

CHAPTER

12

PALESTINIAN PUBLIC RELATIONS—INSIDE AND OUT

R.S. ZAHARNA

AHMED IBRAHIM HAMMAD

JANE MASRI

Palestine has yet to find her place on the world's map as an independent, sovereign state. Throughout much of its history, Palestine—also known as the Holy Land because it is sacred to the three main monotheistic faiths—has been conquered, occupied and ruled over by foreign entities. In this regard, Palestine shares the fate of many countries around the globe. However, it is Palestine's recent history that makes it somewhat unique from other country studies contained in this book. For, unlike other countries with established borders, economies, institutions, and even mass media, Palestine is still seeking independence and statehood. The Palestinians' quest for statehood is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has consumed the Middle East and much of the world.

This ongoing conflict has profoundly shaped Palestinian public relations and communication. As other countries were gaining their independence or developing their economies and mass media, the fuel for public relations, Palestine has struggled with a unique set of public relations challenges. Internally, there was the need to keep the Palestinian people together, despite separation and exile. Externally, the Palestinians sought to present their case to the international community. The Palestinian press, under occupation, was heavily censored. The first Palestinian-controlled radio and television inside Palestine only emerged in 1994. At present, the Palestinians are engaged in nation building. This chapter offers an overview of Palestinian public relations and public communication and links it with the Palestinian socio-political environment.

PALESTINE OVERVIEW

The Land

Palestine has long been a part of the geography and history of the Middle East. It lies at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa, within what is known as the Fertile Crescent. Mandate Palestine, as it was known under British rule, extended from Gaza, bordering Egypt, up the Mediterranean coast to Lebanon, and west to Jordan. Today, Palestine consists of the West Bank and Gaza, two separate, non-contiguous land masses separated by the state of Israel. The West Bank is 5,800 sq km or 2,178 sq miles in area and is divided into 11 governorates (Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqiliya, Nablus, Ramallah-Al-Bireh, Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, Tubas, and Salfit). Gaza covers 365 sq km or 139 sq miles and is divided into five governorates (North Gaza, Gaza, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafah). Gaza has one of the highest population densities in the world, approximately 10,279 persons per square mile, compared to the West Bank's population density of 1,130 persons per square mile. Three-quarters of Gaza's population are refugees, according to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA, 2007). Although the 1993 Oslo Accords between the Israelis and the Palestinians call for freedom of movement of Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza, to date, "there has been near total separation of economic and social interaction between the West Bank and Gaza" (World Bank, 2007a, p. 12). This geographic separation has social, economic and political repercussions for the Palestinians.

The History

The history of Palestine extends back more than two millennia to a land inhabited by the agrarian Canaanites and the trading and seafaring Philistines (Farsoun, 2004). The Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), revered by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, journeyed from Ur to Canaan around 1900 B.C. Around 1200 B.C., the Prophet Moses (Musa) led the Israelite exodus from Egypt into Palestine. Palestine was controlled by the Hebrew Israelite tribes until the Roman conquest in 63 B.C. Palestine became predominantly Christian with the emergence of Christianity in Palestine under the Byzantine rule based in Constantinople. After the emergence of Islam, Palestine was a province under the Islamic Umayyad Dynasty based in Syria (A.D. 661–750) and then a province of the Islamic Abbasid dynasty based in Iraq (A.D. 750–1258) (The Palestine Center, 2007). During this period, Islam became the dominant religion and Arabic the dominant language. The Crusaders invaded Palestine and established a Latin Kingdom in Jerusalem (1099–1187).

The recent history of Palestine has been one of continuous occupation and turmoil. From 1517 to 1917, Palestine was an administrative territory of the Islamic Ottoman Empire based in Turkey. When Great Britain captured Jerusalem during World War I, control passed from the Ottomans to the British. At the time, Palestinian Christians and Muslims composed more than 90 percent of the population and owned 97 percent of the land (United Nations, 1990). The British controlled Palestine, first as an occupying power (1917–1920), then under U.N. Mandate (1920–1947). The British made conflicting promises, assuring the indigenous Palestinian people national independence, while pledging to European Jewish leaders "a homeland"—both in Palestine (United Nations, n.d.). During the Nazi persecution of Jews in World War II, there was large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine. As a result of the conflict, national ambitions and promises, turmoil ensued in Mandate Palestine. The British turned the fate of Palestine over to the

United Nations, which in November 1947, voted to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. The violence intensified. In 1948, Israel announced its independence, absorbing much of the Palestinian state. The Palestinians in the northern region were under Israeli military control from 1948 to 1966 and were eventually absorbed into Israel as citizens of the new Israeli state. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan, while Egypt took administrative control of Gaza. In the aftermath of the June War of 1967, the West Bank and Gaza came under Israeli occupation (see United Nations, 1990). In the mid-1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) emerged and in 1974, gained international recognition as the national representative of the Palestinian people. In 1993, direct, secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO produced the Oslo Accords. Under the stipulations of the Oslo Accords, the PLO returned to Gaza and the West Bank and established the Palestinian National Authority, interchangeably referred to as the Palestinian Authority (PA). Negotiations between the PA and the Israelis have continued in the search for a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The People

The state of Palestine, regardless of what its final borders will be, is small and limited in natural assets. Its people are its primary resource. Today there are close to nine million Palestinians around the world who continue to identify with their homeland and their compatriots living on Palestinian soil. Today, more than sixty percent of Palestinians are scattered across the globe. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2006), the combined population for the Palestinians in the Palestinian territories is estimated at 3.7 million. Another 1.4 million Palestinians live in Israel, and approximately 4.6 million Palestinians live in exile, with 2.2 million in refugee camps in neighboring Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon (PASSIA, 2007).

PALESTINIAN HISTORY and PUBLIC RELATIONS/COMMUNICATION

The historical roots of Palestinian public communication stem from its origins as a traditionally agrarian society and tribal Arab culture. The intimate familiarity within the society and economy based on cottage industries lent itself to word-of-mouth reputation management. In the later period of the Ottoman rule, a vigorous Palestinian press emerged (Khalidi, 1994).

British Rule

Under British rule (1917–1947), Palestinian public communication took on new dimensions. With the influx of foreigners, banners and public signs, including street signs, became more common (Ayalon, 2004). The Palestinian press, which had been dormant during the transition from Ottoman to British rule, re-emerged in the 1920s, albeit under strict British censorship (Khalidi, 1997). During the 1937 uprising of Palestinians against the British, to halt foreign immigration, the press played a limited role as the Palestinians organized primarily through their national committees (Kabha, 2003).

