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The Challenges to Journalistic Professionalism: Between Independence and Difficult Work Conditions

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Introduction

This innovative study examines the struggles of Arab Palestinian journalists working in Israel. The data and conclusions were derived from personal interviews with 31 male and female journalists and helps characterize some basic attitudes of journalists working for local or other (Arabic or worldwide) media. The study also examines their self-image as a group, how they convey this image to its members, and whether or not we can discuss these professionals as a defined status group in society. Job descriptions have expanded as a result of developments in journalism and media fields, especially with the growth of the Internet and new media. This study raises questions regarding changes within this group, considered by researchers as part of the cultural elite with wide influence on society. Therefore, this research delves into the sociology of Arab-Palestinian media in Israel. Journalists' work must be appraised within social context, and this appraisal requires an exploration of the mutual relationships between journalists' work and the basic social and political structures within which they exist.

A number of studies have reviewed Arab-Palestinian media in Israel. Many of these studies were publicized over the last few years; however, their primary focus was researching the structure of various mediums, their initiation and their historical development (Jamal, 2009; Kabha and Caspi, 2011). Some studies focus on media consumption patterns in Israel's Arab-Palestinian society, or research the media's representation of different groups, such as women or political leadership (Jamal

and Bsoul, 2011; Jamal, 2006). No complete and defined study was previously conducted evaluating Arab-Palestinian journalists in Israel as a professional, social and cultural group in their own right. Additionally, no study researched the professional characteristics, patterns of professional conduct or journalists' work conditions. This lack of research leaves a wide gulf in our knowledge of working conditions and their influence over journalists' professional functioning and the general discourse of Arabic media.

At the onset, we must remember there is a theoretical debate concerning the social, cultural and political role of journalists. Some researchers regard journalists as guardians of democracy, feeding the public information and criticisms, and thus helping to form knowledgeable citizens able to contribute to public life and develop views on current issues (Habermas, 1979, 1992; Norris, 2000). This view emphasizes the need to preserve journalistic freedom and it's separation from governmental, political and economic pressures. Others researchers claim that journalists are a part of a professional field naturally subject to the competition between social forces, political, economic and cultural (McNaire, 1998). Therefore, since journalism cannot be independent of these social forces, the media shouldn't even try; their only goal is to reflect the different discussions, opinions and interests existing in society. Thus, journalists work under the umbrella of large forces but are cogs in the grand machine of conflicting political and economic interests. Another view is that journalists may only express the views of the political or economic decision makers for whom they work, or try and maintain a degree of freedom, according to the professions' guidelines and ethics, and express opposing views, which may contribute to the public interests (Bourdieu, 1998)

Recent developments in the media only make it harder to separate

between the professional, political and economic realms. In addition, there is the problem of social affiliation and journalists' potentially conflicting obligations between the society to which they belong and their profession (Squires, 2009; Adoni, 2006), This conflict of opinions between researchers is an important starting point; it means that contained within this group of professionals are important social group elements which allow us to explore the relationship patterns between the journalists, considered active forces in a professional field, and the social, economic, political and cultural structures around them.

Based upon these concepts, the study analyzes this group and specifies the major influences on the patterns of its professional and social behavior. It also examines the connections between journalists' work conditions, their main characteristics and implications on the one hand and the professionalism of this group and of Arabic media in general. A basic hypothesis of this research is the possible dissonance between this social group's self image and its professional expectations, where members of this professional/social group view themselves as equals to similar Israeli and Arab groups, and the spaces of freedom open to it to practice its professionalism. Most of the journalists interviewed have high hopes and they highly value their profession. At the same time, most of these journalists raise the basic issue of difficult and complicated work conditions, which have a negative impact on their ability to improve journalism and media. However, the majority of journalists do not see a direct link between the harsh reality of their work conditions and the professional level of the media, which they describe as deteriorating. Accordingly, one may conclude that, the basic reasons for the deteriorating level of Arabic journalism do not connect directly to one specific factor; they are the result of a complicated structure, which must be examined in order to identify its basic factors.

Ignoring the connection between those two factors is, in fact, an indication of the gap between the self-image of journalists, who perceive their profession as central and important, and their helplessness: their inability to impact the nature of their work and their inability to define the work of the media and its contents - unlike similar groups which take pride in their ability to influence these subjects. This hypothesis does not imply that this professional group is unaware of its work condition. On the contrary, journalists express their fears and resentments regarding their work conditions, but they do not recognize the potential link between those conditions and the professional level of the Arabic media. The reason for this lack of awareness may be the difficulty in acknowledging their failure - partial and as small as it may be - especially their inability to impact media content and maintain an appropriate professional level matching their own expectations. This hypothesis doesn't mean that the journalists are not responsible for the Arabic media's professional level, but that they do not see themselves as solely responsible given the difficult work conditions and other pressures influencing their work.

Most journalists report that they gauge their work according to the highest professional standards. However, their work conditions and the result of what many of them describe as "the media owners' policies and interests" prevent them from performing at the highest caliber and restrict their ability to raise the professional level of the press. On the other hand, there is a broad claim that the role of the Arab minority's journalists, within the Israeli context creates added difficulties, with the political, security and economic pressures weighing upon them and upon the media owners. Most of these journalists have complaints against the media owners, both private and of political parties. However, the journalists lay cause primarily on the structural circumstances of their job without defining who, specifically, is

responsible, and without emphasizing its reflection upon media discourse as a whole. Notwithstanding the structural limitation of the profession, this study asks: Is it possible to ignore journalists' actions within the conditions, the circumstances and the difficulties influencing their work? This study is not only the first to regard this level of the journalists' work; it also presents a unique method to examine the mutual relationships between media owners' policies and the journalists' willingness to work under those conditions.

This study focuses on answering some of the main questions concerning the professional state of Arab-Palestinian journalists in Israel. The study also identifies social, economic, cultural and security circumstances affecting this field. In order to better grasp this field of research and the main reasons for the media's professional state and characteristics, we begin with a sociological analysis of Arab-Palestinian society, and a review of the professional field - a complicated structure with broad implications on this important professional group's life and on society as a whole.

It is important to note: this study is based on personal interviews with male and female journalists residing within Israel's 1948 borders and who are active in the media. By turning to journalists, we attempt to understand how they see the Arab media and how they explain its basic characteristics. Naturally, the subjects in many of the interviews surpassed the research one way or another, but the results of this study will focus on answers most often repeated by the interviewed journalists, a fact which points to the empirical nature of the results presented.

The following analysis addresses the basic facts and present views, stances and explanations expressed by, at minimum, 10 journalists. Based on that, the following data present views,

stances and feelings expressed by a leading group of journalists, some of them with decades of experience working in local Arab media. All of the following discussion monitors developments in journalism and media from the point of view of the journalists. Even though this information cannot be considered absolute, it describes the circumstances of a complicated situation, and helps us better understand the media situation.

The study offers answers to a number of questions. Mainly, who are the Arab journalists? How do they perform their job? What circumstances most influence their work? What challenges and obstacles do they face day-to-day in their professional lives? What is the nature of their relationship with their surroundings? Are they free to perform their duties and present accurate information to the public? How do the social, economic, political and cultural structures in which they operate limit their independence, their field of action and their possibilities? Though it is difficult to give final answers to these questions, this study attempts to reflect the answers given by the journalists themselves. Therefore, this study is an internal examination into the state of Arab journalists, their level of independence at work, and in the manner in which they contribute to the development of a general Arabic realm where it could be possible to discuss the basic facts, topics and challenges facing Palestinian society in Israel.

Before moving ahead, one should note the political reality of the Arab-Palestinian reality in Israel, not ignoring the control and negligence policies practiced by the Israeli authorities. These policies render Arab society in Israel marginalized politically and economically. The mere definition of Israel as a Jewish state, where security issues are formulated to meet the national priorities of the Jewish community, circumscribe the spaces of maneuvering of the entire Arab community in general and the

freedom of expression of Arab journalists in particular. Arab citizens are conceived as security threat, pushing their intellectual and political leadership, including journalists to avoid tackling the hegemonic militarized political culture (Ben-Eliezer, 1998). This reality has a great influence on the framing of the challenges that Arab journalists face, leading to greater emphasis on social and cultural factors, while keeping away from security issues, which may get them easily into trouble.

Although the main focus of this study is Arab-Palestinian journalists in Israel and despite the different legal and political circumstance in which Arab-Palestinian journalists in Israel operate compared to those in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPTs) and Arab states, many of the study's conclusions may be relevant to our understanding of the social and cultural working conditions of Arab journalists in general. The societal culture of Arab-Palestinian journalists in Israel is similar to the societal culture in the wider Arab world. The sociological studies, which tackle Arab-Palestinian society in Israel and those studies researching the Arab world demonstrate similarities and correlations on many aspects of life, despite the different legal and political environments. Therefore, the conclusions of this study could have a wide relevance compared to its limited empirical character.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework for this study is as complicated as the subject. The study refers to general social and political theories, especially those defining journalists as a social group and not just a professional group. Our discussion on this evolving professional field will use a variety of often-conflicting media theories. We refer to a number of media theories, some of which focus on the professional aspects of this field and other theories centered on non-professional aspects within the field (McNair, 2007; Shudson, 2003). These concepts are based on various structural and organizational theories, which help explain the competitiveness and constant adjustments between different social players with competing interests and opinions (Giddens, 1986). The study also draws from functional theories focusing around the social and cultural role of journalists, by exploring, beside their actual work, their functioning inside a structure while struggling to find their place and to expand their sphere of action, improve their position and realize their interests (McQuail, 1994).

This study centers on an important and yet most basic player in the world of journalism and media: the journalist. Numerous studies were conducted on the field of journalism and media, but few of them focused on journalists, their material and their professional job circumstances. Only a handful of studies focused on the self perception of journalists as central players in this field. There are, however, some theoretical attitudes, especially among Marxists, which see journalists as an integral part of the

middle class. According to these theorists, as pivotal members of the middle class it is the journalist's role to reflect the middle class interests while translating the capitalists' interests into culture and media. Thus, Pierre Bourdieu criticizes journalists and media workers for turning into "cultural technicians". These technicians translate capitalists' opinions and interests into discourses and discussions which enter the social fabric and help maintain the average consumer's prejudices to serve their employers' economic, social and cultural stances (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998).

According to this view, journalists are an integral part of the economic and ideological mechanism and their functions do not exist independently. Bourdieu looks at the subject from a realistic-critical point of view, which we see in his explanation that journalism and media are part of the social mechanisms existing in society and must submit to the economic and political considerations of the state and the market. Nonetheless, Bourdieu demands that journalists maintain ethical and professional independence to protect the press' professional integrity and create room in the public sphere for discussions on important matters. Further, Bourdieu demands that journalists not forgo the social concerns in favor of scandals and publicity. On this aspect Bourdieu criticizes journalists' submission to the ruling forces and encourages them to play a larger role in the social struggle for controlling their work. He proposes that the media's deteriorating state is a result of the state's organizations shedding their responsibilities towards journalism. These organizations do not develop general media, which is independent of the economic interests of controlling capitalists. These capitalists' goals, he argues, are to improve their revenue without concern for basic social problems. This focus on revenue above all encourages the media trend of focusing on entertainment and fun, scandals and negativity. Bourdieu also discusses the absence of organized

actions by journalists, which he believes makes it impossible to maintain the basic principles of the profession (Bourdieu, 1998).

