its role as the dominant player within the Palestinian Authority, Fatah was able to control the radio and television station. The other parties tried to create their own media channels, but the PA did not tolerate opposition and closed down their institutions and arrested journalists who criticised its performance. The Palestinian Authority became like many other undemocratic Arab regimes, violating media freedom by acting against journalists and media institutions. What made the situation even more difficult was the lack of separation of powers between government and the judiciary. The often unrepresentative elite controlled both the judiciary and the executive power, thus compromising the independence of the judiciary. Such a flawed political arrangement undermined the democracy and freedom proclaimed by the Palestinian Authority.

As Jamal has noted:

The Palestinian process of state formation is taking place in a situation of strangling dependency. This confines the PA's sovereignty and cripples its judicial potency. Beside the internal pressures exerted on the PA by local social and political groups, there are clear external pressures that limit its governing capabilities. To cope with these pressures, the PA has set limitations on the local media. These limitations empty the media of any substantial plurality and subvert the democratic role that it could play in the process of national construction (2000b, p. 498).

The focus groups were asked to what extent the two channels are monitoring the two governments and thus contributing to their role as the fourth estate.

***Groups 1 and 2: Fatah faction, mixed gender, students and NGO workers***

The concept of 'fourth estate' was clear to the groups in that they understood that the media must be able to criticise the government. But they were aware that very few media outlets in Arab countries can function as a fourth estate due to state censorship. Therefore, given that Palestine is an Arab country, they did not expect the media to function as a fourth estate. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority has created a new socio-economic situation, in which a large number of political and economic elites have emerged. It is argued that elites, especially those with political influence, view democracy and the freedom of opinion and expression as a threat which would undermine their control and authority, because they may contribute to the mobilization of a popular revolution to remove those in power. Therefore, they enact laws and legislations that limit freedom of opinion and expression, claiming this is necessary in order to maintain national unity and serve the national interest. In addition, they exploit the mass media as a mouthpiece for their own party interests.

Although there are many different political parties in the Palestinian arena, none have challenged such an authoritarian regime to create a space for freedom of opinion and expression, so that they could express their views and urge the media to serve the people. Indeed, evidence shows that the ruling elites believe that they are the only ones who care about the country's interests and the people have no right to express their opinions or to participate in political life. A member from Fatah tried to justify why the Palestinian Authority controlled the media:

In fact our political situation does not allow the media to function as a watchdog because it is not that powerful to discuss issues related to government corruption or violation against human rights. If such issues were discussed in media, public feelings would be inflamed which could even result in a coup. This is what happened when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and expelled the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, television has to be secured and governed by people loyal to the government (28-year-old male Fatah supporter).

Another member echoed this view, justifying the Palestinian Authority's control of the television:

I think if the media criticise the government, this situation would create divisions in the Palestinian national project. We are in a situation where we need the people to support their government not to criticise it. Therefore, I see the government holding the national television channel is the right strategy (27-year-old female Fatah supporter).

The continuation of the conflict in the Palestinian arena has led to the destruction of media infrastructure as well as the values of freedom of expression in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This has helped to undermine Palestinian social structure because of the false information that has been broadcast by the two television channels as part of their propaganda strategy. It has become difficult for the two channels to function as a watchdog or fourth estate. In addition, freedom of opinion has become one of the victims of the Palestinian conflict, in which many journalists have been tortured, detained, or harassed to force them to remain silent. Human rights organizations have challenged the two parties to stop the 'covering mouths' policy, and respect human rights and freedoms. A member from Fatah expressed her opinion about the policy of Al-Aqsa TV:

Hamas killed many citizens when they took over the Strip, but television did not cover any of these violations. They usually harass journalists and torture them. The channel was presenting Hamas's takeover of the Strip as a victory when they broadcast live programmes to receive calls of congratulations. It is clearly defending Hamas actions. Therefore, we don't expect Al-Aqsa to function as a watchdog for Hamas government (33-year-old female Fatah supporter).

The struggle between the two parties has also split international solidarity with the Palestinian people and has distorted the image of the Palestinian struggle, which had long been known for its sacrifice and upholding of rights. In the current situation, in the absence of robust laws, the ability to protect human rights has been diminished. With growing threats to journalists and civil society organizations, it has become difficult for human rights organizations to provide statistics and information about abuses and violations committed against freedom of opinion and expression. The two television channels have been monitoring each other's violations, so in that sense each has been a

watchdog over the other faction: Al-Aqsa TV revealed violations committed by the Palestinian Authority and Fatah members against Hamas and its institutions in the West Bank, and on the other hand, Palestine TV revealed violations committed by Hamas forces against the PA institutions and Fatah members in the Gaza Strip.

***Groups 3 and 4: Male Fatah and Hamas students***

A member from Fatah illustrated how the Hamas government deals with journalists in Gaza Strip and how they control the information that is disseminated from Gaza:

Hamas creates fear among editors and journalists and guarantees that none of them would write against the government and their actions. I think the lack of legitimacy of Hamas government puts it in a position to practise censorship and violate freedom of expression (23-year-old male Fatah supporter).

A member from Hamas described how the media could function as a watchdog:

I think for the media to function as a fourth estate it has to be financially independent. This is very hard because the media needs stable financial resources. In addition, journalists working in media have to be independent and not politically affiliated. I think most of journalists in Palestine are politically affiliated or at least supportive of political parties, and media institutions are also financially dependent on parties. I am sure there are independent journalists, but they are very few and they cannot criticise the governments because of heavy censorship in both Gaza and the West Bank (24-year-old male Hamas supporter).

A participant from Fatah justified Palestinian Authority control over the media as part of the national project:

Palestine Television has a national responsibility to explain the policies of Palestinian Authority and at the same time reflect the public demands. It has a role to emphasize the national project as we are in a stage of building our state. Therefore, I see that the Palestinian Authority has the right to control the

television channel and thus we don't expect the channel to function as a watchdog at this stage (22-year-old male Fatah supporter).

A member from Hamas contributed to the discussion and responded by criticising the policy implemented by Palestine TV:

The hierarchy in the Fatah party and especially in Palestine Television does not allow journalists to raise sensitive issues such as investigating allegations against the Fatah elite. The employment policy in the Palestinian Authority institutions and especially Palestine Television channel is based on nepotism. There is lack of transparency in the programmes that are being broadcast and the way they tackle sensitive issues. How can we expect such a channel to function as a watchdog? (23-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Another member from Hamas supported this view and showed to what extent Fatah has influence over Palestine TV:

The power structure, the process of centralization, and the interference of Fatah members in Palestinian television channel has made it impossible for people who are working in the channel to be creative in the programmes and the issues they tackle. The Palestinian Authority policy sought to watch the freedom of expression and media institutions in order not to provoke the public sentiments against the corruption that exist in the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, transparency would not be promoted and the channel will not be able to function as a watchdog (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

***Groups 5 and 6: Female Fatah and Hamas students***

A member from Hamas expressed her opinion about the Palestinian Authority and how it controls Palestine TV, which makes it impossible for it to function as a fourth estate:

Palestine Television should monitor the government and expose human rights violations. It is supposed to be for the public because it is our national television but it is not functioning in a proper way. It is a channel which promotes Fatah and the Palestinian Authority agenda (20-year-old female Hamas supporter).

Another member from Fatah from the same group countered by arguing that Hamas too used its television for promoting its agenda, as it considered television to be a good tool to mobilize the people:

Hamis established Al-Aqsa Television channel just before the election in 2006 because it realized that it is an important tool for propaganda. They have succeeded in mobilizing the people and get the necessary support. However, their television is not functioning as a watchdog. It is the opposite, it only glorifies Hamas achievements (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

A member from Hamas expressed her opinion about the election coverage and how the national television should function at election time. She criticised Palestine TV for manipulating the election campaign:

Palestine Television is considered to be the national channel. But it did not give other factions' members the opportunity to present their programmes during the election. Enormous amount of time was given to Fatah members. The channel did not brief the people of candidates' programmes. I think it should have covered the election fairly, but it was totally biased (23-year-old female Hamas supporter).

A member from Hamas said that Palestine TV was one of the key institutions of the Palestinian Authority:

The Palestinian Authority sought to influence all media systems in the Palestinian territories. They built their media system to mobilize the public for their policy about Oslo Agreement. In fact they were worried that the public could reject the agreement, but they succeeded. This showed that rather than being a watchdog, Palestine Television was being used to manipulate the public opinion for endorsing the Agreement (23-year-old female Hamas supporter).

A member from Fatah responded to that by saying: 'I think it is the same in Al-Aqsa Television channel where they have consultation (Shura) system in which the directors



have to take orders from the high-level Hamas leaders' (22-year-old female Fatah supporter).

***Groups 7 and 8: Mixed gender and faction and independents***

The pressure that is exerted on media institutions and journalists by the two governments, and their control of official mass media, has resulted in a uniform media message and a partisan media that functions as a mouthpiece for the respective governments. This has considerably restricted and compromised the opportunities for the media to function in its watchdog role. This has been made worse by the absence of freedom of expression. Governmental media have played an important role in mobilizing the Palestinian people, but only in reinforcing the divide between those who support the ruling Fatah authority in Ramallah and those who support the opposition Hamas party in Gaza. Such a polarisation in media politics has created a real setback for democratic values.

An independent member summed up the media situation in Gaza Strip and the West Bank and how political factions were manipulating the media:

I think for the media to function as a watchdog, it has to be independent. In Palestine we have many political factions with each one eager to own a media channel to mobilize the people and to win their support. It is impossible to have independent media or the media to function as a fourth estate (27-year-old independent female).

Another member supported her colleague's view. She analysed the situation in both television channels and explained the degree of liberty:

As a governmental channel, Palestine Television is not expected to criticise the government. And as a partisan channel, Al-Aqsa Television channel also is not expected to critique Hamas government. I see that both channels are not having that degree of liberty to adopt a strategy of monitoring government policy. They are financially dependent on the two governments. Both television channels are protecting their faction's interests instead of public interests. The policy of the

two channels is built to praise the two leaders and their governments (30-year-old independent female).

A member from the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestinian (PFLP) described how both parties committed violations against journalists and human rights in the Palestinian territories:

Both parties have committed violations against human rights. Fatah violate human rights and suppress the freedom of expression in the West Bank. They arrest any citizen who criticises them. Hamas in Gaza Strip detain any journalists who write against them. Palestine Television concentrates on violations committed by Hamas in Gaza, while Al-Aqsa Television channel exposes those by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank (28-year-old independent male).

#### **6.6 Theme 5: Television and the project of state-building**

Reversing its long-held policy of not taking part in elections, Hamas contested elections in 2006 and agreed to participate in the Palestinian Authority. It won the majority of seats in Gaza but due to ideological differences leading to political clashes with Fatah, it took over the Gaza Strip and thus contributed to the collapse of democracy and the state-building project. The events that followed the Hamas victory in the elections had a huge impact on the Palestinian national project and state-building process. Palestine has since been divided into two parts with two governments – Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip and Fatah the West Bank. Since then, the Palestinian dream, for which thousands of Palestinians sacrificed their lives over the last decades, has been lost. It is important to note that Hamas policy was based on resistance, and its ideology was to liberate Palestine from the Israeli occupation. Hamas was against the Palestinian Authority and the agreements signed with Israel. It refused to participate in the Palestinian Authority. Hamas has used all media outlets under its control to accuse Fatah and the Palestinian Authority of betrayal and giving up Palestinian land.

Ideologically and politically the situation remains deeply divided and antagonistic. The political polarisation is reflected also in polarisation within the media and continued hostility between the two groups. Against this backdrop, laws on the protection of

human rights and freedom of expression have been constantly violated by both sides. In addition, the siege imposed on the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation has considerably limited the ability of media institutions to contribute to state-building. Many scholars have argued that the sovereignty of media are as fundamental for state-building as it is essential to the success of the national project (Ayish, 2001; Ayubi, 1995; Jamal, 2003).