Dispossession and Exile

The period between 1947 and 1949 is known among Palestinians as the Nakbah or “the catastrophe.” This is when, instead of national independence, the Palestinians found their

homeland torn apart. More than 700,000 Palestinians became refugees as a result (U.N. Report, 1952). The emotional trauma of the experience spawned the intense sense of nationalism that permeates much of Palestinian communication today. Following the Nakbah is the period sometimes referred to as "the Lost Years" (Khalidi, 1994), as the Palestinian people were largely invisible, scattered and leaderless. At the time, the Palestinians faced a two-fold public communication challenge. Internally as a people, the challenge was to maintain a sense of national identity and unity. National symbols took on increased significance along with public anniversaries of historic events; two trends that continue today. The Palestinians also faced the challenge of communicating their plight and gaining support for statehood with external publics. As Christison (2000) notes, "because Palestinians had lived in Palestine for centuries, they felt no need to organize, propagandize or publicize in order to advance their goal of continuing to live and form a nation in Palestine" (p. 22). After the Nakbah, Palestinians became more acutely aware of the need to communicate with foreign publics.

Palestinian Identity and Expression

The 1960s marked a new phase in Palestinian communication, with the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The PLO embodied the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The PLO took on the two public communication challenges. Internally, the PLO itself represented an intense social network comprised of political factions and unions, which cut across the various sectors of Palestinian society. Information was circulated through the members and within society. The PLO also launched radio broadcasts, created a news agency (WAFA), issued press releases, distributed its own newspaper, established a research center, and opened information offices (Hamid, 1975). A historic milestone in Palestinian public communication was international recognition of the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." This recognition accorded a recognized voice for the Palestinians in the international community. In the 1970s, the efforts of Palestinian fighters to bring attention to the Palestinian cause through violence achieved their goal of capturing world attention, but cast the Palestinians as terrorists. This image became the dominant Palestinian image in much of the Western media (Adams, 1981; Ghareeb, 1983; Shaheen, 1984; Zaharna, 1995a).

Military Occupation

For the Palestinians living in Palestine, 1967 began the start of military occupation, which severely affected the political, economic and social life of the people (see, for example, Aruri, 1984). Under occupation, all forms of Palestinian national and cultural expression in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza were suppressed. Books were banned. Possession of publications of the PLO or other illegal materials resulted in arrests and imprisonment. The colors of the Palestinian flag were outlawed; even the word "Palestine" could mean a jail sentence (Said, 1989, p. 24). The Palestinians lost control over much of their public forms of communication. Palestinian universities (students and faculty members) were among the most vocal and hence harshly targeted Palestinian institutions (Aruri, 1984; Fashed, 1984; Johnson, 1986). The Palestinian press was heavily censored by Israeli military authorities. The "Defense Emergency Regulations of 1945, No. 88," left over from the British occupation, were still in effect. "Every article, picture, advertisement, decree and death notice must be submitted to military censors" (Friedman, 1983, p. 99). Local news was the most rigidly controlled, followed by Jewish settlement activity,

PLO statements and activities, and Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule, including school closings, demonstrations, arrests or deportations (Khalili, 1991, pp. 12–13; Friedman, 1983, pp. 99–100). A decade after the beginning of the occupation, organized grassroots nationalist political activity emerged in the occupied territories. This movement brought large sectors of society that had not been active before, including students, workers, and women, into nationalist activities (Hammami and Tamari, 1997, p. 277). This extensive social network laid the groundwork for the Palestinian uprising in 1987.

1987 First Palestinian Intifada

The first Palestinian uprising referred to as the “Intifada” represents another important milestone in Palestinian public relations/communication. The Palestinian Intifada is significant for several reasons (see Zaharna, 2003). First is the level of public participation. Although the Intifada started spontaneously as a result of a traffic accident in Gaza, it was transformed into a massive and sustained socio-political movement that eventually involved every segment of Palestinian society. Second, mobilizing Palestinian public sentiment and securing society-wide participation was achieved without the use of the mass media. Under occupation, the media were not a reliable channel for news or information for the Palestinian society. During the early days of the Intifada, newspapers could publish almost nothing, including photographs, casualty figures, or comments by PLO officials (Jamal, 2000, p. 47). The primary information channels were communiqués or one-page leaflets issued by an anonymous underground leadership composed of political and religious factions. These communiqués dealt with everything from the timing of demonstrations or duration of commercial strikes, to encouraging the public, providing guidance for students on how to study when universities were closed, to how to assist the needy (Mishal and Ahorni, 1994, pp. 25–29). The public waited in anticipation for these communiqués and rapidly circulated them through the social networks. Another prominent communication channel was “graffiti” painted at night by a network of youth activists. Walls, buildings, and almost any flat surface became public bulletin boards containing important announcements and proclamations (Oliver and Steinberg, 1993). While the Intifada was very much an internally directed campaign to mobilize Palestinians within the occupied territories, it evolved to include an external focus to include communication with the international publics, media, and political bodies (Zaharna, 2003). The political outcome, if not the success of the Intifada, is also significant, in that it led to the Middle East peace talks in Washington between 1991 and 1993. The peace talks eventually led to negotiations between the PLO and Israelis and the dramatic images of the signing of the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn in September 1993.

1994 Palestinian National Authority: Public Relations and Nation-building

The Oslo Accords laid the foundation for the current milestone in Palestinian public communication. In mid-1994, under the terms of the Oslo Accords concluded between Israel and the PLO, the exiled Palestinian leadership returned to Palestine and worked with Palestinians in the territories to establish the Palestinian National Authority (PA). The PA immediately faced two public communication challenges. The first was nation-building. The second was the public diplomacy goal of achieving support for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

STATUS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PALESTINE

Despite its rich history of public communication, public relations as a profession, industry and field of study is in its infancy in the West Bank and Gaza. Some of the factors shaping the PA media and public relations are common to other Arab countries. With the exception of a few privately owned newspapers and radio stations, the Palestinian broadcast and print media are owned and operated by government departments or government controlled organizations as well as political forces. Palestinian governmental organizations are primarily involved in information, promotion, publicity and facilitating services (Hammad, 2005). As for as the private sector, they are involved with marketing communication which, at least in the United States, is not considered public relations (Grunig and Hunt 1984, p. 357).