Conversely, some liberal thinkers claim that journalists must function as free agents despite the fact that they fulfill specific functions in the media (Page, 1996; McNair, 1998, 2007). According to this attitude, journalists are pivotal agents who follow the news and transmit that information to the public. These theorists claim that journalists must expand the possibilities for social discussion, which is necessary to maintain a healthy society and promote society's true concerns (McQuail, 1985). Thomas Petterson conducted a research on journalists from five different states: US, Sweden, Germany, Italy and Great Britain (Petterson, 1998). His study revealed different self perceptions of journalists: some see themselves as responsible for transferring information without interfering or revealing their personal opinions, believing that their job depends on their ability to present objective reports and information. Others think that the journalism is a moral vocation, and journalists cannot act as an objective bystanders; their writing organically reflects their views, if only by word choice and phraseology. Therefore, the call for objectivity denies the fact that every report and analysis contains its writer's views and not acknowledging these journalistic norms is a hypocrisy (Entman, 1989, 1993).

Barbie Zelizer claims that journalists are an "interpretive community" with shared discourse and interpretations which give meaning to reality (Zelizer, 1997). Educating other journalists, using specific terms and sharing information between journalists - especially those journalists which rely heavily on their colleagues from other mediums - all contribute to the development of a shared media sphere. In this shared media reality there is a gulf between professional journalists and outsiders, which may be why the media discourse has grown

relatively homogeneous, where the same terminology and images are used. Some say that Zelizer's conclusions are evident in the increasingly homogeneous nature of a variety of media outlets. The correlation between the economic and cultural interests of the owners of the media and the language used by journalists in their work is evidence of the homogenization process (Bagdikian, 1997; McChesney, 1999).

Although it may be difficult to accept the claim regarding journalist's use of professional terminology, there is no doubt that the professional journalists' language plays an important role in making them into a closed professional group. The French philosopher Michel Foucault discussed this sphere development in his discussion about the discourse structures and their internal divisions. This dissonance reflects the power struggles in society and is a mirror of professional differentiation in society (Foucault, 1972). Zelizer's analysis supports Foucault's claims and emphasizes the fact that journalists are an interpretative community, and their views are evident in the contents of the news they report. Evolving viewpoints in liberal and functional scholars' views regarding journalists and the media profession bring these groups closer together. Most media scholars agree on the importance of the journalists' work and on their function as ideological agents, even if they successfully cover this fact under the shaky label of "objectivity" (McQuail, 1994). This process brings forth the erosion of the differences between the news business and the entertainment business, so much so, that we witness the constant rise of "infotainment" as a dominant genre in the electronic media (Graber, McQuail and Norris, 1998). Journalists still deliver news, but they also play a role in entertainment and publicity news, a fact which impacts the news' format and their relationships with current events, especially in the local media. In addition, one cannot ignore the expansion of the Internet, which brought critical changes to

the media, manifested in the difficulty in defining journalism as a profession. This development, manifested best in the "Arab Spring", has added new aspects to the existing complications. The critical changes brought to the media by the Internet pose challenges which cannot be ignored when raising questions about this subject (Norris, 2001).

Despite some of theoretical views presented thus far, developments in the world of media and journalism, especially with relation to politics and economy, show that journalists act as important social, political and cultural agents. Economic interests and technical developments in the media makes it necessary for anyone interested in this subject to focus on the role of journalists and the media. Analyzing this role is mandated, if we agree, like most scholars, that ethical and political standards for journalism do exist (Christians, 2005). Economic, social, cultural and religious forces compete over power, influence and control. This competition is the context within which journalists operate. Although they are not completely free, the role of journalists and media professionals becomes more central, as they reveal and expose challenging issues or competing personalities. Politicians in the public sphere need journalists, and over the last few decades a strong bond was forged between these two groups, turning it into an important field of study that cannot be ignored.

Some scholars point to the new phenomenon of "courtyard journalists" - journalists with close ties to politicians or other influential personalities - who develop a mutual commitment, and therefore may be unable to perform their responsibilities to the general public. Another development concerns work relations in media: the old system, which prevailed for many decades, defended the professional field and enabled journalists to act separately from the media's owners. This system disappeared and

was replaced by a system of personal contracts creating corporate ownership over journalists. This new system of ownership often forces journalists to make unprofessional choices and limits their ability to present their views, independent from their employers' interests and positions.

These new developments create questions and challenges, which impact the essence of journalism. Journalists face these difficulties in a variety of geographic locations, including liberal and democratic states. Those challenges are more intense in political and economic contexts, where undemocratic ideologies and conflicts play a more prominent role. This phenomenon is stronger in states with nationalist or ethnic orientation, and in states with national, ethnic or religious conflicts. In this context many questions arise concerning the role of the journalism and the media and their ability to perform in accordance with the ethical and basic standards of their profession. Loyalty and belonging become one of the main challenges faced by journalists making journalists' role very important to examine. Journalists are expected to prove their loyalty to their state or to their national group, but at the same time they are expected to obey ethical and other professional rules, a conflict which can never be completely resolved.

Journalists who are members of minority groups often face greater challenges in their work. Many of these challenges have never been deeply explored by research until now. Journalists from minority groups are expected to act as role models while also facing the challenges of their group as a whole (Gross, 1998). On the other hand, these journalists work beyond the borders of their group and therefore create subordination patterns and affiliations with their wider surroundings. The changing landscapes these journalists experience reflects on their work. Their work in different spheres may create special phenomena,

especially in the economic and employment markets. The challenges facing minority journalist are greater when there are cultural or language differences between the journalists and their political and cultural surroundings. The reason for these challenges may be found in the special circumstances in conflict situations, especially between their groups of affiliation and other groups in their immediate surroundings. In a context like conflict situations, the challenges in the journalist's work are magnified. In order for a journalist to function in a conflict situation, one must develop complicated mechanisms, which will help explain the reality of the situation. Based on all these understandings, this study identifies and analyzes the main challenges facing Arab-Palestinian journalists and media workers in Israel. We attempt to show the unique characteristics of Arab-Palestinian journalists and media workers in Israel and present recommendations, which may prove useful in other arenas.

Historical and Professional Background

Arabic journalism and media in Israel has undergone numerous changes in the years following the *Nakba[1]*. The current situation reflects the rift created by the 1948 war between the Palestinians who stayed in their homes and those who fled or were expelled and became refugees. Palestinian society within Israel developed in unique social and political directions, partly due to the special conditions and circumstances created by their alienation, exclusion and rejection by the Israeli state (Jamal, 2011). Nonetheless, we must inspect these social, political and cultural developments against the backdrop of assimilation facing this group in its Arab surroundings; an assimilation which takes place despite all the hardships and challenges, especially in the media sphere (Jamal, 2009).

It's important to note the difference between two kinds of Arabic journalism in Israel: the first developed under the State of Israel by Jews of Middle Eastern origin. The Jewish led Arabic journalism reflected the government's views and expressed its messages. This kind of journalism was all but gone by the 1980's. The second kind developed internally, from within the Arab-Palestinian society, written by Arabs and for the Arabic reader. The first newspaper to appear of this kind was the

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1. It is important to clarify that Palestinians and Israelis refer differently to the 1948 war. Whereas Palestinians use the concept "Nakba" (catastrophe), Israelis use the concept "War of Independence", or "War of Liberation".

Communist party's weekly, *al-Ittihad*. The Communist journal was later followed by regional and local journals, magazines and authorized and unauthorized radio stations (Jamal, 2005; Kabha, 2006a). Despite the hardships and obstacles created by the 1948 war, Arabic journalism greatly expanded. The journalists adopted a pro-active attitude and their journalism expressed the problems facing the Arab-Palestinian society. *Al-Ittihad* became the sole stage for authentic Arabic national voices. The journal was faithful to the innermost feelings and concerns of the local Arab-Palestinian public. Those voices succeeded, eventually, in silencing the voice of official journalism, and created a new generation of professionally committed journalists. Some journalists greatly contributed to the creation of a national identity and worked to build feelings of affiliation within younger generations (Ghanem, 2009).

When discussing the historical background, we must mention the fact that Arabic media went through many changes, which led it to its current situation. The State run Arabic journalism and the Arabic journalism born with *al-Ittihad* differ from each other conceptually, in their positions and in their professional perspective. Although the State led Arabic media had almost disappeared and its readership negligible, we cannot ignore it when discussing the development of Arabic media in Israel.

In the fall of 1948, immediately after the Israeli state was established and the Palestinians were still being expelled, the Israeli *Histadrut* (the general workers union) began publishing an Arabic newspaper called *al-Yaum* (Jamal, 2010). This paper was published until 1968 and maintained strong relations with the Hebrew paper *Davar*. *Al-Yaum* used the offices of *Falastin* newspaper, which was published in Jaffa before 1948. *Al-Yaum*'s goal was to spread the government's policy among the Arab readers. However, due to its low circulation the newspaper ran

into financial difficulties and was closed in 1968. Its successor, *Al-Anba*, used the same techniques and encouraged the Arab population in Israel to assimilate in the social and economic mechanisms of the State. *Al-Anba* also targeted readers in the West Bank and Gaza strip who were struggling under the Israeli occupation after 1967 (Jamal, 2010). *Al-Anba*'s publishers used all possible means to ensure that theirs would be the most widely circulated newspaper in the occupied territories. The paper took advantage of the Israeli army's orders, which forbade any publication opposing the occupation. These orders shut down the papers *al-Fajer* and *a-Shaab*, which began publishing in the occupied territories in 1972. *Al-Anba* was published until 1984, when it was forced to close due to poor circulation and resources. The editors of both newspapers were Jews, and they presented the government's policy and spread its interests among the Arabic public (Kabha, 2006b; Jamal, 2010). For a long period these papers distorted the Arab agenda and disguised official governmental views through the use of language presented by Arab writers who were enticed to work within this system.

Other Arabic papers published by Zionist parties adopted similar patterns. *Al-Mirsad*, run by the *Mapam* party, was published weekly through the 1970's. *Al-Mirsad* spread the party's socialist ideology and stressed the need for peace and solidarity among all the peoples in the region. The monthly magazine *al-Fajer*, which was also published by *Mapam* (1958-1961), also contributed to the development of Arab journalism. *Al-Fajer* appointed Rustam Bastuni as editor and employed well-educated Arab writers like Rashid Hussein and Fauzi al-Amar. Those editors and reporters conveyed their nationalist views utilizing the framework of *Mapam*'s socialist ideology. The *Ahdut Haavoda* party also published a newspaper called *al-Amal* in 1959. And the General Zionists party sporadically published *al-Markaz* for a short period from 1955 onward.