As already discussed, the two governments have consistently used the media to defend their political agendas. In order to avoid harassment by the security forces, the media in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have maintained close relationships with political elites in the two governments, which have imposed restrictions on the freedom of expression. This control of the socio-political sphere, with its restrictions of freedom of expression and violations against media institutions, has had a profound impact on the state-building process.

***Groups 1 and 2: Fatah faction, mixed gender, students and NGO workers***

Participants in the first group, all from Fatah, favoured the idea of the Palestinian Authority controlling the media. One of the participants argued that it benefited the Palestinian state-building process:

The Palestinian Authority was right to control the Palestine Television channel because we are in a state-building process and we need to maintain our national security. If they hadn't, others and maybe enemies will take advantage of this opportunity and disrupt the state-building project (26-year-old male Fatah supporter).

Another member of the group suggested that the Palestinian political situation was unstable, and therefore the Palestinian Authority had taken the right decision to control the national media:

We have a large number of not well-educated people and they are an easy target for deception. I think the Palestinian Authority holding the national television was the right decision. Our political situation is unstable and we have many

players in the Palestinian arena; everyone is trying to mobilize the public (22-year-old female Fatah supporter).

A member from the second group raised the issue of Hamas using Al-Aqsa TV to deepen Palestinian divisions:

The editorial policy of Al-Aqsa Television is deepening the Palestinian division. I think in the process of state-building the stability of the country is more important than the party interests. Therefore, I think the government holding the national television was the right decision (25-year-old male Fatah member).

Another participant supported that view and pointed out how Hamas used Al-Aqsa TV to offend the Palestinian president and therefore disrupt the Palestinian national project:

We are experiencing a major change in our history where we are building our state, therefore they have to support the president and the prime minister, not to betray them. It is clear that they are using their television channel to defame the Palestinian president and his prime minister (27-year-old female Fatah supporter).

#### ***Groups 3 and 4: Male Fatah and Hamas students***

The Palestinian experience in democracy and freedom of opinion has been traumatic in all senses. Because journalists feel so threatened they are using self-censorship in case their writings affect national security or Authority interests. They are restricted not only by the governments, but also by customs and traditions which restrict the topics they cover, especially sensitive topics. Taking all these factors in consideration, many commentators argued that the project of state-building has been deeply affected (Abed, 2010; Shaqoura, 2010).

In this context, a member from Hamas added to the discussion, criticising the Palestinian Authority for silencing other voices:

For building the state, we need many voices and many points of view. This could be done through opening up television channels and allowing journalists

to write freely. But the Palestinian Authority censorship and violations of freedom of expression prevent others from starting media channels. Moreover, they threaten journalists who write against them. I think the Palestinian Authority has to revise its strategy and allow media freedom (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Another member from Fatah was in favour of independent media channels, but at the same time he justified the Palestinian Authority position in controlling the media:

I think an independent television channel could contribute in the process of state-building because it can allow more freedom of expression and more people participation. It plays an important role in defining the characteristics of the future of the Palestinian society. But we have to accept the reality that the Palestinian Authority is a part of the Arab world. They have to control the national media and maintain balance between being democratic and autocratic (23-year-old male Fatah supporter).

A member from Hamas responded by criticising the Palestinian Authority's actions in imposing limitations on freedom of expression: 'The Palestinian Authority must accept others' views. Al-Aqsa Television offers another aspect of freedom of expression. They should accept the fact that critical media channels are vital for democracy and state-building' (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

Another member from Hamas attributed the limitation of freedom of expression imposed by the Palestinian Authority to the pressure of the Israeli occupation. He thinks that Palestine TV cannot discuss sensitive issues because it is related to the PA which has signed agreements with Israel. Al-Aqsa Television, however, can provide a space for others to criticise Israel.

Israel is exercising pressure on the Palestinian Authority, forcing it to suppress other factions and individuals' freedom of expression. This has created fear among oppositional factions. I think Al-Aqsa Television can discuss sensitive issues related to the national project and state-building, while Palestine Television cannot do that. Al-Aqsa channel gives the space for other voices to

emerge and I think it is serving the state-creation (22-year-old male Hamas supporter).

***Groups 5 and 6: Female Fatah and Hamas students***

A member from Hamas argued that because elites in the Palestinian Authority and Fatah are employing Palestine TV for their own interests, there is no democratic participation:

Politicians in Fatah and the Palestinian Authority are using Palestine Television channel for their self-interest. It is not representing all sectors in our society. The process of state-building needs people participating in decision-making. Therefore, I think Palestine Television channel has to be for the public to reflect their views (22-year-old female Hamas supporter).

Another member from Fatah argued that both political parties were trying to shape the public sphere:

It's not just Fatah, each party is trying to maintain its media channel because they have realized the importance of media. I think when each party has its own media channel, they would disseminate information that supports their political agenda. But if we have only one channel, it would function according to national interest. In my view, one channel is better than hundreds (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

It is worth recalling that Hamas established Al-Aqsa TV because Palestine TV did not give their members the opportunity to broadcast their election programmes. A member from Hamas argued for multiple channels. She thinks that this could contribute to the state-building project: 'I think if we have multiple channels related to parties, they would cooperate to enlighten people and contribute towards the state-building project. In addition, we would have many views other than the government view' (20-year-old female Hamas supporter).

Another member from Fatah opposed the idea of multiple channels and at the same time did not favour the governmental channel. She preferred the idea of an independent channel, suggesting that it would promote the public interest:

I am against multiple channels because as we can see now we have two television channels one is governmental and the other is partisan – each one functioning according to its political interests. They are not contributing to the process of state-building. Therefore, I would favour an independent channel that could be for the public (21-year-old female Fatah supporter).

The actions against Palestinian media institutions and journalists during the Israeli occupation had a significant impact on media in the Palestinian territories which is still continuing. Many scholars have argued that the Israeli occupation is one of the major obstacles hindering the development of Palestinian media (Hamad, 2010; Abu Shanab, 2001; Abusaid, 2004). A member from Fatah had this to say about the impact of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian state-building project:

The Israeli occupation is trying to demolish the Palestinian state-building project by targeting all Palestinian media channels. Another element which is disrupting the process of state-building is the Palestinian division. I think there will be no state while the Palestinian division exists. Hamas do not accept being under the Palestinian Liberation Organization umbrella. They have always projected themselves as the alternative to PLO. Therefore, I don't think this would benefit the state-building project (24-year-old female Fatah supporter).

***Groups 7 and 8: Mixed gender and mixed factions and independents***

The control of Hamas and Fatah over media and information is aimed at preventing public access to the media, which is against the laws enacted in Palestine. However, observers confirm that the two television channels provide no opportunity for citizens to express their opinions freely (Habib, 2010; Shaqoura, 2010). Consequently, citizens are unable to exercise freedom of expression due to the absence of democracy and pluralism.

An independent member noted that the process of state-building needs public participation:

All citizens have to contribute in the process of state-building; they have to participate by giving their opinions. Therefore, it is the role of media to link citizens with the government. In addition, they have to provide access to information. But the two television channels are functioning as a mouthpiece for the two governments and give only their members the opportunity to participate. This surely affects the state-building process (30-year-old independent female).

Another member from DFLP suggested how television can also work as a mechanism for reconciliation between the two parties: 'For the two leaderships to reconcile, the two television channels will have to stop using provocative language against each other. This is necessary at this stage of the state-building process. In fact, we need unity to be able to confront the Israeli occupation' (28-year-old male DFLP supporter).

A member from PFLP articulated the situation thus:

I think the two governments demonstrate little social responsibility towards the Palestinian people. They do not have legitimacy to run the television channels, because they are using them as tools for public manipulation. In addition, both sides are threatening journalists and citizens. They have to get together and solve their problems. The Palestinian division should be ended. Otherwise this would have major consequences for the Palestinian state-building project (32-year-old male PFLP supporter).

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the Palestinians' perceptions about the two television channels and their contribution to the enhancement of democratic communication in Palestine. Different functions of media in a democracy such as information, critique, and forum have been examined from the participants' point of view. These three functions were examined from different aspects such as freedom of information, watchdog, state- building, promotion of democracy, and public participation. By deriving empirical evidence from fieldwork, I have demonstrated how the two factions control the two television channels and how participants see the channels' contribution to the state of democratic communication in Palestine. By doing this, I provided



information about the Palestinian socio-political situation and the role that these two factions played to manipulate the media in order to dominate the public sphere. I also explored the structure of the two channels, suggesting how the two factions regulate the Palestinian media. The differences in participants' points of views showed how they see the two factions' perception of the future of democracy in the Palestinian state.

However, participants in focus groups have agreed that the two channels are functioning largely to safeguard and promote the political interests of their factions rather than serving the public interest. In terms of public participation, most Fatah members believed that Al-Aqsa TV provides a platform for their members and airs views that suit their political policy. Some Fatah members admitted that Palestine TV provides a platform for Fatah members only. They asserted that Al-Aqsa TV is biased and serves the Hamas party. They also agreed that Hamas government has restricted journalists' work in Gaza and has committed violations against media institutions. On the other hand, Hamas participants confirmed that Palestine TV as a theoretically national media did not reflect their ambitions, but serves only the Fatah political elites. They affirmed that opposition media have supported the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom of opinion. In addition, they believed that Palestine TV is biased, allowing only Fatah members to participate in their television programmes. Few Hamas members think that Palestine TV is a credible source of information. They also agreed that the PA has restricted journalists' work in the West Bank and closed many TV stations including Al-Aqsa TV.

A few independent participants agreed that they can get involved in Al-Aqsa TV without having to criticise Hamas government. They agreed that the PA should not monopolize media channels. Most of the politically-independent participants agreed that both parties are using their own media as a propaganda tool and as a way of defending their actions. They asserted that both governments control and regulate all the media in their territories, and impose censorship in order to manage the broadcast and published news. Members of other factions have favoured the concept of a single public broadcast channel instead of multiple partisan channels to ensure the public interests, while another member from a different faction was in favour of multiple channels as they would present different opinions and views.

In terms of critique and watchdog function, the focus group data showed that the two channels are unable to criticise elites in the two governments. In addition, they cannot fulfil their watchdog role because they are very much controlled by the elites from both factions. Participants noted that the channels are functioning as a watchdog against each other, in the sense that Palestine TV carries out a watchdog role against the Hamas government and Al-Aqsa TV has a similar role towards Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. A cluster of Fatah members believed that it is not the right time for Palestine TV to function as a watchdog because this could inflame public feeling and result in a coup. At the same level, most Fatah members agreed that Al-Aqsa TV does not function as a watchdog for the Hamas government and is only critical of Fatah members and the PA. On the other hand, most Hamas members believed that Fatah elites control Palestine TV which prevents the channel from tackling sensitive issues and functioning as a watchdog. However, independent members believed that for the media to function in this way it has to be independent. In addition, they asserted that it is difficult to have independent media in Palestine because all factions sought to manipulate the emerging public sphere. They affirmed that neither channel is expected to criticise the two governments as they do not have liberty.

In terms of freedom of information, the majority of participants believed that the two governments continue to control the information disseminated from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Participants felt that Palestinians do not have access to information as the two governments impose limitations on the freedom of opinion and expression and violate human rights. They also felt that the two channels try to disseminate information that could harm the other side. The information broadcast from Gaza suits the Hamas government and on the other hand, the information being disseminated from the West Bank suits Fatah and the Palestinian Authority.

Overall, in terms of participation, the focus groups' data shows that the control by the Palestinian Authority of the national media and the rise of opposition media has opened the space for a cluster of people to express their views against corruption and violations committed against human rights. In terms of critique, the focus groups' data shows that as Palestine TV exposes violations committed by the Hamas government, and Al-Aqsa TV monitors the PA actions, such functions could be in the public interest. In terms of information, participants believe that the two channels disseminate information for their

party interests which could hinder democracy. The next chapter will synthesize the data from interviews, focus groups and surveys to paint a picture of the complex relationship between television and democracy in one of the world's most polarized societies.

## Chapter 7

### Media and democracy in a conflict zone

‘What democracy we can talk about while our people are fighting.’

‘Our democracy is better than any other country: in elections the president gets 99.99%.’