About two-thirds of those considered as public relations practitioners or officers are employed in the public sector (government and semi-governmental organizations). Establishing an exact number of public relations practitioners in Palestine is a challenge because there is no widely accepted or well-defined occupation category for public relations, advertising, and press agencies. Distinctions between marketing communication, advertising, and public relations in the Palestinian territories are blurred. What one calls public relations in the NGOs and private sector is mostly seen as a combination of marketing communications and communication management.

Despite these drawbacks in definition, public relations remains the profession of the future in Palestine, due to the fact that the government, organizations, and society need it very badly. One can look at the status of public relations in Palestine in terms of sectors: public or government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private, professional public relations industry.

Government Public Relations: The Palestinian Authority

For the Palestinian Authority, public relations has become a critical part of nation building and governance. Governmental organization places the practice of media and public relations squarely at the center of building civil society in Palestine. Government public relations efforts, particularly public information campaigns, seek to create awareness, generate acceptance of public policies and programs, and mobilize public participation in development undertakings. Public relations is also an important element in implementing government policy. Publics are affected by government decisions and vice versa. As relations between the different sectors of the government and the various publics become more complex, it is necessary for the government to maintain an open, constructive communication climate, cultivate relationships with the public, and project a positive image.

The Palestinian Authority has five governmental agencies that deal with media and to some extent public relations: Ministry of Information, The Palestinian News Agency (WAFA), State Information Service (SIS), National Guidance Foundation, and Palestinian Broadcast Corporation. New departments of public relations have been organized in a number of governmental organizations and have now become an integral part of their structures. Most, if not all, public relations practitioners, especially in ministries, are based in Ramallah (West Bank) and are occasionally found in other major cities such as Nablus and Gaza. According to Braid (1990), one of the major problems of any existing government information system was the duplication of mandate, duties, and responsibilities among government information offices. The problem of duplication is particularly acute for the PA and Palestinian society as a whole given the forced separation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Hammad (2005) conducted one of the first studies of public relations of Palestinian governmental organizations. He found that almost all Palestinian government organizations and agencies have public relations departments. The public relations department is the second most important information source when Palestinian audiences are targeted. However, while public relations is now practiced widely in various types of Palestinian governmental/public organizations, there is a misconception of public relations that has led to a wide gap between top management and the department of public relations. Hammad counted seven different formal names for public relations departments, ranging from "public relations," to "public relations and information," or "international cultural and public relations." Within organizations, overlap often occurs between public relations functions and other departments. Additionally, more than one-quarter of public relations departments performed functions generally not considered to be public relations duties. Public relations management may well have a place within organizations, however in practice public relations revolves mainly around editorial and "facilitation" work and is not concerned with conducting research, planning or decision-making.

Hammad (2005) found that while most of the Palestinian governmental organizations were involved in internal and external public relations activities, they focused predominantly on external publics. Information disseminated by the governmental organizations via mass media channels was directed primarily toward educating the public while simultaneously promoting favorable images of the government. (Many corporations in the private sector and NGOs adhere to a similar philosophy of one-way public relations communications.) While the internal public may appear unimportant, a public relations program will be seen as ineffective by employees if the organization provides poor public service to the community.

"Communication technician" was the most common public relations role in Hammad's (2005) study. The most-often performed activities were "storing newspapers and magazines" (71 percent), "facilitators: traveling, visas, hotel reservations, other services" (56 percent), and "producing leaflets, brochures, and print materials for their organization" (49 percent). The high percentage of "hosting" or "facilitating" activities may seem unusual to Western readers. However, it is important to point out that the political and economic conditions of the Palestinian people and continuing interest of the international community in the unresolved political conflict generates an unending stream of international delegations visiting Palestine. More than half of the organizations reported "always" receiving delegates. Having on hand printed material for distributing to visiting delegations is part of the public relations requisites as visitors inevitably request them.

The public relations activities considered effective by most of the organization's respondents were those that helped reach the largest audience. Television and newspapers are used to reach the general public. Announcements are used to quickly and efficiently target either small groups such as individual organization members or large groups such as the entire community. Successful receptions and special events with large attendance or good media coverage are also considered useful. The municipality of Gaza, for example, engaged in sponsorships of cultural events and sports shows, because these brought the municipality into contact with their target audience (Gaza City Directory 2002, p. 73). However, many of the managers indicated those activities required a high amount of staff time and attention. Press conferences were very common for the Palestinian public sector organizations, while the political organizations tended not to hold as many press conferences. Other activities included organizing dinners and receptions for major suppliers, distributors, and audiences.

The lack of financial resources is a perennial problem in government public relations

and information offices. Most public relations departments suffer from insufficient and unqualified personnel, lack of budget and logistics support. Public relations is often considered a luxury and is, therefore, neglected. Because of dissatisfaction with their salaries and promotion, many professionally skilled government practitioners seek to work with NGOs and private sector firms that offer better salary scales than government ministries.

Palestinian NGOs and Public Relations

Given the Palestinian historical experience—the absence of a governmental authority and foreign occupation that neglected the socio-economic needs of the Palestinian society—NGOs have been an enduring staple of Palestinian society. (Al-Shouli, 2006; Hanafi and Tabar, 2003; Sullivan, 2000). The number of NGOs in Palestine has been estimated between 800 to 1,500 (Hammami, 2000; Sullivan, 1996). This number has been growing rapidly in recent years, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Interior, which registers NGOs. Palestinian professional and grassroots NGOs provide 60 percent of all health-care services, 80 percent of all rehabilitation services and nearly 100 percent of all preschool education (Jarrar, 2005). NGOs are also working in agriculture, housing, small business and credit services.

Public relations is a pivotal component of Palestinian NGOs, given their two central public communication functions and audiences. Because NGOs tend to provide critical services or goods to the Palestinian population, an organization has the immediate task of informing the local population of its mission and activities. In addition to informing the public about their services, NGOs often seek to cultivate public goodwill, support, and involvement in their activities. As result, NGO public relations tend to engage heavily in relationship-building activities. Examples include launching community outreach programs, hosting special public functions, or participating in public events. Such activities help the NGO enhance its social capital and expand its social network within the local Palestinian population, which tends to value interpersonal and social communication. Fundraising is another important public relations function necessary for NGOs.