The radio station *Kol Israel* broadcasted in Arabic and functioned as an official stage from 1958 until present day. Many Arab-Palestinians listened to *Kol Israel* as there were few alternatives. Some listeners received programs and news broadcasts from the Arabic world, in particular, *Saut al-Arab* broadcast from Cairo. The Israeli-Arabic radio station, as well as the Arabic television channel, expressed Arab voices and points of view, but mostly those voices and views that supported the official government's policy. Non-conforming points of view are hardly voiced through these channels. *Kol Israel* radio station and the Arabic television channel remain part of the media in Arabic, and present official views and limited views from within Arab society.

The Israeli attempts to publish Arabic newspapers and the active Arabic radio station created false impressions of the Arabic press in Israel. However, the main goal of these State led media outlets was to strengthen the Zionist parties' and the Israeli organizations' hold over the Arab public. These goals were furthered in similar fashion by Israeli propaganda, broadcast in Arabic, on TV and other methods. The official and party Arabic press did not address the real needs of the Arab public, and disappeared at the same time when the Hebrew partisan press began disappearing.

Al-Ittihad is the only Arabic newspaper published from before the *Nakba* to this very day (2011). In the years 1944-1948 it was the voice of a Palestinian National Liberation League, a semi-Communist group with a strong nationalist stand. After 1948 *al-Ittihad* became a weekly newspaper of the Communist Arab-Jewish party, and the board adapted to the new political realities. However, they continued to demand the establishment of a Palestinian state, an idea that guided the paper continually since then . Although *al-Ittihad* was a partisan newspaper its board exerted major effort to convey the Arab public's needs

and aspirations. This is particularly important because all efforts made by the a*l-Ard* movement to get permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to publish an Arabic newspaper from the mid 1950's until the mid 1960's failed. *Al-Ittihad* covered the Communist party ideology and activities but also delivered a fair report of the social, economic and political hardships of the Arab public. This tendency intensified as the party gained more support from the Arab public (Abu-Saleh, 2010). The newspaper was spread by the party members in the Arab villages and cities, creating a strong bond between the party and parts of society, which helped the party gain support among the Arab public and compete with the Zionist parties' strong influence. The paper thus served as a platform for voices of the opposition in political, economic and societal issues.

By the year 1983, *al-Ittihad* expanded into a daily newspaper. The paper's growth followed important local and media developments, particularly the appearance of a new and innovative free local newspaper in Nazareth called *a-Sinara* (Kabha, 2001). Another factor, which affected *al-Ittihad*, was the establishment of a new Arab-Jewish party alongside the Communist party, The Progressive List for Peace led by the activist Muhamad Miari. The Progressive List for Peace established its own competing paper - *a-Raya*. *Al-Ittihad* became the only daily paper in Arabic, and still is to this day, despite the attempts to undermine its power, the attacks and the threats to close it. Unfortunately, a*l-Ittihad*'s influence declined, especially following the crash of the socialist block in the 1980's, when many reporters abandoned the partisan ideals and the newspaper faced a financial crisis. *Al-Ittihad* is still the most powerful and authentic newspaper in the Arab society; it schooled many of the most powerful and qualified journalists in the Arabic media. However, many journalists believe that it still suffers from a continuing decline despite attempts to solve its economic and

professional problems.

A-Sinara was the first major development in journalism of the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel. *A-Sinara* was the first privately owned commercial newspaper born as a result of the emergence of an educated Arab circle that saw journalism as their main source of income. Those developments opened the door for a new generation of journalists, some trained in the Communist party's melting pot and others outside of it (Jamal, 2010). *A-Sinara* was a free weekly, which earned its revenues from commercials and was spread throughout the state, thus becoming an alternative model to the partisan papers like *al-Ittihad*. *A-Sinara*'s success encouraged the establishment of a similar competing journal, *Kul al-Arab*, in 1987. It was a weekly paper, published in Nazareth, and was first owned by a Jewish-Arab advertising agency, but in recent years, ownership was transferred into Arab hands. Following those two journals, another weekly, *al-Panorama*, was first published in 1987 in Taiybe, a city in the Triangle in central Israel. *Al-Panorama* aspired to become a widely distributed paper and managed to establish its place in the market within a short period of time. Other private local weeklies appeared later, among them *al-Midan* from 1999 onward and *al-Ayin* and *Hadith a-Nas* in 2000, and other local commercial papers with limited readership base such as *al-Akhbar* and *Kul a-Nas*.

Following the developments in the commercial field, two partisan weeklies were established as well: *Sawt al-Haq wa-al-Huria* (1989) by the Islamic movement and *Fasel al-Maqal* (1993) by the National Democratic Assembly. Both reflected the political and ideological rift within the Arab-Palestinian population. These weeklies became strong competitors of *al-Ittihad*, influencing public opinions, despite the fact that they were published weekly while *al-Ittihad* had managed to become

a daily newspaper. This trend reflected the deteriorating power of the Communist party among the population and the increase in power by the Islamic Movement and the National Democratic Assembly. Those papers, together with *al-Mithaq*, published by the southern branch of the Islamic movement, are the partisan newspapers active to this day in the Arab public sphere.

The ideological and conceptual commitment of those papers played a large role in their ability to maintain a high level of professionalism and media discourse, especially in comparison to the work of the private commercial newspapers and Internet websites. Despite the obstacles faced by the partisan newspapers and their parties, they still manage to maintain their functioning as a mirror, which reflects the cultural and ideological views of the political and cultural Arab elite.

In 1997, an Arabic radio station, Radio 2000, was established according to the law of the Second Authority for Television and Radio from 1990. This station opened the door for fresh voices in Arabic society and reflected the various beliefs, ideologies, values and political views existing in the society. However, the station was closed due to disputes between the owners and also due to the station's coverage policy of the popular demonstrations in October 2000 sympathizing with the Palestinian Intifada. Following a bid to fill the void left after Radio 2000 was closed, a new Arabic radio station, *Idhaat a-Sahms*, was established in 2003. This station continues to operate, striving to maintain its integrity and keep the delicate balance between the needs and wants of the Arabic public and the pressures by government officials, who try to dictate certain boundaries to its discourse.

Internet news websites are another important development of the Arabic media, some of which are related to major newspapers mentioned earlier, such as <panet.co.il> by *al-Panorama*

or <alarab.net> by *Kul al-Arab,* and others are independent websites like <Bokra.net>, <Arabs48.com> or <farfesh.com>. These developments brought about great changes to the journalists' work, influencing its depth and quality. In most cases, the commercial websites focus more on pictures and less on textual content, analysis and accuracy of details. Thus we see no journalistic investigations, opinion articles and deep analysis, unlike the partisan newspapers and websites.

The Arab media's structure contains elements of simplicity and complexity at the same time. On one hand, private media bodies, owned by investors and considered profitable businesses, act in accordance with the market forces and compete for the expanding advertisement market. On the other hand, the partisan media bodies compete with each other over public support. Since the economical pressures and the political pressures influence much the same way, in both cases we must ask, to what degree are the journalists independent? How do those factors influence the freedom of press given to journalists? In what ways are these factors reflected in printed and broadcasted content? And what is the influence of the developing electronic media, especially internet websites which rely mostly on inexperienced information providers, over the Arabic media's language and discourse?

Economic and social developments in Arab-Palestinian society and their surroundings resulted in the creation of a new socioeconomic privileged milieu, which controls the cultural, educational and economic capitals and creates an Arab-Palestinian cultural sphere, necessary for the development of journalism and media. This milieu joined journalism and media market, expanding the influence of financial and marketing considerations, a development which is evident in contents and the level of professionalism. Technological developments have brought about the appearance of Internet websites and electronic

journals, which created a new generation of journalists, technically qualified but lacking in work experience and linguistic abilities. We must ask whether or not they are capable of developing strong enough media and journalistic tools to carry their roles properly despite the difficult conditions and inherent limitations such as social gaps, sectarian violence and Israeli negligence and control policies. The widely spread journals *Kul al-Arab*, *a-Sinara* and *al-Panorama*, and some local journals like *Hadith a-Nas* made great strides towards maintaining standards of strong and thorough journalism. Some of these journals have managed to maintain a degree of professionalism, but the challenges call into question their ability to do so in the long run, as they pay heavy prices both financially and professionally. For how long will they be able to hold their ground while important local writers move from local papers to Arabic newspapers published in the west, especially in London, or in the Arab world, or leave to work for television channels such as *al-Jazeera*, *al-Arabia* or MBC?

There is no doubt that the Arab media bodies, especially the partisan ones, continue to play a doubly important role in Arab-Palestinian society in Israel. They help structure the realities of Arab-Palestinian society and at the same time reflect these realities. The economic, political and ideological competition between media bodies is constant and fierce, encouraging internal disputes. To what degree can journalists overcome the challenges they are facing, and by that, help society face its own challenges and hardships? And what are the implications of the fact that media is the only agent showing the public that Arab-Palestinians in Israel are one separate and independent unit, which must develop a special national identity?

The dispute for the right to represent the Arabic public and to gain public support is reflected in the media sphere. Journalists

play a crucial role in the dispute over the public agenda and the definition of the basic social discourse. Although they all support Palestinian national identity, different newspapers represent the social variations existing in society and present a variety of opinions and social values. To what degree do the journalists play an active role in searching for solutions to the internal disputes within Arab society? Do they play an active role in settling social differences and conflicts? To what degree do the commercial papers and the electronic media bodies contribute to conflicts and enhanced competition? To what degree do they contribute to the deterioration of the media discourse to the point that basic professional values are harmed? This study attempts to answer some of those questions by posing them in interviews with active journalists. The answers will be based on the journalists' responses according to the research method presented below.

Research Method

The study is conducted in the qualitative method of social studies, which is an effective means to achieve this study's goals: to describe and analyze Arab-Palestinian journalists' views of the state of Arab media, its professional level and possible causes. This method relies on semi-structured personal interviews in which the researcher (interviewer) and the participant (interviewee) reach their conclusions jointly. Thus, the main body of the research stems from what the journalists said and the researcher's analysis (Shkedi, 2003:71). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer presents a number of pre-prepared questions, and then the interviewee determines the scope of his/her answers; they may ignore some of the questions or direct the interview onto a different path, more suitable to them. The interviewer directs the interview according to the research framework while considering the participant's requests, and changes the subjects according to these guidelines (Corbin and Morse, 2003: 340). Thus, the researcher determines the interview's structure and direction in accordance with the research goals, and poses questions concerning directly with the range and subject of the research (Shor and Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 2010: 200). However, the interviewer leaves room for the participants (information sources) to tell their stories, experiences and views regarding the researched phenomena in their own means and special language, based on their social background (Shkedi, 2003:71). Examination of the social background enables the researcher to grasp the meaning of the participants' behavior (Sparadley, 1979). The participants function as "live content" which may

help explain the studied phenomenon (Shor and Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 2010: 200). According to this method, the interviews were conducted in a manner that allowed the journalists to freely express their stands and views regarding their work conditions without judging them. Furthermore, a number of new and surprising aspects were revealed by the journalists and helped the researchers better understand Arab journalists' work in Israel. The journalists were also asked questions regarding the media in their surroundings, their professional level and explanations for the Arab media's current situation.