‘The two television channels are like fighting between a man and his wife.’

#### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the reader to the structure and nature of the Palestinian media and the problems that hinder its contribution to the enhancement of democratic communication. In this discussion, I will demonstrate the different aspects of democracy that are taking place during the transition period. The discussion will use examples from fieldwork to explore democracy as an ideal that Palestinians seek and as an obstacle that hinders its progress.

#### 7.1 Audiences in stateless Palestine

The study of television audiences in a stateless political context is full of challenges. Given the political polarisation of Palestinian body-politic and therefore its television audience, as we have noted in preceding chapters, it can be argued that Palestinians demonstrate affinities with ‘active’ audience tradition of media research. Most of the interviewees are aware of the intensely political nature and slanted coverage of the two television news networks and appear to be capable of decoding the various ideological messages that are routinely encoded in the news.

The issue of television audiences in stateless Palestine is an area of interest for researchers. Abuzanouna (2006) notes that television occupies a wide space in Palestinian life. In his study of television audiences in Palestine he concluded that *Palestinians are using television content to reflect their political ideas*. However, Abed argues that television audiences have turned their attention to other media such as social media, having realized the partisan nature of television programming. New media

technologies that allow messages to reach massive audiences, and the potential of mass media to mobilize the public have always been a matter for government concern. The importance of television in Palestinian life has prompted the two governments in Gaza and the West Bank to maintain control of the two television channels in order to manipulate the public sphere.

In contrast, social media have provided Palestinian audiences with more freedom of expression. As traditional media are under the control of the two governments, they cannot provide the platform for ordinary people to express their opinions and criticise government actions. Thus social media are the only forum in which they can share and exchange ideas that are not allowed in government or partisan media. There is no doubt that governments fear the power of social media, especially after what happened recently in Gaza when youths used Facebook to organize a protest to end the division of Palestine.

Traditional media in the Palestinian territories face problems and constraints that limit their role in social development. At the same time, government-controlled media in Palestine have failed to serve audiences and have lost credibility. Violations of freedom of expression weaken the ability of media to contribute to the strength and stability of society. In contrast, Palestinians feel other media, such as social media are more credible and trustworthy. They are establishing blogs and social media accounts that allow them to create, participate and share news and events freely.

Participants in focus groups affirmed that the media should play a role in ending divisions within Palestine by rejecting the language of incitement currently being used. They felt that there was a need for state-building, to recover from the difficult experiences they have gone through, especially during the internal conflict. They felt that it was the media's responsibility to uphold freedom of expression and address internal divisions. Unlike in many states, *Palestinian audiences have a direct effect in the Palestinian political arena* and that is why they have resorted to social media to gain a platform to reach and influence public opinion. It is argued that forming an effective audience for media are an important element in state building, in order to create awareness among civil actors. Palestinian audiences have expanded their participation in political life through an online public sphere, creating groups that provide platforms

for their members to express their opinions freely. Such platforms have liberated their thoughts and provided unprecedented opportunities to express, share, criticise and communicate with others.

Palestinian audiences are becoming active participants in the communication process, in which they seek information that is relevant to them. In fact, they are becoming the makers of news as citizen journalists, getting around government restrictions and censorship, to record and report abuses and violations against human rights. The emergence of social media has enabled and empowered them to communicate to an international audience their daily conflict with the Israeli occupation, to gain sympathy for their cause by highlighting Israeli brutality. During the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2008, the Israeli government imposed a media blackout; local and foreign correspondents were banned from entering Gaza. However, Palestinian citizens were able to take images of Israeli forces bombing buildings and civilians and broadcast them through the internet. This demonstrates how a state-less audience can become producers of media and use on-line digital technologies to communicate globally.

## **7.2 Democracy and freedom of expression under Palestinian law**

Democratic thought is based on basic elements, notably the freedom of expression and opinion. Theorists of democracy emphasize the need for a free media in any society that claims to be democratic, as without such freedom the democratic process remains incomplete. So a free media are considered to be a cornerstone in the democratic process. Indeed, democracy gives power to the media and keeps it free from exploitation. In addition, pluralism is considered essential for democracy. Pluralism does not mean simply an increase in the number of newspapers and magazines, but must involve the freedom for anyone, whether individuals or organizations, to publish newspapers in order to present their ideas through the media and thus make their voices heard.

The ability to express opinions freely without fear or limitation has become an established right in democratic systems. It is one of the building blocks of social, political and cultural life. A democratic media are characterized by transparency and credibility: it is committed to professionalism when broadcasting news bulletins and reports and is expected to provide accessible information to its audience. There is no

doubt that freedom of opinion and expression creates a democratic space and a pluralistic and tolerant environment which are indispensable principles for the creation of a modern society dominated by humanitarian values.

In the Palestinian context, in September 1993 the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Declaration of Principles with the Israeli government, which led to interim conventions in May 1994 and September 1995. These agreements were considered the foundation for the redeployment of Israeli occupation forces and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the beginning of a new era of relations based on cooperation between the two parties in many areas. The agreements emphasized the actions and behaviours expected of both parties in order to create an environment which would support co-existence and prevent incitement to terrorism or any form of media war.

The Cairo Agreement of May 1994, for example, confirmed that Israel and the Palestinian Authority would seek to prevent incitement, hostile propaganda and terrorism. In addition, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement about the West Bank and Gaza Strip that was signed in Washington in September 1995 stated that the two sides would seek 'to promote mutual understanding, tolerance and therefore abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda, against each other, and without derogation from the principle of freedom of expression, and will take legal actions to prevent such incitement by any organizations, groups or individuals within their respective mandates' (IMFA, 1995).

The Palestinian Basic Law confirmed freedom of expression, and in 1994 the PLO proclaimed that the Palestinian Authority was committed to the treaties and covenants of human rights. At the end of September of the same year, the late President Arafat issued a presidential decree to establish the Palestinian High Commission on Human Rights. The Palestinian Basic Law includes Article 19, which stipulates 'no prejudice to freedom of opinion, and everyone has the right to express his opinion verbally, in writing or other means of expression or art, taking into consideration the provisions of the law' (MOFA, 1994). This echoes Article 19 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is also included in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. According to Article 9, 'Palestinians before the law and judiciary are the same, without

discrimination because of race, sex, colour, religion, or political opinion or disability' (MOFA, 1994). Believing in the Palestinian people's rights and equated with other free peoples, the Palestinian Basic Law has enshrined principles of justice, democracy and fundamental freedoms that are protected by international covenants and laws. Based on that assumption, media freedom and freedom of opinion and expression must be guaranteed and there should not be any control of information that can affect the practice of journalism or actions that threaten and intimidate journalists.

The late Palestinian president Yasser Arafat issued the Press and Publications Law in 1995 but one of its main drawbacks is that it was a temporary law and was not approved by the Legislative Council. The law consists of 51 articles that regulate and deal with freedom of expression, publication and journalistic work. For example Article 2 affirmed that 'The press and publishing are free. And freedom of opinion is guaranteed to every Palestinian who attains the absolute right to express his opinion freely orally, writing, photography or drawing, in [different] mediums of expression and information' (MINFO, 1995). Article 3 states that 'The press performs its duties freely in presenting news, information and commentary, and participates in the spread of knowledge, thought and culture and science within the limits of the law, and in the framework of the protections of freedoms and public rights and duties, and the respect of the privacy of others and its sanctity' (MINFO, 1995).

Such a statement suggests that the press is free within the limits of the law. But what are the limits of the law? In addition, the law has restricted the practice of these rights by a range of provisions but guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press within the framework of law. Habib (2010) notes that he was a member of the committee that established the press law. He adds that 'such law has seized journalists' work and contributed to censor some publications. The law has raised large disagreement in Palestinian legal and political level because of the serious danger it causes to freedom of expression and freedom of the press'.

Article 7(a) specifies that 'publications must not publish what is inconsistent with principles of freedom, national responsibility and human rights, and must respect the truth' (MINFO, 1995). The problem is how to define those terms. Sometimes what



an individual considers to be a defence of national responsibility may be seen by another to be an offence. The word 'truth' is also subject to different interpretations.

Paragraph 8 of the press law requires journalists to maintain strict adherence to professional ethics. They must:

- 'Respect individuals' rights and their constitutional freedom and not violate the freedom of their own lives.'
- 'Provide press materials in an objective, integrated and balanced manner.'
- 'Maintain accuracy, impartiality and objectivity in commenting on news and events.'
- 'Avoid publishing materials that could promote violence, intolerance, and hatred or encourage racism and sectarianism.'

These paragraphs limit freedom of expression and publication. In addition, terms such as 'objectivity', 'balanced', and 'impartiality' are subject to different interpretations. Such vagueness leaves the door open for the authority to threaten journalists. Consequently, journalists have become fearful of violating the law when writing news articles. The reality is that many journalists have been detained, and newspapers closed.

Article 27 also established freedom for the media. It confirmed that 'the establishment of newspapers and other media is right for all, guaranteed by Basic Law and its funding sources are subjected to law. Freedom of media whether audio, visual or written, and freedom of printing, publishing, distribution and broadcasting, and freedom for workers, is guaranteed in accordance with this Basic Law and relevant laws. Censorship on media is prohibited, and cannot be warned, suspended, confiscated, cancelled or imposed restrictions except in accordance to the law and under court rule' (MINFO, 1995). According to Article 33, 'the owner of the printing press or the responsible director has to submit, to the Department of Press and Publication, four copies of each non-periodical printed copy that printed in his printer prior to the distribution' (MINFO, 1995). This could suggest that the process of submitting copies assumes that distribution is conditional on obtaining authorization from the Department of Press and Publication prior to printing. On the other hand, it is possible that the printer will have produced the

publication but cannot distribute until after submission of the four copies and a subsequent granting of permission for distribution.

The law contains some ambiguity. Article 35 stipulates that the 'Distribution house or anyone who wants to import periodical publications such as newspapers, magazines and alike have to obtain a license from the Ministry of Information for one-time' (MINFO, 1995). The term 'alike' is subject to many interpretations and is not specific. This is clearly intended to control certain publications, especially non periodical, and suggests that human rights publications which do not appear on a regular basis could be the target of this law. It is important to note that vague terms can be used in different situations. For example, the third paragraph of Article 37(a) prohibits publications that publish 'articles which are harmful to national unity or incite to commit crimes ...' (MINFO, 1995). Scrutinizing this, the term 'national unity' is a serious constraint as it is unspecified and undetermined and can open the door to publishing restrictions. Moreover, it may grant a judge the right to prohibit publication under the pretext that permission to publish would undermine national unity.

Article 42(a), which states that 'The competent court deals with all breaches of the Press Law and the Public Prosecutor have the authority to investigate according to the validity of powers and procedures prescribed by applicable penalty codes' (MINFO, 1995). Failure to define the concept 'competent court' raises concern. It is not clear what is meant by such a phrase; whether it is the civil court, state security court or Personal Status Court. It is necessary for the law to specify the competent court in order to consider appropriately violations committed against the provisions of the law. The absence of a clear definition may be seen as intentional on the part of the Authority, allowing it to take over the responsibility of state security courts in order to judge such offences. This would not help to create the open environment essential to the practice of the right to freedom of expression and publication.

It becomes clear that freedom of opinion and expression has become blurred and vulnerable to legal standards that regulate this right. In addition, these standards legitimate government violations against citizens and journalists, resulting in a situation in which there have been arbitrary arrests and attacks against journalists. Government has dominated the official media and tightened its control over private media. Thus,

freedom of opinion and expression enjoyed a small margin of freedom, and the law is devoid of any provisions to ensure the protection of journalists and any guarantees to freedom of expression.

Palestinian press law was an area of discussion covered by the focus groups. A male from Hamas described the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and the press law by saying, 'The Press Law offers the Palestinian Authority the power to control the news in all the publications within the Palestinian territories. There are articles in the press law which appear to protect freedom of expression, but it does not have any legal power. Violations come from different parties such as the Palestinian Authority, militant groups, elites, Israeli occupation, families, and others' (Male from Hamas, Gaza, 2010).