Palestinian NGOs have also formed their own networks and are actively using the internet in their communications. The Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO.net) and Palestine-NGOs.net are examples of Palestinian NGO network sites where members share experiences, post announcements and publish reports. These websites not only help communication within the Palestinian professional community, but provide a valuable source of information for the international community.

The Public Relations Profession

Public relations in Palestine is a relatively young industry composed of a small but growing group of professionals. It resembles the West in its activities, although there have been recent attempts to localize and to be responsive to both industry needs and national development priorities. It is also largely an urban phenomenon in both orientation and concentration. The number of media and advertising agencies grew rapidly in the Palestinian territories after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Few such agencies existed before due to Israeli obstacles and military regulations imposed in the occupied territories. The growth of these agencies was also spurred by the proliferation of communication technology throughout society.

The Palestinian public relations industry is similar to public relations in the Arab countries in that it tends to emphasize certain specialties. Political public relations (public affairs), media relations and corporate relations are the most popular areas in public relations practice (Hussein, Mohammed and Harron, 1991; Mansour, 1993; Alanazi, 1996). Palestinian public relations practitioners also face professional challenges common to their counterparts in other Arab countries such as lack of resources and recognition by top management (Hussein, Mohammed and Harron, 1991, p. 30).

The first independent firm dedicated exclusively to the practice of public relations was founded in the West Bank in 2000 by a young Palestinian who had received his B.A. in public relations at a U.S. university. Most of the firm's early clients were the local operations of international firms, such as British Gas and the Coca-Cola Company, or donor-funded operations such as the Palestinian Banking Corporation, a development and investment bank managed by foreign nationals. The firm's bilingual staff focused primarily on writing press releases (usually taken on board verbatim by the local Arabic language newspapers), and managing press conferences. They also heavily engaged in corporate social responsibility, investing the majority of their effort in staging giveaway events for school children, launching children's libraries at local hospitals, or organizing photo opportunities for donors with local and international dignitaries at the scores of ribbon-cutting ceremonies, project office openings, and official visits by stakeholders from abroad.

After watching the success of this early public relations firm, other communication operations added a public relations component. For example, Sky Advertising, established in the early 1990s primarily as a billboard design and rental operation, added public relations to its roster of services in 2005. Sky was followed into the PR business by En-Nasher Printing and Publishing, another graphic design and publishing house. What is noteworthy about this seeming expansion of the public relations industry in the West Bank is that none of the practitioners could claim any substantive experience or even formal training in the discipline.

In 2004, Zoom Advertising joined the market as the fourth major industry player. Demand for professionally conducted PR campaigns is on the rise, although to date, only the 4 largest firms have the staff and infrastructure required to be a serious contender for the public relations campaign work regularly outsourced by NGOs, government ministries and other international organizations. Today, Ellam Tam, Sky, En-Nasher and Zoom dominate the public relations industry in Palestine, and compete energetically for market share. Virtually all PR professionals with significant experience or educational training in the field work for one of the four major firms.

Another early phenomenon was the "partnering" of the major local public relations practitioners with large, prestigious public relations firms from the West. Ellam Tam captured the attention of Bates Pan Gulf, the Burston Marsteller affiliate headquartered in Dubai. Similarly, Asda'a Public Relations partnered with Sky in Ramallah, and Promo7 partnered with En-Nasher. The formal affiliations resulted in a small but perceptible rise in the level of professionalism among the major West Bank public relations firms. The local firms were able to create systems that mirrored those of the larger mentor, particularly in the area of systematic media scanning and assessments of the impact of media coverage on the client.

The general public has little to no understanding of the profession, either in theory or in practice and tends to confuse it with advertising and journalism. Small to medium sized enterprises view public relations as the realm of the larger corporate players across the board in most economic sectors. The size of the country and market is such that crisis

management is handled behind the scenes whenever possible, and among individuals, although recently several quasi-governmental agencies have sought the assistance of the local industry firms in the area of reputation management.

Public Opinion Research

Poll results are used by a wide variety of individuals and organizations, including political leaders, researchers, local and foreign press, diplomatic community members, and local grassroots institutions. Most public opinion research comes from three sources: academic institutions, governmental organizations, and independent research centers. A few research universities (such as Birzeit University, An-Najah National University, Al-Azhar University and Islamic University-Gaza) have generated public opinion research programs, and more are planning to follow suit. But they seldom receive the necessary research funds to begin and continue long-term research projects. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) is an example of an independent, nonprofit institution founded in 2000. PSR has become known and respected internationally for its polling work and its efforts to further objective survey research methodology in the area.

Public Relations Education and Training

Whereas journalism and mass communication (traditionally housed in political science departments) and marketing (traditionally housed in business departments) have long been on the roster of Palestinian university majors, the study area of public relations is considered to be a new academic subject in communication and media studies. Public relations education began in the Islamic University of Gaza in the 1998, followed by Al-Azhar University. Today, all Palestinian universities teach public relations, either as a program (within Journalism or Mass Communication) or as a separate major. Public relations training is also new, albeit growing. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, organizations have sought and sponsored various types of communication training. The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), for example, has several seminars on public relations, public speaking, communication skills, advocacy and lobbying, and fundraising as part of its human capacity development program (www.passia.org/seminars).

In spite of the confusion about just exactly what public relations is and the many problems that the contemporary public relations practitioner faces in Palestine, public relations continues to be one of the most exciting and fastest growing professional areas.

INFRASTRUCTURE and PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PALESTINE

Palestinian Political Structure

In 1994, as part of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in 1993 (also known as the Oslo I agreement), the leadership of the PLO returned to the Palestinian territories and established the Palestine National Authority (PA). The Palestinian Authority, which functions as the Palestinian government or "self-rule authority" in the West Bank and Gaza, has three main branches. The Palestinian Basic Law or constitution, adopted in 2001, delineates the powers of the three branches of government as well as the relationship between them. The legislative branch, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), is comprised of eighty-eight democratically elected

representatives chosen in electoral districts. All meetings of the PLC and of its committees are open to the public (Palestine Human Development Report 2002).