The interviews were conducted with 31 male and female journalists chosen randomly from about 200 active journalists working in various media bodies. The original sample included 40 journalists; we had assumed that there would be a certain percentage of refusals, and indeed, 25% of them refused to participate. Some refused directly (1) and others (7) refused indirectly without giving any reason. In one case (1) part of the reason was a refusal by one of the managers to authorize the journalist's participation.

Although the research was based on personal interviews, the demographic data of the sample may contribute to our understanding of the social, cultural and economic composition of this group. The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 60. 10 of them were single (Male and female, 29%) and 21 married (68%). The average wage in Israel at the time of the research was 8,727 NIS (according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics); 11 journalists said that their wage was much lower (36%), 10 said it was a little lower (32%), 5 earn average wages (16%), 3 earn a little more (10%) and 2 earn much more (6%). This data shows the journalists' gloomy situation, especially when considering their level of education and work experience. 22 journalists have a bachelors degree (71%; 4 of them are students for a

Masters degree in Communications), 1 has a Graduate degree in Communications (3%), 3 are university students (10%), 2 have a Masters degrees (6%) and 3 have a post-high school diploma (10%). The data reflects the high education level of the chosen journalists, and demonstrates the large gap between their personal abilities and their responsibilities and autonomy in their work. Regarding their work place: 3 work(ed) in official newspapers, 3 in Arab satellite TV channels, 6 in partisan newspapers, 1 in a private Israeli newspaper, 18 in local private newspapers and 2 in foreign websites. 22 of them studied communications (71%; 3 have a post-high school degree). The participants work experience ranges between 3 and 33 years; 12 work as reporters and 4 as reporters and editors (1 is a content editor of a website), 6 as news anchors and editors and 7 as chief editors. Geographically, 4 of the participants live in the *Naqab*, in south of Israel (13%), 4 are from the Triangle (13%), 3 work in and around Jerusalem (10%) and 20 in the north (64%). As for religious beliefs, 6 participants are non-religious believers (19%), 7 are religious (23%), 14 are secular (45%) and 4 are atheist (13%). Regarding political Activity, 7 are partisan activists (23%) and 23 do not identify themselves with any party (74%). 1 refused to answer (3%). As for their interest in politics, 27 are very interested (87%), 3 are somewhat interested (10%) and 1 has very little interest (3%).

Although this data doesn't give us much from a quantitative point of view, it allows us to understand the group's general characteristics and their measure of representation of journalists as a whole. This data helps us develop a profile of this social sector, and establish the fact that they are an educated group and most of them have professional experience. We see that members of this group share characteristics and can be seen as status group. Therefore, the journalists' self image and their understanding of their role can be influential. These group

properties can also be reflected in the professional discourse of journalists, in their views concerning their surroundings and in the level of their loyalty to society.

The Main Findings

The primary aim of the study was to examine how the journalists define their profession and its basic characteristics. This goal led us to ask whether there are different definitions and how these differences influence journalists' actual work and the contents they work with. In addition, the study tries to link the profession's definition with journalists' level of freedom and independence in their work. The findings reveal a wide gap between two prominent viewpoints: One group thinks that journalists' job is to transfer news to the readers, listeners and viewers without interference with its contents. The second group believes that journalists have an impact on reality and play an active role in it, willingly or not. The first group supports the idea of journalism as a profession with history and values, which the journalist must learn and respect; as one journalist said: **"Journalism is a profession, not just fun and not a second job. The journalists' role is to transfer news professionally to the public based on defined and known professional standards. The job cannot be evaluated by the number of working hours. It is a 24/7 job, and the results can be very heavy or very light weight."**

The second view defines journalism as a moralistic vocation and journalists as playing an active and important role, as another said: **"Journalism is a sacred and noble vocation and cause, a service to readers and society. A journalist's job is not merely to take pictures and write news; the Arab revolutions had proven that journalists not only describe the events, they play an active role and impact them - they influence and are themselves influenced."** These words reflect a romantic attitude

of journalists towards their job, their love and devotion to the work. But they also point to the existing gap between theory and the limited range of action in reality.

The participants were asked about the nature their relationships with the general public and about their social status. Here, too, there was a difference of opinions. Some of the interviewed said that the public respect them and their profession, and emphasized the public trust in them, as expressed here: **"There is respect. Under the current situation of the Palestinians, the journalists became an address where the people can express their distress and complaints. There is a crucial credibility crisis between the people and the leadership, and the people respect the journalists, a respect which, on many occasions, defends journalists. Influential figures and the authorities are the enemies of journalism, and regrettably, in our society this animosity has different effects. We were the target of many aggressive acts by official and unofficial figures, such as breaking into our offices or setting it on fire. But the citizens called us and stressed their support. That proves that the citizens protect us. I'm talking about normal citizens, not corrupted or mercenary…"** Some journalists talked about the public awareness and the evaluation of journalists according to professional standards: **"Of course, the public is not blind. They watch journalists closely and sort them by their performances and professional level. It all depends on the journalist's work, and he can gain the public's respect. Journalists mustn't chase scoops or distort the truth in order to get famous. They will become famous but people will never respect them. People respect journalists who bring honest news according to professional standards. The public can distinguish between the two."**

And another said: **"Personally, I get a lot of respect, beyond**

my imagination, and I'm embarrassed. I feel it in all circumstances and everywhere, even in the street. This respect makes me more aware of the public's good opinion of me, and I want to fulfill their expectations. Some colleagues of mine also get a lot of respect and others don't. It varies from one person to another."

These sayings demonstrate the people's need for a helping hand; someone who can express their needs to the general public and the relevant authorities. They also demonstrate the public's dependency upon media in resolving their problems and in facing their daily challenges. Some journalists talked about the burden put on their shoulders by the public's expectations, which are sometimes too heavy for them to carry: **"I think the Arab public thinks highly of journalism, but their expectations of us exceed our abilities significantly. I find it hard to respond to all the requests I get, because my hands are tied, both by materialist means and by professional standards, and I cannot cover all the issues and the problems. My position dictates certain conditions and limitations which I'm bound by."**

A more complex picture is drawn by other journalists, who think that the public's respect is determined by situation or interest, and can't be generalized. For instance, there is a difference between those who work for electronic media, especially satellite TV channels with a wide audience, and those working in the local newspapers. A female journalist working for the written media said: **"It depends. Different groups react differently. When I work with people who hold a grudge for local journalism, I get insults. When I work with people who are benefiting from the media, I feel respect and love."** And another female journalist, working for electronic media, said: **"Personally, I get a lot of respect, because I work for a famous media**

body. There is social status, but generally, the level of respect depends on the journalist.” Another journalist said: **“We could say that journalists determine the measure of respect for them. Right now the professional level is very low.”**

A third opinion links the respect towards journalists to the deteriorating state of local journalism and its rock bottom professional level. Some people think that the public does not love or respect journalism because journalists prefer superficial details and marginal subjects over solid news heavy with content and importance. One journalist stated that the journalists brought about the deterioration of public opinion; their bad performances caused the public to lose respect for them. The following quotes reflect the feeling that a segment of the public doesn't respect journalists: **“Most people respect journalists, but intellectuals and critical readers do not respect them, because of the professional deterioration. Today anyone with a camera can become a journalist and transfer news from his immediate surroundings in an entertaining form. Journalists publish tasteless news such as “praise of the watermelons”. They have become entertainers and abandoned their historical role as critics. Apart from a small minority, partisan journalism is the only professional journalism today. Most news contains only words and pictures, without content.”** And another said: **“Sometimes we hear curses and insults when we come to ask for information, and some people banish us from their homes.”**

Some journalists think that changes in journalism status are gradual, and we are now in a transitional phase, as one stated: **“In my lifetime I lived through two phases. The first phase was written and printed journalism, when journalists were much more appreciated than today. Journalism today focuses more on photos, especially in internet websites,**

and the influence on the journalist's status is negative. But journalists can maintain some public respect by choosing what kinds of reports to write. The culture of pictures brought about a degradation in the level of journalism and that's why journalists are being mocked and their social status is deteriorating, especially if they do not work by the rules and focus mainly on pictures. We don't believe that pictures have news value; we only add pictures of a nice girl in a certain situation or that of a strange fruit's seeds. The respect for journalists today is not as high as it used to be." And another said: **"Today, no. In the 1990's I remember there was respect. Today there are many journalists and internet websites, and there is no need to know how to write. News is published as it is. Journalism is drifting away from the real important things and people no longer respect journalists."**

Some journalists link journalism's status with its role in the past, when journalism was the main way of communication in society. Whereas now, journalism takes second place in many people's choices; people prefer new and fast electronic communication and websites. One journalist, working for a partisan paper, said on the subject: **"As long as Arab journalists must work one job in the morning and a second in the evening, they won't be respected and their profession won't be respected. If I don't respect myself, the public won't respect me. I don't feel that the public appreciates this profession. In my opinion, honestly, Arab journalism is redundant. It was born out of necessity; its members were very educated people. When an article was published in *al-Ittihad* by, say, Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Kasim, Emil Habibi, we are talking about people who were the intellectual elite of Palestinians in Israel. Moreover, journalism was mobilized in favor of society. Journalists worked for the public; they were the main leaders of every demonstration and every fight, but today**

journalism doesn't fulfill any of these roles. In my opinion, Arab journalism today is a frustrating profession, which only enables us to express our anger. Today, if people feel angry about something, they write an article or watch *al-Jazeera*, for instance, and they feel like they have unloaded their anger and finished fighting the bad guys. The reason, I think, is the fact that the local journals cannot compete with other media. The local media is bad. I must wait a week for the news to reach me. I understand the financial difficulties in publishing a daily newspaper, but the readers cannot be satisfied with that and newspapers now contain mainly advertisements. Unprofessional journalists, semi-journalists and those pretending to be journalists, all influence journalism. I don't want to underestimate them, but we are talking here about people who work as journalists by day and drive taxis by night. Some of them are teachers and others are still high school students. The lack of professionalism undermines journalistic value and makes us feel like we don't need the press. I don't want to read some strange news about goats with special talents."

The study reveals a few aspects of the journalists' performances and the professional level of journalists and the media, among them an internal contradiction related to the issue of performances. While a significant percentage of journalists said they are satisfied beyond the average of their professional work - 82% of the participants testified that they are very satisfied or relatively satisfied by their performances - most thought that journalism's professional level does not live up to the standards. None of the participants said they were happy with the state of local media. On the contrary - a large majority of them (82%) said that the state of local media is inferior/below average despite the fact that most of them work for the local media.