### **7.3 Violation of freedom of expression in Palestine**

Violations against freedom of expression and the freedom of the press are common among regimes which abuse human rights. There is no doubt that violations of the freedom of expression are usually committed to hide information that could inflame public opinion. Undoubtedly, any subordination of a free media to the interests of political, economic, and religious groups constitutes a decline in the performance of the media which then does not provide a platform for discussion and interaction which could promote pluralism and competition, and encourage freedom of expression.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is characterized by the control of security by different parties and this results in violation of media freedom by a range of interest groups. On one hand, there is the Israeli occupation and settlers, and security forces in Gaza and the West Bank. On the other hand there are Palestinian militant groups. Violations by all these parties have led not only to a significant decline in freedom of expression and publishing, but also to a practice of extreme self-censorship among journalists, which has led to a decline in the general standard of the Palestinian media.

During the discussion about violations of freedom of expression, a female from Hamas expressed her view about this situation in the Palestinian territories. She said, 'Various parties violate the right to freedom of expression. The Palestinian security forces is arresting and assaulting journalists. Families have also committed attacks on journalist

because they express their opinion and publish news related to their family members. The PA does not take any action to protect journalists in order to ensure that such attacks would not happen in the future' (Female from Hamas, Gaza, 2010).

When the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994, Palestinians hoped this would mean the establishment of rights for citizens, especially the right of freedom of expression. Their hopes were raised by the Palestinian Authority's statement of intent including plans to build a democratic state, implement pluralism, and respect human rights. But the reality was soon seen to be very different from the political discourse. On a political level, the PA issued laws and constitutions that could not contribute to the enhancement of general freedoms; on the contrary, they restricted the right of freedom of expression. On practical level, the PA has carried out actions which restrict freedom of expression. With regard to the freedom of the press, the PA had detained and beaten journalists, and closed many media institutions. With regard to freedom of expression, the PA arrested many citizens because of their political affiliation or political views. The right to peaceful assembly was also undermined as the PA banned many demonstrations, conferences, and other peaceful gatherings.

In discussions among the focus groups, a male from PFLP criticised the Palestinian Authority for imposing restrictions on freedom of expression. He said that 'the PA continued to impose restrictions on freedom of expression and press. It arrested citizens because of their opinions and political backgrounds. In addition, it imposed restrictions on media and arrested journalists for covering certain events, and closed several media institutions for publishing certain news items' (Male from PFLP, Gaza, 2010).

The commitment of the PA to agreements with Israel and the continuing confrontation between Fatah and Hamas has played a fundamental role in creating a situation which involves duplicated and conflicting policies in dealing with citizen's rights. Sometimes, the PA showed flexibility and tolerance when dealing with practices related to the freedom of expression concerning Israel, while on other occasions it showed prejudice. But the PA in contrast showed intolerance towards practices against its policy. Therefore, it was the political agreements with Israel, in some cases, have been the background against which the PA has managed Palestinian affairs.

At the current time Palestinian society suffers from a lack of adequate sources of information and from violations against journalists and media institutions, which result in the restriction of freedom of opinion and expression. The margins of media freedoms in Palestine vary between the wide margin of social issues and the limited margin of corruption, murder, and lawlessness issues. The Palestinian media are experiencing a state of instability that threatens its existence, especially in light of the repeated attacks it experiences from the Israeli occupation as well as from internal Palestinian forces.

The margins of freedom of opinion and expression granted to citizens, writers and journalists by the two governments are very limited. Indeed, the authorities consider activities related to freedom of expression to have a political dimension, intended to achieve control over the economic, social and political situation. It had been hoped the two governments would work towards protecting basic human rights including the right to freedom of expression, creating the legal framework to enshrine these rights.

The year 2007 was the worst in the history of Palestinian media and freedom of expression since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (MADA, 2009b). Violations of freedom of expression have affected Arabic media outlets in the Palestinian territories, especially during the dispute between Fatah and Hamas. Fatah accused Al-Jazeera channel of being biased in favour of Hamas. On the other side, Hamas accused Al-Arabiya channel of being biased towards Fatah. For the first time since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian journalists were brought to trial because of their opinions. The PA forces would habitually announce areas where events were taking place to be a closed military zone to prevent journalists from following stories.

Internal violations against freedom of expression in the Palestinian territories have also escalated. Violations included beatings, detention, and the confiscation of press equipment. The escalation of chaos has created armed clashes in which journalists become victims of the political conflict between Fatah and Hamas. Both parties used violence against journalists and media institutions in the areas under their control. In the Gaza Strip, police forces would chase journalists covering events organized by Fatah and other factions. Evidence shows journalists have been arrested and had their cameras

confiscated and have subsequently been forced to sign a pledge not to cover any other events in the future (PCHR, 2009a).

The two governments have imposed restrictions on public meetings in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In addition, they required organizers to apply for a license to hold events. Security forces of the two governments have worked in a very focused way in order to prevent any public gatherings being mounted against their policies. Violations against media freedoms that took place during the year of 2007 and actions that prevented peaceful gathering and demonstrations have seriously affected citizens' rights in the Palestinian territories.

The two governments in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank bear the full responsibility of ensuring the respect of human rights, including freedom of opinion and expression. And, because the two governments hold the legitimate power in the Palestinian territories and are able to enact laws and regulations within the areas under their jurisdiction, it is an essential part of their duties to implement the rule of law and respect freedoms. They should provide protection for journalists and prosecute those who violate their rights. The continuing situation which fails to provide protection for journalists encourages those groups to continue their aggression against the media, threatening their right of expression and putting lives at risk.

The two governments attracted criticism from the participants in the focus groups. A male from DFLP criticized the two governments for their violations of freedom of expression. He said, 'the two governments do not allow people to exercise their right to freedom of expression. Their security forces shoot many citizens because of their opinion. They are arresting journalists and issuing orders to close newspapers. Each party have prevented the newspapers of its opponent to enter its controlled zone' (Male from DFLP, Gaza, 2010).

In this context, the Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) revealed about 280 violations of media freedoms in the occupied Palestinian territories during 2010. These violations were committed by Israeli occupation forces and settlers, Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza and Palestinian armed groups (MADA, 2010).

Reports issued by organizations monitoring violations of media freedoms show that Israel was among the worst violators of the freedom of expression and press freedom during 2008 (PCHR, 2009c; MADA, 2009a; Al-Mezan, 2009). These organizations emphasized that the Israeli occupation forces make no serious investigations into crimes committed against journalists and media institutions working in the Palestinian territories (ibid). A study by the organization Reporters Without Borders into press freedom in 2009 reported that the Palestinian territories ranked very low, which gives an indication of the reality of media freedoms in Palestine ( cited in MADA, 2009a).

The Israeli occupation forces continue to violate the right to freedom of expression and access to information, and to restrict freedom of the press in the Palestinian territories. Violations take many forms such as the direct bombardment of journalists or media organizations, shutting down of newspapers, arrests and beatings. Journalists have been targeted in many ways: media organizations and vehicles have been bombed, and journalists have been killed and injured. Despite journalists wearing bulletproof jackets clearly identifying them as representatives of the press, they are targeted by Israeli occupation forces who impose restrictions on their movements and announce event areas are closed military zones. Empirical data from human rights organizations indicates that the Israeli occupation forces deliberately target journalists and bomb civilians in those areas (PCHR, 2009a).

#### **7.4 Effects of the Israeli blockade on the Palestinian media**

Despite the political instability in the Palestinian arena and the continuation of the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian media are considered an important tool in the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestinian media functions in very complex circumstances, especially in the presence of the Israeli occupation and the absence of an independent Palestinian state. Palestinian people have been living under Israeli occupation since 1967. The Palestinian Authority was set up after the Oslo agreement in 1994, to control the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. But, in spite of the agreements, the Israeli occupation has undermined the Palestinian Authority and controlled the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Despite the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, they continued to control the borders and Palestinians' movements.

Over more than three decades, the Israeli occupation has controlled all aspects of Palestinians' lives. Moreover, Israeli invasions of the Palestinian territories which involve its troops carrying out heinous crimes are aimed at disrupting Palestinians' daily life (PCHR, 1998). Palestinian journalists have endeavoured to document Israeli practices in daily reports issued by the local and international media and by human rights organizations operating in the Palestinian territories. Israel claims these reports distort its image in the wider world, where it claims to be a democratic state which respects human rights. Reports from the territories reveal the falsity of such a claim. The Israeli occupation is deliberately targeting journalists and media institutions in order to prevent them from exposing its crimes, committed against the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation purposely prevents Palestinians from exercising freedom of expression through repressive practices against anyone writing about their crimes (Al-Ajrami, 2008).

One of the Palestinian journalists working in the Gaza Strip described during an interview the difficulties he faces during his work. He said, 'while I was covering Israeli invasions to Gaza Strip in 2009, Israeli helicopter fired a missile towards me. The missile fell about 5 meters away from me where I got injured. My friends took me by ambulance to the hospital where it turned out that I had some shrapnel in my body.'

There is no doubt that the Palestinian media plays an important role in increasing public awareness (Shinar, 1987). In addition, it has succeeded in creating international sympathy for and solidarity with the Palestinian cause, and has activated international campaigns to support the Palestinian people. However, the blockade has had a negative impact on Palestinian media performance, as media institutions suffer from a lack of broadcasting and sound equipment, cameras and other necessary resources for the work of journalists. Reports of the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights reported that among the equipment that has been prevented from entering are cameras, tapes, recording equipment, sound mixers, connection cables for audio and video, editing equipment, camera batteries and studio lights (Al-Mezan, 2009).

The decision to ban the import of such equipment is usually taken by the Israeli occupation under the policy aimed at restricting the Palestinian media in order to prevent coverage. Usually, the Israeli authorities are not clear about the reasons for the



banning of such equipment and present flimsy arguments related to their protection and security. However, media institutions in Gaza are not permitted to obtain press equipment without approval from the Israeli authority. Media institutions will usually provide the necessary licences for the Israeli authority, but the authority stalls and then refuses permission. This has led to the obstruction of journalists' work. Israel is exercising control over Palestinian journalists through a variety of vague legal mechanisms.

Since the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian media have suffered from Israeli censorship which led to the closure of some newspapers and prevented others from publishing. It is worth mentioning that the political and military conflict was the most important feature of the relationship between the Israeli army and all sectors of the Palestinian people including media institutions (Nossek and Rinnawi, 2003). Needless to say, the media sector, especially in the Gaza Strip, is suffering from a lack of qualified journalists who have the necessary experience. Journalism in the Gaza Strip depends on existing experienced journalists based in the Strip and others who have come from outside.

The Israeli blockade has prevented local journalists from participating in external training courses to develop their journalistic skills. The occupation's refusal to allow Palestinian journalists to leave the Gaza Strip has meant members of the Palestinian media are unable to achieve required levels of training. Media institutions in the Gaza Strip are endeavouring to cover events on the ground, but the blockade makes this work very difficult and complex. It could be argued that reports which are produced by these institutions in such circumstances should be considered a major achievement.

Among the negative impacts of the Israeli blockade is the restriction of fuel supplies, as the Israeli government allows only a small amount of fuel to enter the Gaza Strip. This affects journalists and their work. Media crews need to travel by car to reach events and set up live coverage. In addition, the daily power outages disrupt their work. It is important to note that during their war on Gaza in 2008 Israeli forces deliberately bombed the main power transformers. Thus, the power outage has become a part of Palestinians' daily suffering in the Gaza Strip.

Accordingly, journalists use generators that use fuel in order to operate their equipment. This increases their daily suffering and makes their work more difficult. Therefore, the blockade has resulted in a complex situation of violations against journalists and media institutions. It is important to note that Palestinian journalists have succeeded in covering invasions by the Israeli occupation and contributed to publicizing massacres against the Palestinian people (Al-Uwini, 2009). Through their reports and pictures, Palestinian journalists have played an important role in raising awareness of the Palestinian cause in the international arena.