The executive branch is the highest executive administrative body in the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian basic law divided political power in the self-rule authority between the president and the prime minister. The late president Arafat, who was the chairman of the PLO, was elected directly by popular vote as the first president of the Palestinian National Authority in 1996. In 2003, the law was modified to shift powers of the presidency (then President Arafat) and to a newly created position of prime minister. The prime minister would be charged with appointing ministers, the daily running of the government, and negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians.

In January 2006, the Hamas party won the majority vote in the nation-wide parliamentary elections monitored by the International Election Commission. Ismail Haniyeh of the Hamas party became the Prime Minister and was given the mandate for running the Palestinian government. The Presidency was held by Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah party. Citing Hamas' political philosophy, the U.S. and European countries politically boycotted the elected Palestinian Hamas leadership and suspended its funding, and Israel blocked Palestinian tax receipts and transfer of foreign funds. In his "End of Mission Report," Special U.N. envoy Alvaro de Soto highlighted the repercussions of this external political and financial pressure in fueling internal Palestinian tensions (BBC, 2007, de Soto, 2007). Despite efforts in February 2007 to help the Fatah and Hamas parties forge a unity government, tensions continued to escalate and led to armed confrontation between the two groups in Gaza in May 2007. At the time of writing, Hamas is in control in Gaza. The United States, the EU and Israel have announced political support and new funding for President Abbas and the West Bank. The political situation remains fluid, greatly hampering effective government internal public relations with the Palestinian domestic public as well as Palestinian public diplomacy with international publics.

Economic Factors

The Palestinian economic situation has been greatly impacted by the ongoing conflict (World Bank, 2004, 2006, World Bank-IMF, 2007). During the years of occupation (1967-1993), the Palestinian infrastructure languished (Roy, 1991; Rubenberg, 1989). While the Palestinian Authority assumed responsibility for the civil administration of the territories in 1994, it has no control over its water or electricity supplies, or its borders to this day. According to reports by international financial institutions, "external closures" and "internal restrictions on movement" of Palestinian people and goods continue to have the most detrimental effect on the Palestinian economy (World Bank, 2004, 2007b). There are no Palestinian-controlled borders, ports or airports. Agricultural produce, one of the main exports, is ruined when permits are delayed or denied. Imports, necessary for business development, can also be denied. Internal restrictions of movement also great affect the economy. Since June 1967 until now, the Government of Israel (GOI) has "retained full control of the Palestinian population registry," which "allows the GOI to issue ID cards and determine the place of residence of every Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza over the age of 16" and via a permit system, "to control nearly all facts of Palestinian movement outside of an individual's immediate village or municipal area" (World Bank, 2007a, p. 3). Without permits, Palestinians in the West Bank cannot enter or visit Gaza, and vice versa. This separation has meant a duplication of personnel, work and materials for government ministries, NGOs and private businesses and "high transaction costs," while "the uncertainty restricts Palestinian entrepreneurs from making

investments” (World Bank, 2007c, p. 6). A public relations practitioner interviewed for this chapter told of designing and printing a client’s brochure for distribution in the West Bank, then having to send the brochure design via the internet so that it can be reprinted in Gaza.

At present, the Palestinian economy is severely depressed. According to the World Bank (2006), the Palestinian economy has become increasingly dependent on foreign aid. In 2005, 44 percent of Palestinians were living below the poverty line of US\$2.3 per person per day and an estimated 15 percent were living in extreme poverty, with incomes insufficient to afford basic subsistence (World Bank, 2007b). In January 2006, following the election of the Hamas party to head the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian finances were blocked, preventing government employees from receiving their salaries. This includes staff in government offices, medical personnel in clinics, and teachers throughout the public school system. While many have remained in their jobs, the economic effect has reverberated throughout Palestinian society. Unemployment rates, along with malnutrition, have grown. Almost one-third of the 15–25 year olds and over half of 25–29 year olds are neither employed nor studying (ILO, 2004). The severity of the Palestinian economy makes public relations expenditures a luxury for most organizations and businesses (Hammad, 2005). While public relations is still considered important, basic operational expenses such as employee salaries, electricity, transportation as well as office maintenance and supply take financial precedence over media and publicity costs.

Another important note is the impact of the economic situation on the availability of independent media outlets, an important vehicle for public relations. Most independent media cover their operating costs through advertising sales. However, given the economic climate in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian media are unable to survive on advertising revenues alone and have relied on the patronage of political sponsors (Khatib, 1999). As a result, Palestinian public relations practitioners must be politically aware in their media relations.

Legal Infrastructure

The legal situation of Palestine is complex and unique. The successive occupations of the country have deeply affected Palestinian political and legal structures in that the successive divisions of Palestine resulted in a composite of legal systems in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem (As’ad, 1995). While each area evolved separately, none have completely divorced from its historical heritage. Following the 1948 War, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, became part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and was subject to the Jordanian continental legal system. Gaza fell under the administrative rule of Egypt and continued with the common law system established during the British Mandate. After the 1967 war, Israel took over the administration of the Palestinian legal system by imposing military law in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. East Jerusalem fell under the jurisdiction of Israeli domestic law and was annexed in 1980 by Israel. One of the major challenges facing the Palestinian Authority today is unification and harmonization of the various legal systems in the Palestinian territories.

In June 1995, the Palestinian President signed a new Palestinian Press Law. This replaced the Israeli military regulations and orders in the occupied territories and defined the relationship between the newly established Authority and society as a whole. The fact that the Press Law was among the first laws issued by the Palestinian Authority reflects the sensitivity of expression and the attention paid to it by Palestinian officials. The spirit of the law illustrates the importance the Palestinian Authority attaches to freedom of the

press (Jamal 2005; Hammad 2005). The law stipulates that freedom of opinion should be permitted to every Palestinian individual who attains the absolute right to express his opinion in a free manner either verbally, in writing, photography, or drawing, as a different means of expression and information (Palestinian Press Law, 1995, p. 3). Censorship is not an officially condoned behavior. However problematic this provision might be in practice, it provides the local media with a legal framework unknown in other Arab countries. Palestinian public relations practitioners are aware of these parameters, and like journalists, seek to expand them.