This discussion led one of the journalists to say: **"I don't think the problem lies with the journalists. There is a problem in journalism, but it is not because of the low level of Palestinian journalists. There are a number of problems."**

Another analyzed the subject and said: **"Arab journalism in Israel is very limited, because it covers a limited area and a small society. In addition, there is a conflict with the political frame within which it works. The press' abilities and possibilities are limited, and therefore, its experience is limited. Most of the press is not worthy of printing and is published only inside 1948's borders. What worries me the most is the heavy engagement with criminal everyday news, similarly to what happens in the Hebrew press. When we read the newspaper we find news about manslaughter and robbery, as if journalism had turned into a show of excitement and public relations. I'm not against publishing these issues; we must publish them, but we must do it professionally, and not merely for the sake of publicity. We have some experienced and qualified journalists, but they waste their abilities on small time criminals in Tira, in Teibe or in other places. The local media must change, and a change would start with creating a fierce competition between the local newspapers and between them and the Hebrew press. We must excel, but of course, the Hebrew publishers are stronger, the state defends them, their owners are powerful and their experience is longer. We must explore possibilities for improving the local press."**

Some journalists linked the professional level with journalists' educational level. One of the reasons for dissatisfaction with the local media is the lack of suitable education establishments, which may help journalists function professionally. 68% of the participants thought that journalists' education doesn't

prepare them to perform their job properly. Many thought that most journalists who are attracted to this work don't have any qualifications which can help them perform. A large majority of the participants thought that this lack of education is linked directly with the level of professionalism.

A female journalist talked about the influence of education, saying: **"Naturally, educated people with a background can write real substance, while amateurs base their news on photos."**

A. The Relationship with the Organization's Owners and Editorial Board, and their Implications on the Work and Freedom of the Press

The study now turns to face the questions regarding the relationships between the journalistic work and the media bodies' owners, in an attempt to clarify their structure, complexity and implications on journalists' work. We discovered there are various opinions among journalists regarding private ownership versus public ownership. We also found differing opinions among those working for Hebrew private media and journalists in private Arab media enterprises as well as between those working for the partisan and non-partisan press. These differences were apparent on all levels.

The findings indicate that the worst situation is found in the private local media. Most journalists described negative relationships with the owners and connected their performances and freedoms with the owners' tendency to control all aspects of the work, including viewpoints. This seems to be the biggest journalists' distress, as we can see:

"Generally, the relations between an owner and an employee are complex, but journalists' work conditions are worse than most workers in other sectors. The work conditions are very bad; the wages are very low; the work environment is inadequate and inappropriate, and all that creates an unending vicious circle. The work conditions are not easy; journalists have no chance of promotion or improving their families' situation; they are stuck with the pay they get from the owner and must obey him. In other sectors, such as law or teaching, there are high authorities, but in journalism, sadly, there aren't. That's why the owner thinks he is the high authority and he can tell the journalists what to do…. The result is a relationship of financial and ideological dependency. The newspaper's owner owns the journalists, and that is really bad."

Some journalists tried to shed light on other aspects of these relations, explaining that these are complex relationships, based on shared interests and professional views, as we can see here:

"We all have our job. I bring up issues and he publishes what doesn't harm his interests. His influence is mainly negative, based on financial interests. He censures what you want to say and forces you to ignore some issues completely in order to avoid problems, even though we became journalists thinking we could change society."

Another female journalist said: **"there is a range of free action, but there is always a limit, something that prevents you from covering everything professionally, as a result of economic as well as the political interests of the owner."**

Another journalist said: **"There is a big influence, mostly negative, because the owner interferes, and this is negative**

because he thinks about the newspaper's interests. For example, regarding advertisements, he notices things that I, as a journalist, don't notice. Commercials are important to him as the source of our income and wages. Our newspaper's existence depends upon commercials. There are some positive aspects; he pays our wages and defends our liability, but all newspapers are like that - the financial interests take precedent."

Partisan journalists presented a similar type of relationship with their managers. While the owner's interests dictate the agenda of private journalism, in the partisan journalism it is the political party's agenda that dictates journalists' conduct. In the next descriptions we can see that loyalty to the party is of great importance and again we see the range of differences between journalists.

A female journalist working for a partisan newspaper said: **"Obviously, in the partisan media there is greater harmony, but there are some difficulties. If you want to express opinions that oppose the party's stands or framework, there are some limitations."**

Another added: **"There is a very big influence. When you write any report you always have to know what the newspaper's owner thinks. You must ignore your own views and get into his head: Does what I'm about to publish suit the policies and interests of the party/the movement, or not?"** Another partisan journalist said: **"In my experience in the partisan press, it is very similar to the commercial press. In the commercial press you serve the owner's financial interests, and in the partisan press you serve the party's interests. Sometimes the party's pressures can be greater than the commercial ones, up to the point of dictating your opinion. I don't know**

a single partisan journalist who never had to compromise in his job. Sometimes you get a pointless report on one of the party's branches and you find yourself unwilling to publish it, but this is the will of the party, and you must obey. There's not always an option to refuse. You are bound by the party's interests; it's like the Arabic saying: 'If you eat from the Sultan's table, you must strike with his sword.' In the partisan press you are not always free to object."

Another partisan journalist stressed the same point: **"This is a relationship based on loyalty. As long as you, as a journalist, are loyal to the ideological and the political views of the party, you won't encounter any problems. The problems begin the minute you disagree on something with the owner - in this case, the party - or with some general policy. It is true that we all believe in the same ideology and work under the same general assumptions, so usually there are no disputes, but once there is a fundamental problem, it might get complicated. The relations are based on loyalty and conviction, ideological and political conviction regarding the fundamental problems. The financial aspect plays a role as well. Once a private investor gets involved, it becomes triple relations between the owner, the investor and the journalist."**

Journalists who work for Israeli official or private media describe more sophisticated relations, that don't rest on a complete dependency upon the owners or upon their opinions, even though they admit, with some embarrassment, that there are some guiding opinions and interests. The complex relations between Arab journalists and the Israeli media are expressed here: **"We are a governmental organization which is bound by different rules than those of the private sector. We are an official agency and as such, we are bound by the same rules that bind all state's officials. Obviously, this status dictates certain**

limitations. I'm not talking about the contents; I'm talking about the work rules. For example, I can't work in another place. Basically we have boss-employee relations, but I don't feel it. There is hierarchy, like in every official organization. The relations are based mainly on professionalism and on work rules."

In private Hebrew press we found that generally the relations with the owners and with the managers are professional and do not involve interests or interferences which limit the journalist's freedom or his/her writing. A journalists working for a Hebrew newspaper said: **"The relations are professional… regular human relations."**

Journalists working for satellite TV channels gave similar answers. It seems that these journalists get the greater amount of independence. A female journalist working for a foreign channel said: **"The owners are not people but a governmental entity, and this is good, because my relations with the editors and managers are professional and healthy, based on the job quality."** A journalist working for an Arab satellite channel added: **"I have no relations with the owners, and I am completely independent in my work. Even the editorial board does not interfere with my job. In 16 years I've never had anything to do with the owners or the channel manager."**

B. The Freedom of Press and Rejection of Journalists' Articles

According to the journalists, their dependency on the owners of media enterprises results in a number of negative implications, mainly the limitations placed upon journalists in writing and interviews. The owner's interference, in many cases, is evident;

it harms the work processes and influences the journalists' work. In this aspect, both partisan owners and private owners maintain similar policies. The political party or private owner frequently interfere and prevent the release of certain articles or interviewing certain people.

Some journalists described the difficult situation they face, especially when there is a contradiction between journalistic professionalism, based on independence, freedom of expression and ethical principles, and the interference and censorship by managers in the name of economic, ideological or personal interests. The testimonies about articles rejected due to owner's/ party's interests contradict the journalists' claim, that they are independent in their work. A journalist from the partisan press said: **"Yes, some of my reports were rejected due to party/movement interests. In most cases it happens with minor reports or news, but they are rejected because they contradict the party/movement ideology. For example, one report that was rejected concerned the events of al-Aqsa's demonstrations and the *shahids* (martyrs) from October 2000. It was very good, but it wasn't published because I interviewed a person from another party. It was a big shock for me. They also won't publish certain issues relating to city councils or local councils controlled by the party."**

Another added: **"Yes, some reports [are rejected] which contradict the political guidelines of the newspaper, or focus on a specific person. People have personal considerations and they don't want to harm their relations with certain organizations."**

Another journalist said: **"It happened to me many times, but I insisted on publishing these reports, and sometimes it worked. There is a balance of terror. I did a good job and**

sometimes I could force my opinion. But many reports were rejected on political grounds, because they may have harmed the party's interests."

Another said: **"Many reports were rejected on the grounds of politics or ideology, and later I was expelled because of something I published. I was blamed for working in favor of different and competing parties. They invented some professional reason and fired me, so I wouldn't be able to refute them. Other reports were rejected on commercial grounds, when I wrote a bad report on a company which advertises in the newspaper and they were angry."**

Private owners also influence the journalists' work. Many journalists described strong and even arbitrary interventions, revealed in answers to the question about interference of owners in professional work.

One journalist explained the reasons for the owners' interferences: **"Yes, because of personal disputes… For example, some person was not welcome for a long time without any explanation. I think there was a personal dispute between this man and the owner, maybe about money or political views. I couldn't tell if the problem was personal or political."**

Another female journalist added: **"Political background and personal considerations of the owner, sensitive political views."**

And another male journalist said: **"Yes, there are political views and personal considerations involved. The owner had a conflict with a person I wanted to interview, so he canceled the interview. Sometimes he would cancel a meeting that was pre-arranged and paid for with a person because of some**

false claim that we already interviewed him many times. The truth is there is a political conflict with him and we should turn somewhere else.”

Another female journalist from another media said: **“Yes, many times. For example, issues which regard certain companies, city councils, local councils or important families. Even bad criticism of unrelated artists, such as Haifa Wehbi; we can't criticize her, because the public loves her.”**

C. The main Hardships Impacting the Journalists' Work

The study attempts to identify the hardships implicating the work of Arab journalists and Arab journalism in general. Following preliminary talks with journalists and press people we assumed we would find four general types of hardships: social, economic, political and religious. A number of questions in the interviews were pointed towards drawing out the journalists' views on these four subjects. Even before we delved into the details of those hardships, the initial assumption was refuted and the list of hardships was changed by the words of the journalists. We can now define five groups of hardships facing Arab journalists in their work, which will be presented here. The order was not determined by importance but by the journalists' statements.

1. Working in a Partisan Journalism with Ideological Convictions

The first difficulty that was revealed in the interviews was working in a partisan environment with specific ideological convictions, which limit the freedom of the press. Most journalists working for partisan journals agreed on this issue, and we will bring some

of their statements.