Despite the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the lack of equipment, journalists have been able to broadcast via satellite channels and reveal the enormity of the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation. It is important to note that the Palestinian media played an important role in pressing the Israeli authorities to investigate complaints about offenses and crimes committed by its soldiers and officers against Palestinians (Al-Mezan, 2009).

Palestinian journalists have faced a critical situation due to the repressive practices of the Israeli occupation. Their work became threatened and this directly affected the freedom of the press and the ability of journalists to deal with the situation. It is clear that the blockade has had a negative impact on media performance.

### **7.5 Suppressing journalists and media institutions in Palestine**

In the absence of law and with the continuing conflict between Fatah and Hamas, attacks on journalists and media institutions increased. The attacks began to target foreign journalists working for international news agencies. The kidnapping of foreign journalists began when the photographer of France Press, Khaymi Razori, and BBC correspondent Alan Johnston were kidnapped in 2007. This insecure situation created fear among foreign journalists and forced them to leave the Palestinian territories. Accordingly, foreign news agencies had to rely on local journalists for coverage of local events.

Statistics shows that 2007 was the worst year for journalists; they suffered beatings, shootings and attacks on their families and property. 2007 was the first year in the history of the Palestinian media that the Israeli occupation came second in the list of

those known to have killed and threatened journalists: Palestinian militant groups had carried out a greater number of attacks (PPCMD, 2007). The continuing political divisions and the escalation of violence between Hamas and Fatah led to infringements of press freedoms by Palestinian security forces in Gaza and the West Bank. Several media institutions were attacked or closed. Consequently, self-censorship has emerged among Palestinian journalists which had a negative impact on their performance.

Since the Israeli occupation, journalists' freedom of movement has been restricted, especially after the unilateral disengagement plan in 2005 and the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation from the Gaza Strip. It is worth noting that after the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in September 2007 the Israeli government announced the Strip to be a 'hostile entity' and closed its borders. This situation had restricted Palestinian journalists as Egypt was the only way to leave the Strip. They had to travel through the Rafah crossing point at the borders with Egypt. This led to a restriction of their movements due to the severe congestion which built up at the checkpoint.

Recent years have witnessed an increase in Israeli violations against journalists working in the Palestinian territories which threaten the whole Palestinian media structure. Consequently, this has undermined journalists' ability to cover events in the Palestinian territories. Through its control of Palestinians' movements, Israeli is violating the international laws that relate to freedom of movement and human rights. In addition, the targeting of Palestinian journalists and media institutions became very obvious, as the Israeli government worked to undermine Palestinian journalism (Abu Shanab, 2001).

Israeli occupation forces are targeting both Palestinian and foreign journalists. This led to a decline in Palestinian media performance. Israeli authorities, since their occupation of the Palestinian territories, have deliberately silenced the Palestinian press. The restrictions imposed on Palestinian media have included the closure of newspapers, detention of journalists, and refusal of press cards. Because of these restrictions, censorship had found its way into press rooms (Jamal, 2000b). Journalists became fearful when writing articles and stories that could irritate the Israeli censor.

A Palestinian journalist has expressed his opinion about how the Israeli occupation prevented him from leaving Gaza. He said: 'I have got an invitation to go to London to

get a press award. I tried to get out of Gaza through Israeli territories. I got the permission, but Israeli intelligences had to question me. They had interviewed me where they warned me for my writings against them. However, they refused to allow me to enter and prevented me to leave the Strip. Therefore, I had to go through Egypt' (S.E., 2010).

International conventions have emphasized the journalist's protection during war and armed conflict and states they should be treated as civilians who must be protected. Paragraph 1 and 2 of article 79 from the additional protocol of the Geneva Conventions 1949 affirmed that: 'Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians....'(ICRC, 1949). But the Israeli occupation violates these conventions and attacks journalists and media institutions. Its troops have ignored international conventions and killed Palestinian and foreign journalists.

On 2 May 2003, Israeli occupiers killed the British photographer James Miller. Investigations showed that an Israeli soldier had deliberately fired on Miller. It is important to note that 34-year-old Miller was shot while filming a documentary in the Gaza Strip (Al-Mezan, 2009). Moreover, on 6 April 2008, Israeli troops killed Reuter's cameraman Fadel Shanaa. Shanaa was targeted deliberately, by a tank shell fired by an Israeli soldier, while he was covering the Israeli occupation's invasion of Gaza Strip (ibid).

#### **7.6 The role of independent media in building a democratic Palestinian state**

The media plays a vital role in a nation's life as it covers events on a daily basis. This role has grown with the rapid development of mass communication and the emergence of new technologies. International organizations have affirmed the role of the media in the service of humanitarian issues and state building. Freedom of information is seen as a human right and an essential element that contributes to state building (UNESCO, 2008). Moreover, democratic media theory affirms democratic participation by the people. It focuses on individuals and minority groups having the right to access media.

Palestinians are experiencing a critical period of transformation where public participation is much needed in order to contribute to the process of state building. But the existing media are not able to provide the opportunity for the public to participate and express opinions, and therefore freedom of expression cannot be fostered. It is essential for democracy and independence that citizens should have the right to express their views and contribute to decisions that affect their lives. This will then create trust between citizens and governments and contribute to the construction of a state based on democratic principles.

The Palestinian media are controlled by governments and political parties where they serve their political agenda. In order to contribute to building a democratic Palestinian state, the media must be independent. In other words, in such a situation, people trust neither governmental nor partisan media, as each is seen to serve its owners. Independent media work to gain public confidence and meet their demands for news and debate. This could be achieved by adopting a clear policy and transparency regarding the owners and financial supporters of media groups.

During the focus groups' discussion, a female from PFLP criticized partisan media channels and how the control of the media have contributed to the destruction of Palestinian society. She said, 'Partisan media failed to meet public demands. In addition, it failed to broaden freedom of expression to include all public sectors. Partisan media remained hostage to the political dictators. This led to keep the people away from the realities and therefore, destruction of the society. I believe independent media could be the solution to provide the public the necessary platform to discuss sensitive issues' (Female from PFLP, 22, Gaza, 2010).

However, freedom must come from inside rather than being imposed from outside, and cannot be achieved unless people believe in it. In this regard, the Palestinian media should apply freedom and work to promote public participation in order to create an open society that can lead to the establishment of a democratic state.

In such a state-building process, it is necessary for the Palestinian media to work side by side with the development movement and thus to play a strategic role in sustainable development. It is essential that it should provide data and information needed by the

public and professionals. At the same time, it should be able to play a pivotal role in nation-building, and thus contribute to socialization and the formation of public opinion. And, because it is considered such an effective tool, it must be enabled to strengthen the national principles. In contrast, when it is dominated by parties where each seeks to spread its own ideologies and political agenda, it undermines the state structures. Both television channels sought to spread their own ideologies and eradicate those of their opponents. Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV have both worked to mislead the public and inflame the internal arena.

Governmental television is seen as a symbol of national sovereignty and has become the first thing to be seized in a coup. Palestine TV channel is one of the Palestinian Authority's symbols of sovereignty and has played a major role in the broadcasting of propaganda against the Hamas movement. The PA used it to convince the public that they are seeking to establish a Palestinian state. In addition, they tried to show how Hamas had tried to disrupt the national project. This inevitably inflamed Hamas opinion against the Palestinian Authority. Thus, when Hamas seized the Gaza Strip, Palestine TV channel was its first target, resulting in the seizure of the channel's building and confiscation of its broadcasting equipment.

Hamas uses the Al-Aqsa television channel to attack the Palestinian Authority's policy of negotiation and has sought to convince its audience that such political negotiation would not lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. In such an unstable situation and in the presence of political crisis and internal conflicts, the Palestinian media cannot perform its functions and contribute to building a democratic state.

Palestine TV, as a governmental channel, is linked to the political, economic, social and security situation. Therefore, it is crucial to achieve national security through even-handed media coverage of all issues that concern citizens and which contribute to nation-building as well as protecting citizens against hostile media. On the other hand, the media plays a prominent role in promoting peace in communities where it contributes effectively to establishing the foundations of security and stability. But the two television channels have both contributed significantly to building hatred among citizens through analyzing controversial issues which contributed to internal instability. The Palestinian media faces many difficulties in the current situation:

- disruption of national identity;
- security chaos due to the absence of political consensus and conflict about who holds power;
- corruption existing within the two governments.

It cannot be disputed that the two governments have censored the media and used their official media channels to disseminate propaganda. In the light of these complexities, the Palestinian media cannot function properly, especially at this stage of state-building and democratic transformation.

The focus groups' discussions centred on the topic of an independent media and its role in building a democratic state. One of the male participants from Fatah expressed his views about independent media. He said, 'independent and pluralistic media are essential for fostering democracy. It provides the people access to information and enhances their participation. It is crucial to exercise freedom of expression. It can carry out a role of being watchdog for public interests. Overall, such functions can defiantly contribute in building democratic state' (Male from Fatah, 30, Gaza, 2010).

Although governmental media should be responsible for expressing people's aspirations, a free and non-partisan media are considered the best way to clarify state policy. This means the Palestinian Authority should completely review and reform its policies through designing a media strategy that takes into consideration the development of media content and allows more freedom of expression. Such a strategy remains subject to the existence of real political will.

### **7.7 Media as a Fourth Estate: contributing to democracy and human rights**

The authority of media is not legislative, executive or judicial, but it is a supervisory authority. Media are the unofficial supervisor of government actions and those of other authorities, judiciary authority being the only exception. The media work together with other social organizations to reveal practices which threaten human rights. A supervisory authority's primary aim is to reveal and highlight faults within the system. Media supervision includes critique of the system for society's

benefit. Accordingly, this can contribute to modifying the behaviour of officials and the performance of those involved in political and social life.

The media have a range of functions. It provides knowledge and information which help the public in decision-making, contributes to the shaping of public opinion, provides education and awareness and, of course, entertainment. In addition to these functions, the media have an important role in the service of human rights issues and democracy, and the fight against corruption.

In democratic systems, the task of the media is to provide accurate and unbiased information to citizens. Undoubtedly, the provision of such information is essential to the survival of any democratic system for the following reasons:

- It helps citizens to take informed and responsible decisions regarding their country's future. In contrast, wrong decisions which are based on false information can be harmful to the ultimate interests of a country and its citizens.
- By offering accurate and correct information, the media can perform supervisory tasks that serve the public interest. However, serving the public interest involves revealing illegal or corrupt practices by government or other institutions that affect the public interest. The media can draw attention to these practices, bringing pressure for change. One of the benefits of this supervisory function is that the media helps government and other political forces in a country to achieve a better understanding of the problems within society in order to improve the political and administrative performance of the government.

As a government channel, Palestine TV is unable to expose the corruption that is rampant in the Palestinian Authority. It is controlled by the ruling political elites, meaning it does not criticize the PA's policy and consequently does not address those issues which affect ordinary people. It speaks only on behalf of the authority. On the other hand, the Ministry of Information imposes control over all mass media. This means other media cannot disclose such corruption because Palestinian security forces are known to threaten journalists. Palestine TV, as a tool for the authority, is very keen



to highlight corruption within the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip and to reveal its actions against the citizens of Gaza.

A female from Hamas revealed her feelings during the focus groups' discussions about Palestinian television. She said, 'Palestine television remain as a hostage for the Palestinian Authority where Palestinian elites from Fatah movement impose their views on its content. They do not want their corruption authority to be exposed to public in order not to lose their control over the authority. I think, as long as the channel remain in Fatah hands, it will not function as a fourth estate' (Female from Hamas, 23, Gaza, 2010).

However, the emergence of Al-Aqsa TV has played a role in revealing corruption within the Palestinian Authority. It criticizes the ruling elites and reveals practices carried out by the Authority in the West Bank. On the other hand, it cannot criticize the Hamas government and disclose its corruption. In addition, the existence of censorship in the Gaza Strip and the establishment of the Governmental Information Office have prevented the media from fulfilling its role as a Fourth Estate.