Activism

Despite the heavy censorship, Najjar (1994) called the Palestinian press "unabashedly political." This description of the Palestinian press applies to most of the Palestinian society. Inside Palestine, there is the continuing struggle against occupation and the restrictions on daily life. However, as Nabil Khatib (1999) noted, "attempts to mobilize people through the media were not always successful because all the material had to go to the Israeli military censor." Outside Palestine, Palestinian activism has focused on education and mobilization (Hijab, 2004). Palestinians in the diaspora have also been particularly active in trying to gain understanding for the plight of the Palestinians. Human rights has been a central issue, along with statehood and the right of return. The battle over media images and accuracy has been a long standing issue for Palestinians (see, for example, Hatem, 1974) and the Israelis (see, for example, Toledano (2005)). During the first Intifada, Palestinian and non-Palestinians established new activist organizations to explain the Palestinian position to the public and media, using primarily media relations and public outreach programs. During the second Intifada, Palestinian organizations took to the internet. As Shadid (2002) noted, among the "best and richest resources of pro-Palestinian activism" are such Palestinian websites as the Palestine Chronicle, the Electronic Intifada, Al Awda, Palestine Media Watch, and Palestine Remembered. Palestinian activists, especially those in the diaspora who are trying to increase awareness and understanding of Palestinian concerns among Western publics and media, have tried to increase their public relations skills and efforts. Groups focused on media monitoring have become more sensitive to the way messages are constructed and propagated in the mainstream Western media. Palestinian activists have created media and action alerts to mobilize the community, urging them to contact media outlets or political representatives. For example, Palestinian activists have tried to enhance their media relations skills by developing training manuals and conducting workshops. Khoury-Machool in a study of Palestinian youth and political activism also noted a sharp increase in internet use in Gaza and the West Bank and observed that it helped "foster new socio-political solidarities" (2007, p. 31). This interaction between Palestinian activists in and outside the Palestinian territories has helped increase the overall level of Palestinian public relations in the political realm.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Whereas a nation's political, economic and legal structures may dictate what public relations activities are feasible, cultural attributes suggest what communication approaches may be most effective (Zaharna, 2001). Palestinian culture reflects much of the attributes of the Arab culture (Al-Hourani, 2002). Islam, the dominant religion, also has a strong and important influence on Palestinian life. The Palestinian's collective folk heritage can be traced back to ancient times (Barghouthi, 1994). However, again because of its recent

history, traditional Palestinian culture has been shaped by its experience with foreign occupation and suppression of national expression (Farsoun, 2004).

One of the most dominant Palestinian cultural communication features is its tendency toward high-context communication. High-context communication places more of the meaning in the context or setting than in the code or actual speech (Hall, 1976). The meaning or value of a communication may not be obviously apparent, but rather may be buried, blurred or suggested. In the Palestinian experience, because overt expression of national aspirations could risk retaliation by the occupying authority, Palestinian communication is rich with symbolism. Examples of dominant nationalistic symbols include the gold "Dome of the Rock" of Al-Aqsa Mosque (which symbolizes the Palestinian capital Jerusalem), "the olive branch" (which symbolizes peace) or the olive tree (which symbolizes Palestinians' long connection to the land). Such symbols are interwoven in the often elaborately detailed logos of Palestinian organizations. Interestingly, under occupation, the watermelon became a high-context substitute for the colors of the national flag—red, green, black and white. While watermelons are plentiful, displaying the national colors was illegal.

Palestinian culture also tends toward collectivism over individualism (Zaharna 1995b). The tendency to value group over individual goals is reflected in the strong family connections. Communication that highlights group interests tends to be more effective than individual choice. Collectivism is also reflected in the media consumption patterns; television viewing tends to be a group experience (Zaharna 2004), while a newspaper circulates through an average of eight readers. Palestinian communication also tends to exhibit the strong in-group and out-group distinctions found in collectivist cultures. Reference to in-group can enhance a communication's persuasive value. While Palestinian society has a collectivist, group orientation, Palestinians have also been described as having a "deep sense of individualism" (Berger, 1962, pp. 274–275). As one scholar noted, Palestinian individualism is not expressed in the nonconformist behavior of Western individuals, but in "demands for equality and reciprocity" (Quandt, Jabber and Lesch, 1973, p. 80).

Similarly, traditional Palestinian culture is very much a "being" culture that stresses "who one is" and relationships to others as opposed to a "doing" culture that stresses what one does (Zaharna, 1991). Palestinian family status or village/town of origin is often prominently stated. Press releases tend to focus on the "who" as opposed to the "what." Palestinian communication also tends to reflect a past-oriented time perspective, in which references to history and tradition are prominent and even essential components. This time perspective, however, can make future-tense public relations strategizing sometimes difficult (Zaharna, 1996). Communication plans are often confined to "the foreseeable" future of six months, rather than the detailed five-year projection.

Palestinian culture tends to be an oral culture that values the spoken word over the printed text. Public dialogue has long held a special place in the Muslim world (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003, p. 2). As Najjar (1994) noted, every time the PLO radio was shut down, efforts were quickly made to broadcast from another venue. Palestinians, like many in the Arab world, also place a premium on direct, interpersonal communication. As Rugh (2004) observed, information from trusted, familiar friends is viewed as more credible than impersonal mass media channels. For the Palestinians, who lacked control over their own media, the credibility of the mass media is doubly suspect.

A final important cultural note relates to gender. Hammad (2005) described Palestinian public relations as a male dominated field. He attributed the observation to the responsibility that public relations workers have for hosting foreign guests. Most public relations

managers feel that it is inappropriate to expect women practitioners to go out at night to receive or bid farewell to a guest of the institution. This conforms to traditional Palestinian Arab culture and customs (Al-Hourani, 2002; El-Enad, 1990). While the male dominance in public relations goes against the trend in the United States and even in other Arab countries (e.g., U.A.E.), female enrollments in public relations programs in Palestinian universities are beginning to match or surpass male enrollments.

The rapid rate of entry of women into the field is being seen in the private sector. At present, many female public relations graduates and senior female professionals apply for and are offered positions by the four largest public relations firms (Ellam Tam, Sky, En-Nasher and Zoom). Within the past two years in the West Bank, women have increasingly assumed highly visible, high profile roles in the management and execution of public relations campaigns and events. Three of the four firms have women holding high-level managerial positions in the operation and one of Zoom Advertising's managing partners is female. In Gaza, which tends to be more conservative than the West Bank, female practitioners still face problems with working the longer hours or at night that public relations often requires.