A journalist working for a partisan newspaper said: **"It is hard to work in a newspaper with ideological and religious views. For example, there is a problem with anything related to women. You can't publish a photo of an unveiled woman, even if it's Tzipi Livni, who doesn't arouse feelings in anyone. There is also caution regarding subjects of 'family honor', which could expose you to social criticism. Many other social subjects are not published as well."**

Another female journalist said: **"Sometimes people refuse to be interviewed because I work for a newspaper of the opposite party."**

A male journalist said: **"The problem is working relations - the control in the work environment and subordination to your boss. There is interference in issues outside work, some of them are personal, and personal conflicts between workers. Publishing considerations also affect us, when partisan or social obstacles prevent the journalist from reporting on a certain subject or interviewing certain people. Sometimes ideas or criticisms which oppose the owners' or the leaders' views might cause personal problems, interventions and arbitrary decisions."**

Another journalist said: **"People tend to believe that any Arab party is a unified political body with one agenda and the unified interests. Actually, there are different sub-currents in every party, and conflicts between the different leaders of different currents, which cause personal disputes. When you publish a story on one member, they interpret it as being against the others. Frequently I get reprimanded by one of them: 'Why did you put the news about so-and-so before**

the news about me?' Every partisan journalist believes in the party's ideology. The problem is rooted in the internal disputes within the party. Another major problem is the attempts to drag newspapers and journalists into the war with other parties. If we refuse to cooperate they blame us: 'You are not helping us, you support this-and-that party.' The managers use childish arguments and the journalist is conflicted: If I don't publish, I'll have a problem with the party, but if I do, I would appear as a weak journalist who can't maintain his own agenda. The journalist may succumb to the party's pressure or he may protect his independence against the party's interests, and defend it from the pointlessness and the dirt around it. This was my way, but it was a very difficult one to follow. I was the target of a few mean attacks by some of the party members because of some articles I chose not to publish, and it was very frustrating."

2. Owners' Control and Content Changing for Financial, Religious, Personal and Partisan Considerations

One journalist said: **"My past experience with owners of media outlets was awful, because of the attitudes, the work conditions and the connections between the manager and the workers, which are controlled by financial and personal considerations. The head of the pyramid gets first say on many occasions. The journalist must obey the owner's wishes, even if he thinks otherwise, and the effect on the professional level is negative because journalists must serve the owner's financial interests. Professional articles are rejected because they oppose the owner's interests."**

Another female journalist talked about the connections between

journalists and owners: **"This connection is limiting and troubling; it dictates the work method and forces you to serve certain interests and ignore others. This connection serves the owner's personal interests."**

3. Social and Religious Challenges

The third hardship, which showed up clearly in the interviews, relates to the social surroundings and the prominent cultural views in society. Despite the differing views, there is no doubt that the familial patriarchal structures of society play a major role in defining journalists' work, as do prominent social views and religious thought. It is also evident that the challenges facing male journalists are different from those facing female journalists. Society and culture can impair the journalists' ability to function freely and can stop their efforts to increased professionalism. Some social conventions, customs and traditions do not relate directly to religion. Other customs and ideas are derived directly from the religious beliefs and laws, and they create obstacles and limit the options for discussing sensitive social issues, like sexual relations, abuse of religion for political and social influence, corruption of religious organizations, "public decency" and "family honor". We see these challenges in a number of the journalists' responses.

One female said: **"The social challenges affect my work. Our society is eastern and conservative; people watch your every step and they assume you have bad intentions. I feel like my surrounding society won't accept me as a journalist and put many obstacles in my way, which prevent me from working freely. This implicates my work as a journalist and makes me ignore important social issues."**

Another female journalist said: **"Some difficult issues, like gay**

marriage, I refuse to sign my name on, because I'm afraid of the conservative religious society. It's hard to talk about these subjects."

And another added: **"There are social limitations regarding most issues, especially these issues that might hurt the public's feelings. In Arab society there are crime groups and 'honor', and if I hurt someone from this group, they might threaten and even harm me. I avoid news about this world because I'm afraid they may hurt me or the people close to me. The police never protect us, they never do their job. We feel there is no one who protect us."**

A male journalist said: **"The biggest problem is the gap between journalists and Arab society. The Arab listener is more affected by bad news in comparison to other listeners or readers. We must be cautious with the news we deliver. Unfortunately, subjective journalism makes the public ignorant. Another problem is the fact that there is no objective journalism, there is no honesty, no exposing the truth and dealing with it. We avoid casting responsibility on anyone, we are scared of what someone might say and we are afraid of the truth. We always think first about political and religious considerations. In politics, if I talk to some politician, his opponent will be angry and ask: 'Why did you invite him and not me?' The social, political and religious problems are the greatest difficulty of Arab journalism. Our society is closed, not open. Every group rejects the other groups and this situation causes many problems for us, as journalists, when we have to work with the different groups. This situation blocks us and limits our possibilities. That's how unprofessional journalists entered this field, and their lack of professionalism is reflected in their writings. The media owners participate in this process of regress when**

they give a camera to a journalist and tell him to cover the crowds coming out of an event and to take 300,000 photos. This makes the people ignorant and it's not professional. They can change this policy, which harms our people."

Another journalist added another important aspect: **"The lack of cooperation by the public is also a problem. For example: when someone refuses to give me his surname when I publish his report and photo. During the fire in the *Karmel* range (in the north of Israel), people from the nearest villages, Dalia and Usfia, didn't want to talk to the press because they were still afraid. Whenever we deal with a political issue, or one which involves criticism of the State, the government or the city councils, people are afraid. Once I was pressured and threatened by the relatives of some woman who was murdered after it was published that she did indecent acts. They blamed me for the publication. I felt insulted. I fought about it with my neighbors. The unwillingness of the public to cooperate is a problem. They don't accept self criticism."**

Another female journalist stressed the same point: **"The society is not open to hearing about certain issues. There are subjects that you can't explore because the society forbids it, like the issue of 'family honor'. Girls are being murdered and no one is to blame and the journalist can't write about it. Sometimes even the victim's relatives are afraid to publish it. These events are only mentioned briefly. This is our reality."**

4. Material Conditions

One of the greatest hardships is the financial situation. In this issue we found agreement between most of the journalists, if not all. Journalists from various fields and media outlets described the same bleak picture, and therefore it is presented boldly. First

we must emphasize the fact that the wages in the Arab media, and especially those of journalists, are lower than the average wage in Israel. Most media workers' salaries are determined by problematic standards and are close to what is considered the minimum wage. Most journalists live poorly, without suitable social benefits and basic equipment needed for their work, like travelling expenses, cellular phones and sometimes even cameras. We will clarify this issue with samples from the journalists' answers, who demonstrate the link between their financial situation and their work. When asked what the main obstacle in their work is, one of them said:

"The financial and work conditions are the most difficult. I'm required to perform many duties but I get pennies in return. When I finish my work I go home and turn off my phone so I won't get calls from work. In addition to the need to obey orders from the owners, this thing bothers me. I was forced to do unprofessional things, and my refusal created a conflict with the owner, which made me resign. Personal and financial considerations control the work environment and make our job harder. The social and traditional limitations are another obstacle."

Another female journalist added: **"Financial difficulties and work conditions are a big obstacle. There are not enough tools to do the job. There are also certain social pressures, like different conceptions on women and traditional customs, as well as religious limitations. We are required to write in a way that would suit some religious or social ideas, and ignore other issues that might 'harm the public decency', and thus we don't present the whole truth."** Another female journalist from the same workplace added: **"The work conditions are the greatest hardship. Everyone is required to work double shifts and perform five roles at the same time. There are no**

job definitions or limitations agreed upon in advance. This is a significant problem with implications on the job's quality. The journalist is expected to edit, translate, take pictures and follow Internet websites, and later he's blamed for failing and being reproached. Reporters are required to deliver a minimum amount of news and they are forced to bring a few different subjects together, ignoring their quality, even when the reports are superficial and unworthy of publication, but the reporters must deliver a minimum number of news in order to get paid. Reporters refuse to cover events far from their homes because they don't get travel expenses, and those conditions make for an unprofessional job."

A journalist working for a private newspaper said: **"The main hardship is the unsuitable wages and work conditions of journalists. They are forced to take on more than one job, which eventually damages their work. Journalism, investigations for example, requires time and devotion. But you work in more than one job and you must deliver a minimum number of news, pointless and unimportant as they may be. Additionally, there are no specializations, and this fact damages our work. No journalist is specialized in a certain field and studies it well. We all write about everything: politics, sports, society, and health. These are the things that bother me the most: The financial difficulties and the lack of specialization."**

Before we move on, we must say that we talked to some media owners about those complaints by the journalists. Some of them expressed sympathy but pointed the blame towards Israel's economic situation and the difficult advertisement market, their most important source of revenues. The owners claim they cannot pay higher wages because that would lose them money and close media outlets, which would lead to

journalists' unemployment. Some of the owners rejected the journalists' claims of "exploitation" and "enslavement", but they acknowledged the low wages in the field. Journalists responded to these answers, saying that they are not sufficient, especially since some of the owners run large and successful advertisement companies, which would enable them to improve the journalists' work conditions.

5. Political and Security Hardships

A major hardship that came up in the interviews is the fact that these journalists not only work in their immediate surroundings, but also in the Israeli context. This fact creates major limitations and hardships on the Arab-Palestinian society as a whole, and particularly in cultural and economic contexts, including journalism. We can differentiate two subjects here: one is the establishment, government policies and security forces actions, and the other is the Jewish society's responses towards Arab society's representatives, such as journalists. We can also distinguish between the racial view, which undermines the Arab media and conceive it as unprofessional merely for being Arab, and the political view, which undermines Arab media as part of a broader political agenda. Another distinction would be between racist security figures, which see any Arab as a security threat, a suspect in any case, and between those who are trying to protect their status and their security discourse, although it has neither verification nor justification in law. Usually, this attitude is based on a security perspective as the army or security official thinks he is the landlord who must maintain political, cultural and security order and imagines the journalists are interrupting this order. Some journalists are also afraid of being recruited as whistle blowers for the security forces, and especially for the police.

One journalist said: **"One subject that really bothers me is the recruitment of some journalists to collect information for the police and for the *Shabak*. For example, when there is a command to demolish a certain house, the whistle blower journalist knows about it before other reporters do. The next day, if the people of this house are about to do something, he gives the police the names of the participants and the contents of the conversations. In return he gets the news ahead of time and he is the first to get information from the police. I wanted to write an investigation about this issue but I was afraid it might put me in danger. Once a colleague told me that a *Shabak* agent asked questions about me and I was so scared I considered resigning. They had tried to recruit me in the past but I refused."**

Another journalist talked about the same subject: **"The Israeli establishment's political and racist attitudes are a big problem for us. For example, a month ago I was invited to a press conference by the prime minister and I was asked to come at 7am so they can search me, but I refused, because I wouldn't be like those journalists in Ashdod, who were humiliated and beaten. There was also an incident in a press conference given by one of the ministers before the last elections in Israel. When we got there, they wanted to search us, even though they had enough time to get information about us ahead of time. At the same time, Jewish journalists got inside the room without being searched. We started arguing with the guards. The official policy is regrettably discriminatory and it makes my work harder. They won't allow us to be present in the scene and we have to rely on information given by the authorities."**

Another said: **"I'm bothered by the fact that local journalism is linked this way or the other to the Israeli establishment.**

Most of the newspapers are commercial and their owners are trying to protect their source of income, and I can understand that. But I can't understand why a state, which considers itself democratic, links money with freedom of the press. There are also traditional and social problems, but the Israeli establishment is the biggest obstacle. They even interfere with the phrases we use."