It could be argued that the presence of both an official and oppositional media are in the public interest. However this position has created a situation in which the two television channels have focused on political issues and the struggle for power rather than the social issues that concern people in their daily lives. Thus, there is an absence of a fourth estate that analyzes the reality of people's situation and helps them to determine their priorities. Therefore an independent media could be a solution because of its ability to handle sensitive issues, especially violations against citizens' rights.

An independent media are an effective tool in the fight against corruption. It could be argued that, if the Palestinian media had an absolute freedom, it could work for individuals and the development of society and could fight against corruption. The Palestinian media have to form an effective power that is not related to authorities or parties. Such a media could publicize those actions which violate human rights, and rebuild lost confidence within society.

Diversity of media is important, as it provides freedom for people. But the focus groups' discussion made it clear that Palestine TV, as a governmental channel, is considered contrary to the ideals of democracy as it cannot function as a fourth estate. It is undeniable that Fatah and Hamas always tend to control the media in order to achieve their goals, controlling people's minds by acting according to their own agenda. It is important to note that, when media becomes one of an authority's institutions, it automatically glorifies the authority and becomes a tool of manipulation where it exercises neither caution nor objectivity when broadcasting information, and therefore does not fulfil its role as the fourth estate.

However, the Palestinian media have played an important role in raising issues concerning the humanitarian situation in this conflict area. In addition, it succeeded in exposing the suffering of Palestinians and attacks by the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian media can play an important role in disseminating values such as tolerance, pluralism and acceptance of others. It could encourage the renunciation of violence and persuade people to engage in dialogue as a means to resolve conflict. But both Al-Aqsa TV and Palestine TV have inflamed the conflict and spread sedition between the two parties.

The two governments usually order their security forces to prevent media institutions and journalists from covering events where violations against human rights are taking place. They still do not fully understand the international demand for respect of human rights and the freedom of information, and do not provide a secure environment for the press to fulfil its duty as a fourth estate. Violations against human rights and media freedoms are against international legitimacy. The two governments should allow media to function as a fourth estate. Unfortunately, the Palestinian media have lost its function as a fourth estate and become a tool for manipulation. Changes that occurred within the Palestinian media in recent years demonstrate that the two governments have intentionally misled public opinion.

A Palestinian journalist discloses his opinion about how the two governments impose censorship over media content and how that affects media performance. He said, 'Since the establishment of Arafat regime, there has been censorship imposed over media content in Gaza and the West Bank. He was using his forces in order to silence any

journalist. He ordered that Palestine television building to be in his compound in order to disseminate his views. Nowadays, Hamas government in Gaza Strip impose censorship over media channels and they use their forces to threaten journalists. That is why other media channel could not function as a fourth estate' (S.K., 2010).

The Palestinian media have lost its objectivity because of its relations with political decision-makers. The dissemination of misleading information has become a daily practice, especially in the light of existing conflicts between Fatah and Hamas in which politicians became engaged in political deception. In addition, it has become difficult to distinguish between misleading and accurate information, and consequently people have lost their confidence in the media.

At this time of increasing sources of knowledge and information, public opinion has become more vulnerable to manipulation and misleading information, especially in times of crisis and wars. The reason, of course, is the failure of media to implement its expected role as a fourth estate. In the Palestinian context, Hamas practises manipulation through its media tools where Al-Aqsa TV has a double role: it is both a political opposition and a governmental channel. It serves as a tool of manipulation in which it critiques opposition parties and at the same time functions as a mouthpiece for the government. This has led it to lose its credibility, objectivity and legitimacy among some segments of the Palestinian community. On the other hand, Fatah controls the Palestinian Authority institutions and tries to employ its entire media institution against Hamas. Palestine TV plays the role of protector of the PA, and functions as a mouthpiece. It does not criticize any of the government elites. This has led it to lose its credibility among some segments of the Palestinian society. In the absence of a genuinely pluralistic media that reflects different thoughts and the diverse spectrum of Palestinian society, as well as the absence of a platform for discussions and dialogue, public opinion remains vulnerable.

### **7.8 Freedom of information as a human right in the Palestinian context**

In Palestine, the importance of adopting laws that guarantee the right to access information must be seen in the context of supporting a strong push towards the democratic process. This could be achieved through empowering national public

opinion to practise democracy; in other words, to provide information in order to engage the public in decision-making.

The right to access information is considered a source of conflict between media practitioners and local authorities in Palestine, in which the latter creates pretexts to restrict this right. Consequently, Palestinians, especially journalists, are constantly seeking a legal environment to protect their right to access information. Palestinians' access to information enhances their involvement in the democratic process.

Media pluralism offers an opportunity for Palestinians to access alternative sources of information. These sources should be protected by law and should not be exclusive to the government or any other party. However, Palestinians have the right to question those in power. They can exercise this right through elections. Hence, accessing information is very important as a primary source through which citizens can play a part in political life and take decisions regarding their representatives.

Although the Palestinian Basic Law stressed freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press, it did not mention directly the right to access information. However, the Palestinian press law has many articles relating to the right to access information. Articles 2 and 4 affirmed the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedom to access, disseminate and circulate information and comment on it. But this philosophy is inconsistent with other articles, which restrict channels for obtaining information. In addition, there is a vagueness in terms and phrases employed in many articles.

For example, paragraph C of Article 4 affirms the right for journalists to 'search for information, news and statistics that are of concern to citizens from various sources and to analyse, disseminate and comment within the limits of the law'. In the same context, Article 6 states that officials should facilitate the task of journalists and researchers by advising them of anticipated programmes and projects. It is clear that these provisions as currently drafted do not guarantee the right of access to information essential for citizens and journalists, and they restrict citizens seeking information.

There is no doubt that the Palestinian Authority intentionally included unclear terms in articles related to freedom of information. It is difficult for journalists to obtain information and even when they do, they have to be very careful when they publish. In addition, there is a lack of clarity regarding this law which therefore prevents journalists from performing their duties. Indeed, they could be prosecuted or punished based on the elite's interpretations of the legislation, especially in the light of the lack of independence of the judiciary and separation of powers.

A human rights activist analyzed the situation of the two governments and how they use information for their own interests. He said, 'The public have the right to know. Both governments hid the facts. They only disclose information that could serve their interests. Hamas government disclose the information that could harm Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, Fatah try to disclose information that could inflame the public against Hamas government' (Shaqoura, 2010).

Paragraph 4 in Article 4 grants journalists the right to protect confidential sources of information unless ordered otherwise by a court. Circumstances in which a court could take action include investigations involving a threat to national security, endeavouring to prevent crime being committed or to promote the interests of justice. While this paragraph indicates the right to protect confidential sources of information, it restricts it with ambiguous provisions of law under the pretext of prejudice to state security, prevention of crime or promotion of the interests of justice. These restrictions put journalists and media institutions under the penalty of law.

These articles are followed by a set of prohibitions contained in Article 37 which prohibit publication of the following:

- Any confidential information about police and public security forces or weapons, their location, movements, and exercises;
- Articles and materials which contain insults to religions and sects that are legally guaranteed freedom;

- Articles that harm national unity, incite crimes, promote hatred and discord, and encourage disharmony and sectarianism between community members;
- Proceedings of private meetings of the National Council and the Authority Ministers Council.

From this, it is clear that the Palestinian Authority did not respect the law, especially the right of freedom of access to information. For the Fatah faction, it remained in power and took control of the Legislative Council for about ten years. It is suffering from an internal democratic crisis that has resulted in established leaders taking control of senior positions within the organization. They did not give leadership opportunities to the younger generation. Hamas faction took over power and controlled the Gaza Strip, which prevented both free access to information and freedom of expression. The immaturity of democratic thought within the two governments has led to practices such as the targeting of journalists, withholding of sources of information, assaults on media institutions and the detention of citizens because of their views and political affiliations.

It is reasonable to impose restrictions on confidential information which relates to national security. But these restrictions must be within a rigid framework and only exercised when there is danger and real threat. Imposing restrictions on the dissemination of confidential information that related to meetings of the National Council and the Authority Ministers Council is contrary to international laws and does not allow the public to know what is going on.

Despite the existence of a clear law which regulates media work, Palestinian journalists suffer from the absence of a law that constitutes a legal reference point. This legal vacuum leads to many violations from the executive authority which practises violations against media institutions and journalists without any justification or legal basis.

## **7.9 Media and liberation**

Liberation movements became aware of the role of the media in influencing the individual's political knowledge. Therefore they attached great importance to the mass media and took advantage of news programmes to disseminate their political ideologies. Governments became aware of the liberation movements' intentions. Thus, they

regulated the media law that restricts their work in an attempt to control information. But the new technology has made it very difficult for those regimes to control information and to impose censorship over media channels. However, media activists who employed modern technology such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other publishing tools have made it easy to circumvent censorship and the blockade. Undoubtedly, such new technologies became tools of liberation and freedom from authoritarian suppression.

In the Palestinian context, the Palestinian leadership has realized that the media are one of the most effective weapons it can employ to achieve its goals. It was used as a tool to defend counterfeiting and the forgery of facts by the Israeli media. Needless to say, since its occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Israeli government has ensured strong support for its media propaganda aimed at destroying the Palestinian identity. It was therefore the duty of the Palestinian leadership to highlight the Palestinian cause and enlighten world public opinion in support of their cause.

After the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Palestinian factions started to issue leaflets and statements that highlight their achievements at the national level in refuting the allegations of the occupiers. The Palestinian media have been the concern of the Palestinian revolution since its inception. In parallel with their interest in military actions, Palestinian factions have paid special attention to the media to explain their goals widely and lead the process of liberation. Indeed, they knew very well it was essential to focus on the Palestinian people and inflame their feelings against the Israeli occupation. In the absence of a balance of power between the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian resistance, the best option was a popular uprising. It is important to note that the internal press faced many difficulties, such as prosecution and the confiscation of equipment as well as the detention of journalists.

The role of the resistance press in liberation struggles cannot be ignored. Such a press had flourished during the Israeli occupation. It gained a strong position among Palestinians. It had an impact on public awareness, and mobilized them to fight and to spread the experience of resistance. Thus, it promoted the struggle for national liberation in order to return to the homeland and establish an independent and democratic Palestinian state. In order to achieve national goals, the Palestinian

resistance had to be committed to principles and values to succeed and deliver its message, and therefore to activate the role of the media.

In the diaspora, factions used to issue newspapers and magazines and established a radio station in order to connect with Palestinians inside and outside Palestine. Such mass media was the most important tool in providing the latest information and news of military operations that took place against the Israeli occupation. Such information was used to inspire people to look forward to freedom. It is important to note that the Palestinian media played an important role in building public pressure on the international political community to take action to liberate the Palestinian people from occupation. It also made the Palestinian cause the focus of the international community.

Needless to say, representatives of non-Palestinian news organizations had suffered difficulties when journalists were subjected to chases and assassination. Educators in the Palestinian factions wrote against the Israeli occupation policy and played an important role in inflaming the people and igniting the popular uprising. Their essays, poems and drawings expressed Palestinian suffering under the occupation. At that time, Israeli had focused on the assassination of Palestinian journalists and intellectuals because of their distinctive role in publicizing the Palestinians' suffering. They assassinated the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanaan, participated in the assassination of the artists Naji Al-Ali and Majed Abu Sharar, and other Palestinian writers.

A Palestinian journalist expressed his view about the Palestinian journalists' role in liberating Palestine. He said, 'Palestinian journalists played an important role in liberating the Palestinians from the Israeli occupation. They succeeded to show how much such occupation dominating about five million Palestinians' lives. They raised the Palestinian cause to the international community. They pressurised on international policy and made it clear that the Palestinian people deserve an independent state' (Sabah, 2010).

Radio has received special attention, as an important medium that can reach a large number of people. The Palestinian resistance, notably the PLO, had established a radio station in May 1968 to play a role in the liberation process. Its tasks were to support the Palestinian liberation movement in its struggle against Israeli occupation, to connect



with Palestinians inside and outside, to announce statements and updates from the Palestinian leadership, to clarify the strategy of struggle against the occupation, and to refute occupation plans to destroy the Palestinian cause.