MEDIA

While the media is a core component of most public relations, Palestinian-run media are a very recent phenomenon. As of 1993, there were no Palestinian-controlled radio or television stations in the occupied West Bank or Gaza (Najjar, 1994, p. 221). The signing of the Oslo Agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority marked a major change in the landscape of the Palestinian media. The PA created the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), and introduced the first official Palestinian-run radio and television in Palestine. Palestine radio (Voice of Palestine) began broadcasting from Jericho on 1 July 1994. Palestine TV began broadcasting in 1996. Gaza's first local radio station began broadcasting in 2001 and Gaza still had no private television as of 2005.

Media Control

Palestinians have eagerly made use of the right to establish private media. Today, there are approximately 13 newspapers, 45 private television and 28 radio stations. All of the stations are local (restricted to the major districts) because of the limited transmission power (MIFTAH 2005). Two Palestinian journalists, exiled during the occupation period, returned and introduced two different newspapers into the Palestinian market. The names of the newspapers symbolize the Palestinian hope for a peaceful solution in the region (Hammad 2005) and focus on nation-building (Jamal 2000). *Al-Hiyat al-Jadida* (The New Life), which appeared in November 1994, is partially subsidized by the PA and distributed free in government offices. *Al-Ayyam* (The Days), which started in December 1995, is private and independent. *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), the private daily established in 1951, has the largest readership and ad revenue. However, it is published in Jerusalem and is still subject to military censorship. Print media from the religious political parties include *al-Watan* (The Homeland), *al-Risala* (The Message), and *al-Istiqlal* (Independence). As the names of print media suggest, they represent a political medium rather than a neutral public relations tool.

The four major West Bank public relations firms are rapidly learning to cultivate relationships with newspaper editors, staff reporters and freelance journalists, and helping public relations clients gain an understanding of how print media can be engaged in

information and awareness campaigns. The level of professionalism and sophistication in crafting press releases and staging press conferences is on the rise, especially in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The print industry sees the relationship as mutually beneficial, and readily responds to attempts of the local PR practitioners to engage them.

Media Reach and Access

Palestine is becoming a media-rich society. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, approximately 91 percent of households own a television and 97 percent own at least one radio. Palestinians spend approximately 14 hours per week watching television and nearly a third of Palestinians listen to radio daily. In addition to the PA official broadcast channels, West Bank cities can receive Jordanian stations, while Gaza can receive Egyptian stations. Nearly half of Palestinian households possess a satellite dish. Among households with satellite dishes, Al-Jazeera television is the most popular satellite channel followed by Arab Radio and TV Channel (ART) and the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). Whereas the print media are strongly political, television and radio are primarily entertainment and spot news information media. Among Palestinian households there was a strong preference for recreational and artistic programs (47 percent), music and song concerts (12 percent), news bulletins (10 percent), and religious programs (10 percent). Prime-time television viewing for most households is 8:00–10:00 p.m. For children (aged 6–17), favorite viewing times are between 2:00 and 6:00 p.m. The print medium is the least accessed among the traditional media.

In terms of new media, according to PCBS 2000 statistics, 44 percent of Palestinian households had one member who possessed a mobile phone (51 percent in the West Bank and 30 percent in Gaza). Internet use has been growing steadily throughout Palestine; cybercafés can be found in town centers and refugee camps. In 2000, approximately 11 percent of Palestinian households possessed computers. Internet access was much lower (2.3 percent for West Bank and 1.1 percent for Gaza) because access requires both a fixed phone line and personal computer. Approximately, 5.4 percent of Palestinians over 18 years had access to the internet and access differs significantly for males (7.9 percent) and females (2.8 percent). Most accessed the internet from their place of work or study rather than home. According to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of internet users has grown from 35,000 in 2000 to 160,000 by 2005.

Information and awareness campaigns are often broadcast on local radio stations, and simple, low-cost television spots are created by local firms and broadcast on the local television stations. Generally speaking the high cost of advertising on the popular satellite TV and radio channels, as well as a lack of sophisticated tools for impact assessment, have thus far discouraged Palestinian clients, both government and corporate, from including satellite channel messaging in their public relations campaigns or for product advertising. Internet advertising, such as the use of banner ads on web sites, is slowly attracting attention, but has still not attained a measurable level of significance as a PR tool. Private firms have also been integrating SMS messaging, which is transmitted to mobile phones, as another method of maintaining communication and building relations with customers.

COMBINED IMPACT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURE ON PALESTINIAN PR

Public relations—the need for an entity to communicate and forge positive relations with publics—has been ever present in Palestine. Indeed, even in pre-modern times, public

relations flourished throughout the Middle East (Hatem, 1975; Kirat, 2005). Kruckeberg (1996) argues that while sophisticated public relations are practiced in the Middle East, the models used are not identical to those in the United States or other Western countries. The Palestinian approach to public relations is somewhat different from that presented in U.S. public relations texts that rely predominantly on messaging strategies and the mass media. The impact of infrastructure, especially political and economic factors, combined with cultural features has produced what appears to be a relationship-building and social networking approach to Palestinian public relations.

First, in terms of infrastructure, the political component has been the dominant force propelling the emergence, evolution and growth of Palestinian public relations as a whole. Rather than being primarily a commercial business function, driven by economic necessity of a competitive market place, Palestinian public relations was a political necessity. Public relations was seen as a necessity for communicating internally among the Palestinians inside the territories and throughout the Palestinian diaspora as well as externally with foreign publics. The public relations of international Palestinian activism is comparatively more sophisticated than commercial public relations within the Palestinian territories.

Second, the Palestinians have lacked a strong or long tradition of an independent media, a key component of public relations. Politically, from 1917 up until 1994, the Palestinian media was under heavy censorship by foreign political powers. Economically, the prolonged distortions of occupation hampered the development of a base capable of enabling the Palestinian media to survive on advertising revenues alone. Instead, Palestinian media have relied on the patronage of the various political sponsors. As a result, rather than becoming a neutral channel of communication, the mass media became a political tool with pronounced biases reflecting those of their sponsors. For all these reasons, the mass media has not been a dominant source of credible news and information for the Palestinian people or a reliable communication vehicle for public relations activities.

In the absence of reliable mass media channels to communicate with a dispersed population, Palestinian public relations tapped into a strong cultural feature: interpersonal communication and social networks. Interpersonal communication via social network remains the most credible channel of information. In Arabic, "truth" and "friend" are derived from the same root stem (s-d-q). Interpersonal communication is also valued for immediacy and emotional quality, features that impersonal mass media sources often seek to duplicate but inevitably lack.