A female journalist working for the electronic media said: **"The biggest obstacle is the racism and the racist discrimination in this field working as an Arab journalist for an Arab media body. For example, not long ago there was a homicide of a known figure not far from here, but the police won't let me be present on the scene, while reporters of the Jewish media outlets got into the scene and got information from the authorities. There is also discrimination by the police spokespersons, who are supposed to give information to reporters. This is my daily reality."**

One journalist working for an international media outlet said: **"There are daily obstacles when we try to reach the news. We have trouble describing events when we are in areas closed for security reasons, we go through searches, we get banished, we are being discriminated against… When we go to cover a suicide bombing event, fundamentalists attack us just because we are Arab, and we must ask for the Israeli police's protection, even though we never feel the police represent us, but we are in danger and must ask for their protection. Sometimes, when we ask directly, they are willing to protect us. We have troubles working with the authorities. The problem is especially acute for journalists working with foreign agencies. They always suspect us and search us, whenever there is an important personality around. Personally, I got used to these things, because I**

can't change this general policy but I'm obliged to cover the events by professional standards. I must accept reality for what it is. We already filed complaints to the Government Press Office but I don't think they care. The biggest obstacle in my work is the security issue which prevents me from getting information; hence I must rely on Israeli journalists for information."

Another journalist said that the police's cooperation with the Jewish journalists is completely different from their cooperation with the Arab ones. He said: **"The police's cooperation with the Arab press is completely different from their cooperation with the Jewish press. The work methods are different, even during demonstrations and other events. They see us as a part of the Arab public and therefore they beat and attack us. I've witnessed these things myself. The policemen don't care you are a journalist with a job to do. For them you are an Arab. They don't want you to document their aggressiveness against Arab citizens. Lately we were attacked when we covered the events near Marun a-Ras, when policemen also attacked demonstrators. This is the biggest problem. The Israeli police and other authorities won't give us information like they give to the Jewish journalists, and we have to cooperate with the Jewish journalists to get this information from them. The policy of information distribution is discriminatory towards us."**

Another journalist said he is feels like an outsider, even though he works for an official media organization which is operated by the State and targets the general population: **"I feel like an outsider, although I work for an official agency and carry a state journalist's certificate. I've worked for this organization for a long time, but I always feel I'm an Arab. There are also procedural issues. When we go to ministerial**

press conferences I must go through a search while Jewish journalists don't get searched, even though I have a certificate like theirs and I've worked for a governmental organization much longer that they have. We face problems with content as well. Sometimes we get some task and we are the first to report some news, but they take it out of our hands and transfer it to the Jewish media outlets. There is definitely marginalization. The Arab public is ignored because they don't vote for the Israeli parties during elections. I remember in the past I interviewed most ministers, but for many years now I can't interview any minister at all. They consider us second class citizens. We interview some political officials occasionally, but if they are important, they don't care about us."

Another journalist, working for an official television channel, said: **"In the channel dedicated for the Arab public there was a great team of people but no balance and the work conditions were bad. The organization responsible for the Arab broadcast was only a show. We were constantly supervised."** And another said: **"The only thing I was forced to do against my will was to say '*Ursalim al-Kuds*' instead of '*al-Kuds*'."**

A journalist working for one of the satellite TV channels added another important aspect: **"The biggest problem is the security problem. We find ourselves threatened by both Israel and the Palestinian authority. The Israelis limit our movements and the Palestinians supervise us closely because they expect us to be recruited 24/7. Therefore, we mustn't think about being professional, we must think if our reports are good or bad for the Palestinian people. They ask me to do unprofessional things, as part of their supervision. The problem is even bigger when you work with the different**

sections. Every section, as well as the Palestinian authority, wants you to write what is best for them. Today the situation has improved, although I can't say we are absolutely free."

A journalist working for another satellite channel added: **"There are several problems. First, the movement limitations: The Occupation limits journalists who don't carry Israeli I.D cards. Second, there is the animosity by the army, the Israeli security forces and their messengers, the settlers in the West Bank, who terrorize us."**

Most journalists see a direct link between the problems mentioned above and the level of the Arab media's professionalism. This link was mainly important for journalists who see journalism as an important profession and social vocation, which must perform its duties and maintain its integrity in the eyes of the journalists and the public. One of the journalists said: **"These problems prevent us from showing the whole truth"** and another said that these obstacles **"prevent us from exposing important issues."**

D. Content which is Avoided by Journalists or only Partially Presented

As part of a deeper exploration of the challenges and hardships presented by the journalists we turn now to the complexities and the challenges over content. The study will try to define what subjects are being ignored by the press and why. What are the sensitive and most important issues, which are taboo for the journalists to report? We will present these issues according to their order of appearance in the interviews, not by importance: Tradition, religion, The Israeli nuclear program, sectarian links,

Israeli security issues, corruption in the local councils, murders based on "family honor", sex and the crime families.

We must first say that these subjects are not ignored completely, but they appear in the Arab press blurred or indirectly, occasionally based on official information given by the police, the official agencies or local councils, in order to avoid legal liability, personal conflicts or even violence. Sometimes the owners reject news presented by the journalists, even when the news is true and worthy of publication, a fact which reflects owners' interference in editorial decisions, as we discussed earlier.

1. Religious Beliefs and Socially Sensitive Subjects

It is evident from the interviews that the problem of religion and fear of aggressive social revenge considerably limits reports about belief issues and religious traditions. Though journalists' views varied, these issues are ignored almost completely because of the fear of the religious establishment and the fear of being accused for attacking religion, religious people or traditions. When asked what subject they ignore as journalists, all of the participants agreed that religious beliefs and social sensitivities are one of the most important issues. Their answers reveal different aspects of this view:

A female journalist working for an electronic media outlet said: **"I avoid writing about religion, about the religious establishment and its corruption, and about the discrimination between men and women."**

Another journalist talked about the same subject: **"I avoid writing about the 'holy trinity': sex, religion and politics.**

Some people are more open but others get closer to religion. Commercial websites will never publish news against religion, because we are supervised by the market. If we lose readers, we lose money. A website once published a paid advertisement supporting the gays. I think they didn't know the meaning of the word 'gays' when they published it. Within four hours they got hundreds of hate letters and threats, and they had to cancel the ad, even though it was paid for in advance. The owner lost 4,000 NIS, but he would have lost millions if people would excommunicate him. This is the result of centuries of traditional society, created by colonialism and the Turkish occupation, which had made us into a superficial society, without national identity, education or leadership; society invested in its old ways. The Arab's submissive mind wants to ignore any possibility of social innovation. The eastern Arabs suspect their eastern neighbors and brothers more than they are afraid of those westernized. We demonstrate bravely and criticize the state but we won't dare criticize our party comrades, for example, or our neighbors, because we fear the consequences. This is a difficult situation which must change. We are brave facing others but afraid to face ourselves."

Another journalist added: **"I avoid writing about religious leaders, and I don't know why. There is a wall between us."** A female journalist said: **"I ignore religious and sexual issues because I'm scared of society's reactions."** And another male said: **"I avoid any issue which concerns religion. I prefer we put religion aside and take care of our problems. Religion doesn't stop me from writing about certain issues, but readers might misinterpret me."**

Another journalist said: **"I don't discuss religions, because the public can easily threatens you; it had happened to me before.**

Unfortunately, if you cross certain religious boundaries you become Salman Rushdie. Our society tends to blame people for being infidels."

2. Sectarian Issues

Another subject feared or avoided by journalists is the rifts between the different sects in society. An important subject, especially when the government tries to encourage conflict between the sects as part of a "divide and rule" policy intended to increase its control over society and serve its interests. One female journalist said clearly that she won't write about: **"religious and sectarian issues. We avoid writing reports about certain sects or groups, like the Druze or the Bedouins, because we are afraid of creating problems with them."**

A male journalist said: **"I avoid issues concerning the different religions because of my personal belief, personal issues regarding specific people, and reports that might ignite conflicts between sects or religious groups, or between men and women."**

3. Security Issues

The journalists said they try to keep their distance from security issues, because they are sensitive and their publication might cost them. The interviews showed a great fear regarding security issues, and that is why they are not part of the Arab media agenda, even though they loom large in personal and public life. The journalists' answers revealed great fear, both personal and institutional, of security issues. One female journalist said: **"I avoid writing about security issues because the owners are afraid of them too, and that's why we never publish them."**

Another female journalist said: **"I avoid security issues because they have caused me troubles before."** She added: **"the owners are afraid of security issues either and tend not to publish such stories, even if I'd write about them."** A male journalist said: **"It is forbidden to talk about the nuclear issue, or about sensitive security issues that aren't allowed."** A female journalist working for an international media outlet said: **"There is no room for discussing Israeli nuclear capabilities. Israel decided on ambiguity in this subject. We can't discuss details but to give a general description. There is army censorship, and they can hold you responsible at any point. We are constantly being censured."**

4. Corruption of the Local Councils

Not all journalists agreed about avoiding issues regarding local councils, yet it is clear that this issue bothers many journalists, while the violent conflicts in the Arab local councils over the power centers creates threats and fears. A female journalist working for a major media outlet said:

"It is easy to kill. Innocent people are murdered. My life was threatened and drugs were planted in my car during the elections. I wrote once about the son of the head of council. He was running for reelections and I wrote that his son was arrested for drug possession. He threatened me and wouldn't let me go into his town."

Another female journalist added: **"I'm scared of the threats. Last week the City inspector of Qalansuwa was murdered because he discovered corruption in the city council."** Another male journalist talked about reporting corruption and policies of the local councils and said: **"It got me into many troubles. A partisan paper cannot criticize councils which**

belong to the party. When I criticized one of those councils I was reproached not just by the newspaper editors, but by the city council and the local council. People outside your workplace become your bosses, scold you and yell at you." A journalist and an owner of a media outlet said: **"This issue only gives me troubles and creates a financial war against me. I paid the price by losing advertisements."**

5. Direct Criticism Against Murders Based on what is Mistakenly Called "Family Honor"

The number of news related to violence, social violence and particularly murders based on what is commonly known as "family honor" has increased significantly. Yet, the journalists themselves feel that the press plays a minor role in criticizing these phenomena. There is a fear regarding these issues, especially when reporting about the murders' suspects or the circumstances, because of possible implications and social vengeance.

One journalist said: **"The press avoids dealing with the problem of 'family honor'."** Although another said: **"There is a positive trend in the press to talk about the violence against women."**

Another said: **"in the past we had a code name, 'family honor', but basically I can't talk about the subject. Even if there were sexual relations between some woman and some man, it is within her right; she can do whatever she likes. But I can't say that, because I would be considered as encouraging 'moral promiscuity' in society, by our internal standards. Personally I think women are free to do anything.**

Unfortunately, I've seen cases where the girl wasn't having sexual relations, she was merely talking to some guy over the phone, and she was murdered, horrifically. Today I can say that we cover these issues and criticize them."