The Israeli government followed with concern the growth of internal and external Palestinian media. They realized that it was impossible to end this by the assassination of Palestinian writers. Consequently, Israeli political and military bodies began planning a major operation to eliminate the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. The strike was in early June 1982: a large-scale military process aimed at an area which included southern Lebanon up to Beirut, which was a stronghold of the Palestinian press. As a result, Palestinians were scattered in different countries and their media suffered suppression.

The national press played a positive role in all stages of the Palestinian people's struggle. It expressed their hopes and worked to strengthen their movement for national liberation, and participated in the process of nation-building. Palestinians considered the press as a tool to guide and mobilize and to serve the values and fundamental principles that they enshrined during their long struggle. The national press must therefore remain a strategic weapon that encourages the fight for liberation, and a protective barrier that protects rights and freedoms.

With the signing of the Oslo agreement, the Palestinian Authority entered a new phase which was represented by the establishment of Palestine TV. This has been identified as a turning point in the history of Palestinian media. As stated before, agreements between the PA and Israel prevent any incitements against each other. Therefore, as the television station is controlled by the PA, it is not allowed to broadcast any content that could inflame the public against Israel. Consequently, the Palestinian media have lost its role as a resistance tool for liberation and became a tool for a certain class of beneficiaries from the authority's regime.

When Hamas started Al-Aqsa TV, expectations were very high as it was not related to the Palestinian Authority regime. The station's stated goals were to raise public awareness of the occupation's plan, to reveal its crimes against the Palestinian people, and to lead public freedom towards liberating the whole Palestinian land (Abumuhsen, 2010). Indeed, the station has shown Palestinian suffering and played an

important role in highlighting crimes committed by the Israeli occupation. It covered very closely the 2009 Israeli war in the Gaza Strip.

There could be three trends for media priorities at this stage of the struggle for liberation. The first trend focuses on the use of the Palestinian media to accomplish the main objective of Palestinian resistance, the liberation of the land from Israeli occupation. At this stage, the main tasks of the mass media are to establish politically and ideologically integrated unity, to promote initiatives that encourage unification of the different political factions, and to mobilize international support for the liberation of Palestine from the Israeli occupation.

The second trend focuses on the main challenges that face the media at this stage of the struggle for liberation. These challenges are represented in its contribution to the achievement of social justice. Yet the media are considered to be an integral part of the struggle and therefore should focus on economic, social, political and cultural problems. The media at this stage focuses to develop individuals within society in order to prepare them to lead the country.

The third trend focuses on the primary task of the media at this stage of the struggle for national liberation. These tasks are linked to the strengthening of democratic practices by promotion of the three main functions of information, forum, and critique. The media at this stage encourages freedom of expression, provides credible information, allows more criticism, and functions as a watchdog. But at this stage, especially with the existence of the Israeli occupation, it would be impossible for the media to promote democratic practices.

### **7.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed different issues related to media and democracy in Palestine as a conflict zone. These issues affect the Palestinian media in its everyday practices. Despite several media institutions having been severely affected by the two governments and by Israeli occupation policies, they are still able to carry out some of their daily activities. The lack of freedom of expression, the obstruction of information, and the existence of daily harassments by the two governments' security forces have become the major barrier in any move towards democracy. Although the Palestinian

press law affirms freedom of expression, it contains vague terms which are subjected to different interpretations. Ambiguous terms and sentences contained in the press law were intended to enable censorship of media and journalists. The prominent role of the executive forces of the two governments and the vagueness of the Palestinian press law has had a significant impact on the right of freedom of expression. However, violations against freedom of expression, self-censorship, restrictions on Palestinian press freedom and the detention of journalists have all been part of a clear decline in Palestinian media performance.

Peace agreements with Israel have affected the Palestinian media's ability to work towards political liberation. In addition, such agreements have limited Palestinians' freedom of expression. At the same level, Israeli blockade policies have deprived Palestinian journalists of opportunities to develop their journalistic skills and have affected media coverage of violations. In essence, freedom of expression has not been respected as a principle that ensures citizen's freedom and which protects their interests in order to move towards democracy. Indeed, the media's experience over recent years has established deep doubts about the likelihood of any move towards democracy.

The data from fieldwork showed that the two television channels are providing a platform for their own members and supporters of their policies. Interviews with political analysts revealed that such participation that does not include different public sectors and this contributes to a deepening of political differences which then leads to state destruction rather than state building. Moreover, the two governments' control over media channels has resulted in public mistrust in the information that is broadcast. However, the presence of the two opposing television channels has in some ways acted for the public interest, as each channel functioned as a fourth estate for its opponent. But, at the same time it has become clear that the two television channels play the dual role of being government channels, which defend their owners' strategies, and political opposition channels which distort the image of others.

## Chapter 8

### **Conclusion: Democratic communication and partisan media**

The main aim of the thesis was to investigate the question of how far, in the perceptions of Palestinians, the two television channels – Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV – were contributing to the development of a democratic political state through participative communication processes. Both quantitative (survey-based) and qualitative (focus group/interview) methods were used. Although, as stated in Chapter 4, the views are not claimed to be representative of all Palestinians, a carefully structured range of groups was selected to reflect the stratification of both areas of Gaza Strip. The fieldwork gathered the perceptions of different sectors of Palestinian society and media workers about their access to the television channels, their views on media reliability, freedom of expression, the watchdog role of television, their opinions on the status of democracy and human rights, and other issues related to media functions and democracy in Palestine.

The key findings from the survey questionnaire were that, in the view of many respondents, the two television channels, Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV, were controlled by the two political parties - Fatah and Hamas respectively - and that the programmes broadcast on these, such as talk-shows, served to further the political agendas of the two groups so that the channels in effect functioned as a mouthpiece for the two parties. Respondents also felt that freedom of expression was not a priority for either channel, so that independent television channels was essential to help create a democratic culture. However, some participants believed that the rise of Al-Aqsa television has provided an aspect of freedom for the Palestinians in that they now had a counter propaganda channel to the Palestine TV.

The findings illustrated how far the two television channels were acting only in a limited way as a public sphere, as they tended to only provide their own members with a platform and avoided those who critiqued their policies. The findings demonstrated that the status of democracy and human rights in Palestine was extremely low and indicated

that it would be very difficult to conduct free and fair elections under such circumstances. The survey results highlighted that the two television channels were not able to function as a fourth estate: i.e. that they were not providing credible information or promoting democracy by encouraging tolerance among Palestinians, nor were they protecting human rights and freedom of expression.

However, participants did believe that the establishment of the Hamas-supported Al-Aqsa television channel had prompted a change in the Palestinian arena. On the one hand, it contributes to promoting the democratization process by functioning as a fourth estate monitoring the opposing Fatah government, disseminating information in the Hamas interest not otherwise provided and providing a platform for Hamas members and others who support its policies. But, on the other hand, it contributes to the instability of Palestine by only providing a partisan view. In the same way, Palestine Television as a governmental channel functions as a fourth estate monitoring Hamas governance, broadcasting information of interest to Fatah and providing a platform for Fatah members and others who support their views. It was clear that both television channels have entered into a cycle of action and reaction in which media disputes are the major feature in recent years.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, it is possible that this adversarial situation itself could be a partial solution to the provision of democratic communication. Despite the fact that independent media are essential at the stage of state building, partisan media could be part of the solution for democracy. Since the media have three functions in democracy – forum, information provider and monitor, each party urges its television channel to play these three functions for its own interests.

In this investigation of the two television channels and their function in relation to supporting and developing democratic communication, it was necessary to examine the characteristics of the opposing factions and their role in Palestinian politics. Exploring these internal conflicts has reinforced the need to investigate the elements that hinder the implementation of democracy. An analysis of the dynamics of power inherent in occupied and transitional societies is an essential pre-requisite for understanding media functions in this context. In examining the strategies adopted by the two factions in shaping the emerging public sphere, the thesis argues that the two political factions are

trying to manipulate the public and conceal information that affects their power. As a result, the political parties have polarized the emerging public sphere. Giving examples from the internal political sphere, the Palestinian political and media structures, the research has demonstrated how much these spaces have been occupied by undemocratic practices. The survey results provided evidence of how far the two factions control the media and how this has compromised the media's function to promote democratic communication and the democratic process. It shows how internal division and Israeli occupation have disrupted these attempts to establish a democratic sphere in Palestine.

These findings were reinforced by the output from the focus groups, providing an insight into the problems caused by political divisions and the effect on the state-building project. Discussions with participants in focus groups revealed their aspirations for an end to political divisions and for a democratic space where human rights are respected. The factions' control of the two television channels, together with the censorship of other media channels, has resulted in the deterioration of performance by the Palestinian media. The results also revealed the difficulty of practising journalism in the Palestinian Territories and showed how media institutions and journalists suffered from censorship and other state harassment when covering human rights violations. The conflict between journalists and the two governments over access to information has compromised the role of the media in providing the basis for democratic communication and participation in the political process.

The findings from both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups and interview) research show that the two television channels are not enabling the development of democracy in Palestine. The interviews supported the survey findings that the two television channels' policies are affected by the conflict between the two factions. Members of the 'Independent' focus groups were the most vigorous critics of the two television channels, stating that any criticism of those in power in the two factions was absent in their programmes.

The key findings from both qualitative and quantitative research have pointed to the most important factor, which is the partisan nature of Palestinian society. Unstructured interviews in cafes – a popular space that functions as a public sphere - reveal the inner feelings of ordinary Palestinians, who are keen to discuss the political situation. They

tend to take a partisan position, whether for or against what is happening in the Palestinian arena. Some favour Hamas strategy in ruling Gaza, others favour Fatah strategy in ruling the West Bank and yet others criticize both governments. There is some convergence of opinion in the research in that all groups criticize both governments' actions against journalists and media institutions and all agree that the Israeli occupation is negatively impacting on the performance of the media in the Palestinian Territories.

The findings from the interviews with journalists, political analysts, human rights activists, and academics revealed the problematic position of the media as an area of practice in Palestine. Political divisions and the lack of security arising from the Israeli occupation have made it difficult for journalists to practise professionally or effectively as media workers. Journalists suffer both from government censorship and self-censorship in that most journalists are afraid to talk. In addition, the Israeli occupation and its operations are preventing journalists working freely, for example covering violations committed against Palestinians. Another impact on their performance is the Israeli blockade that prevents them participating in international conferences and training and has caused a shortage of press equipment. However, despite being targeted by the Israeli occupation forces, Palestinian journalists have succeeded in communicating Israeli violations to the international community.

The fieldwork interactions with Palestinian people, academics, journalists, human rights activists and other media practitioners in Gaza have enabled insights into how media can function during a transitional period, where there is no democratic state. It is clear that much of the literature concerns media functions in democratic Western societies but it is important to consider examples from the Arab world, where authoritarian governments control the media for their own interests. In this context, the need for rethinking an Arab media culture is extremely important (Sabry, 2009)

During the research, it became clear that many journalists and participants in focus groups were not fully aware of the nature of democracy and how media functions in democratic countries. This indicated a lack of knowledge among some sectors of the Palestinian society that need to be informed about their rights. Indeed, the prospects for democracy in Palestine were still seen as vague. Freedom and independence for the

media is very much dependent on the willingness of the political parties to form a united government.

There was a view in the focus groups that maintaining a national broadcaster during the period of political instability could ensure the national interest was upheld. However, if national television is run by one political party, there was no guarantee it would not be used for its partisan interests. Thus the solution might be to form a national committee to supervise national television policy in order to maintain the national interest. Interviews with journalists indicated that so far national television has failed to tackle internal issues and meet people's demands and not managed to communicate with the international community. Instead it was the perception that Palestine Television had been used as a tool for political manipulation and to mislead the public. In addition, because of its partiality, it was not upholding proper journalistic ethics, which meant it had no credibility and therefore could not function as a fourth estate.

On the other hand, the journalists interviewed were frustrated with the way that the Al-Aqsa television channel was tackling internal issues. They confirmed that the channel had a strong influence, which Hamas was using to oppose Fatah and inflame public opinion against the Palestinian Authority. Using the channel as a party mouthpiece in this way has led to the loss of its credibility. The media discourse being used during this phase of political tension is one of inciting conflict leading to violence and deepening internal divisions and which ignores professional journalism ethics. Such an adversarial discourse is affecting negatively the project of state building and progress towards democracy.