Culturally, social networks have long been a dominant feature of Palestinian society, one which pre-dates the mass media and has endured even into cyberspace. As Hadi (1997) noted, during the Ottoman period in the late 19th century, Palestinians established cultural societies and clubs to advocate public policy issues and mobilize the public. During the British Mandate, Palestinians established a mixture of religious, family-based and political organizations. Under Jordanian/Egyptian rule, Palestinians established a variety of professional and charitable organizations run by a new, educated political elite. As Hamid (1975) noted, the PLO itself was a vast network of political factions and unions (students, women, teachers, etc.), which helped maintain the unity of Palestinians in exile. Among the strongest and most enduring Palestinian social networks have been the women's unions. Not only do these unions have extensive connections throughout the society, providing family services, pre-school education and charitable assistance, they are also engaged in information activities. This tradition of communicating through social networks is present today. Today, one of the most ambitious communication ventures for creating a dialogue among Palestinians in the diaspora, CIVITAS sponsored by Sussex University, is built upon

social networks (see CIVITAS, "Communication Channels"). PALESTA (Palestinian Scientists and Technologists Aboard), is another example of a Palestinian community network that has been created using the new media (Hanafi, 2005).

Interpersonal communication using social networks has also proven to be highly efficient, especially given the political restrictions. Until very recently and all during the occupation period, because of the predominance of oral communication, information dissemination was tied to transportation, literally. Taxi drivers transporting passengers and goods between towns would be among the first to deliver news. As the taxi stands were often located in the bustling town marketplaces, the news was then passed to shopkeepers, who passed it to customers, who passed it to family members and neighbors. Because most people shop for food daily and rely on public taxis, which allow for small group personal exchanges, news was readily circulated. Within hours and without any employing mass media channel, a town of 100,000 would learn the news. By the next day, people across the territories were discussing the news. Today, cell phones have replaced taxis, but have not lessened the preference for first-person accounts and reliance on interpersonal relay networks for passing information.

Mosques are another example of the importance of interpersonal communication and social networking in Palestinian society. Because the five daily prayers are spread out from dawn to nighttime, mosques are within walking distance from people's homes and work. The Friday noon prayer, the largest congregation of worshippers, is often when important community announcements are circulated. As one Palestinian media report noted, "some Palestinian political factions use the mosques as their main media outlets" (MIFTAH, 2005, p. 3). Islamic parties also reach out into the community providing social, educational and charitable assistance. This direct and often sustained personal contact allows for strong relationship creation. Not surprisingly, religious parties are able to create a formidable social network for communicating and persuading publics.

Tied to the predominance of social networks as a dominant, enduring and efficient communication channel is the importance of relationship building and maintenance strategies. (There is perhaps a correlation between dominant communication channel and communication function.) Again, this stems from the combined impact of infrastructure and culture.

Palestine is a small geographic territory with a close-knit society built around an interconnected family system as old as the olive trees. Knowing one's family name is often an indication of what area or even village people are from, their economic standing, social connections, religion and political affiliation. In such a setting, maintaining a strong social image and reputation is extremely important as it represents part of the social capital one uses to operate in the society.

Culturally, the social networking approach plays a valuable role in maintaining public images and reputation. Public relations press agency publicity models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) strive to "get the word out" and enhance one's image. In the Palestinian setting, rather than generating publicity, the veracity of the viral communication and inter-connecting social networks makes "managing the word" or reputation management more critical than "spreading the word."

Public relations in U.S. texts tends to focus on message design and delivery relying primarily on mass media channels; students are taught how to craft messages for target audiences, develop media relations skills, and assess public opinion polls. In contrast to this message and media-driven approach, the social network approach among the Palestinians focuses on relationship creation. Skills involved identifying and cultivating relationships and then extending those relationships via a vibrant social network. Instead

of relying on the mass media to *disseminate* information, the Palestinian public relations approach tends to rely on the extensive network of social relationship to *circulate* information.

In addition to cultural features, there are also economic features that make relationship-building and social networking more financially sound than using the mass media in public relations activities even today. Economically, Palestine is still dominated primarily by cottage industry. Businesses are predominantly family-owned and operated, and like the families, are long time members of the community. Family reputations often extend to the business's product or services. Palestinian businesses also tend to have a direct personal relationship with their patrons and community members. In such an economic setting, reputation management and relationship marketing practices are important, along with social responsibility activities. Crisis tends to be handled via interpersonal networking rather than through mass media pronouncements. More important than media placement, critical public relations activities include attending social functions (i.e., wedding or funeral service), sponsoring community events, and personally visiting or inviting community leaders for informal gatherings. As mentioned previously, social responsibility activities are among the dominant functions Palestinian public relations firms conduct for their international clients.

In turning from the commercial to the political sector, the 2006 parliamentary victory of the Hamas political party to head the Palestinian Authority is very much illustrative of the social network approach of Palestinian public relations. The political arena still represents Palestinian public relations forte. As part of the U.S. administration's push for democratic reform in the Arab world, the Palestinians were urged to hold legislative elections and Hamas, which had previously boycotted elections, was encouraged to join the political process. The ruling Fatah party, which fielded a wide array of candidates in a high visibility campaign, had a well-known reputation for corruption. The mass media, for reasons cited above, played a minimal role in political advocacy. Western analysts, who closely monitored the Palestinian media and public opinion polls, were stunned by the Hamas election victory. However, if one looked at the party's extensive social network, which was well integrated into Palestinian society and paid attention to relationship creation, reputation management and social responsibility, then perhaps the election outcome may not have been so surprising.

That Western observers missed the key components of relationship-building and networking in the Palestinian approach to public relations is understandable. The dominance of the media-based public relations model found in U.S. texts may help explain the confusion about "what is public relations" not only in Palestine, but also in other countries which have a tradition of strong social structures and restricted media access and censorship. The social network approach to public relations among the Palestinians appears to be a natural outgrowth of the intensive and extensive social connections within the Palestinian society and the infrastructure (particularly political and economic) that precluded the development of a Palestinian-controlled independent mass media. Palestinians have a vibrant strain of public relations—it is just different. Rather than being message and media-based, it is relationship- and network-based.

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