Interviews with human rights activists showed how human rights organizations are very aware of the two governments' actions against journalists. They also claimed that the two factions used their television channels to target human rights activists. There have also been attacks on independent media outlets. It is clear from the findings that a review of Palestinian Press Law is also very much needed. The government should ensure that the free flow of information to support democracy is safeguarded by the law. Legislation should be enacted in order to encourage media pluralism and prevent concentration of media ownership by the government. Furthermore, the government should encourage media diversity in order to safeguard the public interest. Democracy



and state-building can only be achieved if the two political parties Fatah and Hamas end the internal division and stop using their television channels as propaganda tools.

The lack of freedom of expression and access to information has prevented the establishment of a democratic space essential to create a coherent political system and on which to base a democratic society that respects human rights. The view of those interviewed was that the two governments needed to hold elections in order to end the Palestinian division. They were convinced that public participation in the political process was very crucial at this stage of state-building.

The success of the Palestinian state depends on political unity and an effective media system that is able to perform the three functions of forum, critique and information. In moving towards democracy, the government should provide the climate in which an independent and pluralistic media can emerge and develop. The government should guarantee freedom of expression and free access to information. Special efforts should be made to support independent media and journalists to work freely and without government interference. It is crucial to maintain non-partisan reporting and high professional standards of journalism ethics when covering events, especially in times of conflict.

However, in the transition to this desired state, it could be argued that the Palestinian media experience has shown that partisan media may be able to fulfil a role in contributing to the democratization of Palestine. The two television channels do provide limited functions of democratic communication to their own factions, so between them they may benefit Palestinian society. The Palestinian Authority treats Al-Aqsa television channel as opposition media, considering it to be irresponsible, by causing discontent and disunity among Palestinians. In addition, they believe that the criticism it makes of the Palestinian Authority and Fatah threatens political stability. On the other hand, Al Aqsa's supporters believe that the existence of the television channel is their only guarantee of freedom and democracy (Zaqout, 2009; Abuhashish, 2010). They think that it would be impossible to have democracy without such an opposition media channel, which is able to fulfil the functions of providing a platform for critics of the Palestinian Authority, acting as a watchdog and providing the public with the necessary information in order to be able to form an opinion.

Partisan media as opposition media can practise a freedom of expression which is important for democratic communication. Despite the fragile political situation in the Palestinian Territories, Al-Aqsa television does act as a watchdog, monitoring the Palestinian Authority. Al-Aqsa television, as a partisan media channel, has played a crucial role in exposing the Palestinian Authority in relation to violations against human rights and freedoms in Palestine. Moreover, Palestine Television as a governmental institution is restricting the flow of information to the public, and, therefore, Al-Aqsa television has played the role of an alternative source of information. Palestinian Authority control over the West Bank, censorship and the hierarchical organisation of the Palestine Television channel has prevented journalists from tackling sensitive issues. However, Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip has provided Al-Aqsa television channel with the space to criticise the Palestinian Authority and monitor those in power in the West Bank.

Since the Palestinian Authority is controlled by Fatah, and Fatah elites control Palestine Television as a governmental channel, this also is a partisan media channel. Fatah elites use the channel to respond to Hamas actions. They tend to show Hamas as the party which has betrayed the Palestinian cause by seeking power to further their own ideological interests, while Hamas depict Fatah and the Palestinian Authority as selling out to Israel.

The other smaller political parties have also tried to establish their own media to provide an alternative source of information but the two governments are now trying to exert control over these channels via censorship. However, when the national television channel fails to provide the platform for diverse opinions, fails to provide information for the public and fails to act as a watchdog to protect public interests, then opposition media could be a partial solution.

There is no doubt that national and partisan media could get stuck in a cycle of action and reaction, which would lead the public to mistrust both. However, this opposition means that the two channels act as watchdogs of each other, that between them sufficient information is made accessible and that the platforms provided by the two

channels are sufficient for the public to express their views against each government act overall in the general public interest.

As the Palestinian public sphere has been controlled by the Palestinian political parties, independent media have not been able to find a way to reach the public and contribute to democratic communication. As discussed in Chapter 2, independent media are characterised by the World Bank as having free access to information and free to report the information they receive without ‘undue fear’. Media in Palestine are either controlled directly by the two governments or indirectly via censorship. The law has also proved unable to safeguard their independence or the safety of journalists. The key factors required for independent media to flourish are not present, as in many transitional and post-conflict countries, leaving it vulnerable to power elites.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in situations such as Palestine, where there is strong political control and little democracy, international NGOs have played an important role in promoting independent media and professional journalism by providing resources and training courses to build capacity and skills. The role of the internet is also important as an alternative space or public sphere as a source of independent information. Projects supporting media development such as those of UNESCO or the SIDA collaboration with Birzeit University have a particular importance in the Palestinian territories, which lack the basic tools to sustain a robust public sphere. There is little doubt that the aim of such projects is to provide the Palestinian journalists with the ability to support media channels as a force to promote dialogue and democracy.

The research showed that nearly all the groups surveyed thought that independent television channels would help to create democracy. This indicates that Gazans are aware of the role of independent media in establishing the conditions for democracy by providing information and acting as a forum for public debates. However, independent media depend on a democratic constitution which provides guarantees of freedom of expression and the right to access information. In the Palestinian case, an independent media are much needed in order to promote democracy and build a Palestinian state. As Shahin (2010) states, if the two channels were independent, it would benefit Palestinian communal interest, not just the factions’ interest. In addition, it would play a role in reconciliation and reduce Palestinian divisions.

That Palestinian media are dominated by political issues is a legacy of the birth of the Palestinian problem, and as a result other issues have been neglected. It is crucial at this transition stage to state-building to focus on other social and economic issues such as education, health, etc. Allowing Palestinians to express themselves in issues related to their daily life would deepen democracy and create a public space for discussion among different political players.

In May 2011 Hamas and Fatah finally reconciled their major differences and signed an agreement to form a united government. It will be interesting to see how this will impact on these two television channels and whether Palestine Television could become a national television rising above partisan interests.

## Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Gaza Strip, 15-01-2010

**Communication and Media Research Institute**  
**The University of Westminster**  
**Researcher: Bahjat Abuzanouna**

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Please answer by placing the sign X in the appropriate box

1- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Age  Political affiliation

2- How long do you watch television daily?

☐ Less than one hour ☐ From one to two hours ☐ More than three hours

3- Do you watch Palestine TV channel?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4- Do you watch Al-Aqsa TV channel?

☐ Yes ☐ No

5- Which television station fulfils your requirements?

☐ Palestine TV ☐ Al-Aqsa ☐ None

6- In your opinion, which television station has greater reliability?

☐ Palestine TV ☐ Al-Aqsa ☐ None

7- How would you evaluate the current status of democracy and human rights in Palestine?

☐ Good ☐ Bad ☐ Very bad

8- Do you think it is possible to conduct democratic elections in the current situation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9- Do you think television can contribute to facilitating a dialogue among different political parties in Palestine?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10- Do you think the editorial policy of the two television stations - Palestine and Al-Aqsa - is affected by the conflict between Fatah and Hamas?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11- Do you think the social debates conducted in the two channels could enhance the democratic culture and contribute to the creation of a pluralistic society?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

12- Do you think Israeli occupation affects the performance of television in Palestine?

☐ Yes ☐ No

13- Do you think television could contribute to the process of state-building?

☐ Yes ☐ No

14- Do you think Palestine television channel is politically biased?

☐ Yes ☐ No

15- Do you think Al-Aqsa TV channel is politically biased?

☐ Yes ☐ No

16- Are freedom of expression and opinion being implemented by the two television channels?

☐ Yes ☐ No

17- Do you think that the creation of an independent media would be an important factor in establishing democracy in Palestine?

☐ Yes ☐ No

18- In your view which television station allows people's participation and promotes controversial opinions?

☐ Palestine TV ☐ Al-Aqsa ☐ None

19- Do you think Hamas government in the Gaza Strip imposes censorship?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20- Do you think the Palestinian Authority (PA) imposes censorship?

☐ Yes ☐ No

21- Do you think the two TV channels Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa television function as a mouthpiece respectively for Fatah and Hamas?

☐ Yes ☐ No

22- Do you think Palestine and Al-Aqsa TV, function as a fourth estate?

☐ Yes

☐ No

23- Do you think Palestine TV and Al-Aqsa TV can afford to criticise those in power?

☐ Yes

☐ No

## استمارة استبيان

عزيزي المواطن/المواطنة :

يهدف هذا الاستبيان إلى التعرف على دور التلفزيون في بناء الدولة وتحقيق الديمقراطية. الرجاء الإجابة على العبارات الموجودة في الصفحات التالية بصراحة وصدق من خلال وضع علامة

( ✓ ) أمام أحد البدائل، مع ملاحظة أن هذا الاستبيان يستخدم لأغراض البحث العلمي. الباحث: بهجت ابوزعونة

1- الجنس ☐ ذكر ☐ أنثى العمر ----- الانتماء السياسي: -----

2- ما مدى مشاهدتك اليومية للتلفزيون؟ ☐ أقل من ساعة ☐ من ساعة إلى ساعتين ☐ ثلاث ساعات فأكثر

3- هل تشاهد تلفزيون فلسطين؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

4- هل تشاهد تلفزيون الأقصى؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

5- أي من القنوات التلفزيونية التالية تلي رغباتك؟  
☐ تلفزيون فلسطين ☐ تلفزيون الأقصى ☐ ليس مما ذكر

6- أي القنوات الفضائية الفلسطينية التالية ذات مصداقية ؟  
☐ فلسطين ☐ الأقصى ☐ ليس مما ذكر

7- ما هو تقييمك لوضع الديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان في فلسطين؟  
☐ جيد ☐ سيئ ☐ سيئ للغاية

8- هل من الممكن عقد انتخابات ديمقراطية في ظل الأوضاع الحالية؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

9- هل تعتقد أن القنوات التلفزيونية ممكن أن تساهم في إنجاح الحوار لدى الأحزاب المختلفة في فلسطين؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

10- هل تعتقد أن سياسة تلفزيون فلسطين و تلفزيون الأقصى تتأثر بالصراع بين فتح وحماس ؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

11- هل تعتقد أن البرامج الحوارية التي تعقد في القنوات يمكن أن تعزز ثقافة الديمقراطية وتساهم في خلق مجتمع متماسك؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا ☐ أحياناً

12- هل تعتقد أن الاحتلال الإسرائيلي يؤثر على أداء محطات التلفزة الفلسطينية؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا

13- هل تعتقد أن التلفزيون ممكن أن يساهم في عملية بناء الدولة؟  
☐ نعم ☐ لا



- 14- هل تعتقد ان تلفزيون فلسطين حزبي؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 15- هل تعتقد ان تلفزيون الأقصى حزبي؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 16- هل تعتقد أن حرية الرأي والتعبير تطبق في تلفزيون فلسطين والأقصى ؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 17- هل تعتقد أن وجود إعلام مستقل يعتبر عنصر حيوي يساعد على إرساء الديمقراطية في فلسطين؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 18- برأيك أي من المحطتين تسمح بمشاركة الناس وتعمل على نشر الآراء المختلفة والمتعارضة؟  
☐ فلسطين ☐ الأقصى ☐ ليس مما ذكر
- 19- هل تعتقد ان حكومة حماس في قطاع غزة تفرض رقابة إعلامية؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 20- هل تعتقد ان السلطة الفلسطينية تفرض رقابة إعلامية؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 21- هل تعتقد أن قناتي فلسطين و الأقصى يعملان كبوق إعلامي للحركتين- فتح وحماس؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 22- هل تعتقد أن قناتي فلسطين والأقصى يعملان كسلطة رابعة؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐
- 23- هل تعتقد أن قناتي فلسطين والأقصى يستطيعان انتقاد الرموز القيادية؟  
نعم ☐ لا ☐

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