Another journalist added: **"I wrote once about a girl from my town that had attempted suicide. Her brother called me and started yelling and threatening me, although I didn't even mention her name. I told him I got the information from a medical source and I have no connection to what had happened. A short time later I got a call from the town's clinic, and they told me I was almost responsible for the doctors' death, because the girl's brother came to the clinic and wanted to murder the doctor with a brick. The issues concerning women are especially sensitive. Some murders based on 'family honor' are not reported at all. A few years ago, a woman from our city was murdered and her family immediately arranged a press conference and declared that the house was robbed and the woman was killed, but they didn't even seemed sad, they seemed happy. There is still ambiguity around these issues. We write that a woman was murdered in unclear circumstances but we don't report the details."**

6. Concerns Regarding Sexual Affairs

The subject of sex is the most mentioned and it is considered one of the most sensitive issues in society. Journalists try to avoid writing about sex directly, even though there are provocative pictures in the front pages of the private newspapers. Despite the conservative attitude, journalists say that society is changing and so is the writing about this issue.

When asked about subjects he avoids, one of the veteran

journalists answered: **"Of course, sex and religion are both taboo because we are a traditional society. We can't accept doubts and rebellion against the basic Muslim understandings and conventions because our society is conservative and not free. We look free from the outside, like clothes and stuff like that, but not on the inside, I'm afraid."**

Another journalist said on the same subject: **"sex, AIDS, alcohol consumption. No matter if you describe them positively or negatively, these issues are taboo. There is a certain limit which is called 'public decency'. You can't write about things that disgrace the 'public decency', and you can't discuss sex and alcohol. For example, I wanted to write about the 'Satan's Cult' phenomenon in our society but I changed my mind because they perform shameful sexual ceremonies, among other thing. We can't even criticize a religion because it would cause conflicts with the believers. The newspaper won't allow us to write about these things, so we avoid them."**

The journalist explained the reasons for avoiding these issues: **"The Arab press wants to increase the number of readers and surfers as much as possible, and they don't want any conflicts which will cause them to lose money or readers. Religious leaders in the mosques might hear about it and declare a ban on some newspaper, which might turn into a financial ban. Moreover, the newspaper's owners are part of the society and belong to a known sect. The town's religious leader or its elderly know the editor and can contact him at any point about any publication. Editors and owners are also bound by social contacts. The social relationships are important because we are directly connected to the public. In Jewish society, no one knows the editor personally, but we are a small society and everybody knows everybody."**

Another journalist explained that he avoids sex as part of his personal beliefs: **"I don't write about sex and indecent acts because of my personal basic beliefs. I don't want to disgrace the public."** And another said: **"I avoid writing about anything regarding sex, rape or sexual promiscuity, because I think these are sensitive issues and they only cause trouble."**

Despite these general sayings, one journalist said there is **"a sense of openness and freedom in the Arab press. We can now read articles we couldn't read before about religion and sex, even articles of self criticism or criticism of religious and political figures."**

7. The Fear of the Crime Families

One of the sensitive issues is the problem of crime families, which journalists avoid or write about cautiously or under a pseudonym. One journalist said on this issue:

"The weapons anarchy occurs because no one raises the crime problem. Everyone fears they will be attacked, which is why the criminals are never punished. Often, a conflict between two crime families becomes a conflict between the family and the journalist. There is fear of the revenge, which leads us to act unprofessionally and stick to the police's version, so we can be objective and stay on the safe side. Journalists who cover criminal issues are afraid that their names would be mentioned in the news or on a report regarding the crime families or any similar issue."

Another journalist said: **"The scariest thing is to write about the crime families. No journalist dares to write about them. Me neither. I avoid this issue because I'm scared I would be attacked or murdered."** Another journalist talked about the fear

regarding this issue: **"I avoid writing about the crime families. This is taboo I don't want anything to do with it. Journalists worry for themselves, for their lives. Once I wanted to write about them and even interviewed one of them, but the police attacked them while I was there. But you can't criticize them if you want to live."** Another journalist said that suicide is one of the most sensitive issues, and writing about it can be of consequences: **"If one of them commits suicide, you can't write about it. If you write someone had committed suicide, it might get you into trouble."**

E. The Challenges to Journalism by Customs, Traditions, Religion and the Familial Social Structure

It is clear that journalism in Arab society is greatly influenced by the social and cultural surroundings. Although communication theories recognize the influence of these two factors, it is still unclear how and to what extent they influence journalism. From the interviews we discovered there is a wide influence of the customs and traditions on the boundaries of Arab discourse, on choosing the issues included in the agenda and on the phrases used to describe these issues. To avoid repetition, this part will present the challenges facing journalists that play a major role in their considerations and put them in a difficult spot with no easy solution or escape. 45% of the journalists (14) said that the customs and the traditions have an influence over their work, their way of writing and their phraseology.

A female media worker said: **"There are always rules and taboos. It's a combination of society and street rule. When**

I write about a sensitive subject that hurt someone feelings, the street rule is exposed."

Some journalists mentioned the problem of working in a small society, where everyone knows everyone, and there is a strong sense of patronage. This patronage interferes with the journalists' independence in their writing, as we see here: **"We live among people who know us and know our phone numbers. They can call us at any time about any specific news. This fact drives me to take certain considerations into account and to write the news in a 'gentle' way. I'm afraid of the news' implications. I get a lot of important news which concerns a large part of the public, but I only deal with issues that won't cause me too much trouble."**

Another journalist, working for an Arab satellite channel, said: **"I take religion and tradition into consideration. For example, some time ago someone told me about a group of girls, about 12 years old, that went to meet guards in the crossings in order to develop sexual relations with them. I was very angry, because it's not just about sexual relations with minors; these sexual relations have a political purpose as well. But the issue is very sensitive, because if I would write about it, the girls might have been murdered. As a journalist I had to decide whether or not I want to cause some girls' death, and I decided to give it up. When I tried to find a different solution, I was approached by the elderly who told me not to get involved in honor problems. I really wanted to cover the issue and to show it's an attempt of sexual blackmailing. What's worse is Israeli guard companies do it to girls from east Jerusalem, and they may use this against the girls, their families or relatives. The issue has major political implications, but I didn't want to be responsible for any murder. What does it mean? It means that the society**

limits my actions."

Another journalist said: **"Of course we take customs and traditions into account. Some problems and crimes we don't report because tradition forbids it. My goal is not to fix the society. I'm not a social activist, I bring news. It's hard for me to get involved in internal social conflicts. The familial and tribal complications make it harder. I avoid any subject related to different groups or one that could lead to a sectarian conflict."**

51% of the journalists (16) stated clearly that religion and religious sensitivities influence the way they cover certain issues. A few examples suffice to show us the fear of these issues and the religious influence on journalistic content. One journalist said: **"Of course there are subjects I won't discuss, like homosexuality. I'm not a Communist. I refuse to discuss this issue because of religious and moral reasons. I don't think homosexuality is legitimate, I think it's a mental illness. I censure myself."**

A female journalist said: **"Of course religion dictates certain rules which harm society, I think, especially regarding women's status. We have a problem getting closer to Judaism, because the Jewish religion is strongly tied to the Israeli national identity, which is conflicted with the Muslim and Christian faiths and the Arab national identity. I'm part of an occupied minority but my culture is Arab and my national identity is Arab. Sometimes I want to criticize my society but I feel I would be serving occupation. These [identity issue] prevents us from shedding light on certain issues, because we want to look good against external challenges [Israel]."**

Another journalist, working for a partisan newspaper, said:

"This is one of the basic facts in journalism: religion rules and so do religious people. For example, we can't post in the newspaper pictures of unveiled women."

The next journalist's words reflect the crucial problem caused by religion: **"I'm a secular person, far away from religion. But the society around me is religious, so I try not to attack religion or to expose my secular views in my writing, and to be objective. For example, I wanted to write about the many atheists in our society, but this issue might upset religious people's sensitivities."**

Another important issue is the social structure, which is based on familial and tribal ties and greatly influences the press' content and level of independence. Many journalists described the wide influence of family and tribal ties over their work, their content and their views. One of the journalists said: **"There is an influence. For example, when there is a blood feud between two families, we only cover it partially because of the fear for the journalist's life and the life of those around him. The report will be general, so we won't ignite a war. If we increase the problem, it might be considered instigation for murder. We don't report these issues because of the nature of our society. We adopted a few bad habits from the west, but we maintain wrongful customs like violence and killing. We made them a part of our eastern identity."**

Another journalist said on the same subject: **"No one can write about the social structure because the newspaper doesn't want to get into a conflict with the important families. Sometimes we cover the issue of murders and crime but the reports are short and superficial. We don't deal with the issue like we should, because we haven't developed into an urban society. We didn't refute the familial ties. This social**

order is installed in us as a society, maybe even in me."

Another journalist added another aspect of the same problem: **"Some of our characteristics as a society interfere with our work as journalists. For example, we can't write about the violence and the crime in Arab society. No newspaper, no journalist, even not me, no one dares to write about these issues. If a Jewish journalist writes about it, no one will touch him. But if an Arab journalist even makes the smallest hint, he might be a target for violence or even worse. Eventually the journalist will have to decide whether or not to write the truth even if his or her family's life is in danger, and this is a problem."**

Another journalist repeated the same answer: **"There are issues you can't write about in details, like crime families and organized crime. Despite the issue's great importance, no one really investigated it. Because of the fear, we can mention their names only when related to the head of the council or with names of other opponent families. The issue is covered only briefly because of fear from threats or revenge and because we worry about the rating and don't want to inflame the public. So we ignore the issue although in other areas we are braver: We write about religion, marriage and women, about social issues and family honor, and we even mention names. But with the crime families it's different. They can put a bomb, hit you or set your house on fire."**

The sensitive link between the familial structure and the journalists' work is revealed in the words of a veteran female journalist: **"Some time ago, for example, there was a dispute between two families from my town, and I was the only journalist from this town. But my relatives warned me not to write about it, and I got the same warnings from the**

newspaper: 'Don't write about the dispute, you will frame them and this will cause troubles to your family.' Sometimes I can't write about the head of the council because there is some connection with my parents or with one of my relatives, and I simply ignore the subject. Our hands are tied."

Another journalist said that the familial structure contradicts the freedom of the press and journalism's principles: **"I live outside the family and the tribe. I left my village when I was 18 years old and never came back. The society judges you when you leave. A journalist who lives in the village sympathies with the society, the family and the tribe, and it's hard for them to criticize society. That's why the urbanization of the west contributed to the creation of a free press. Unfortunately, a journalist in Haifa is freer that the one who lives in Tayibe or in Nazareth. A basic element of urbanization is anonymity. You can walk in the street and no one will recognize you, unlike the village, where almost everyone knows you. In a situation like that you can't do anything and you can't criticize society. You are afraid to think or write differently. All the great writers were forced to conform and adapt to their surroundings, but they moved to another place and realized their individuality. There they could express their different opinions and say to their society: 'I disagree with you and I don't belong to you'. Without the everyday contact you can gain a lot of freedom."**

The journalists said there is a big problem working with sensitive social issues, which are often mentioned only briefly or ignored completely. According to the journalists, indirect mentions or general and blurred descriptions are some of the common ways to avoid pressures, threats or violence and social or religious tensions. One of the most sensitive subjects is what is usually named "family honor". Some journalists said they cover this

issue, but they said are cautious in dealing with it. Sex, sexual freedoms and sexual relations are also sensitive issues.

One of the female journalists said: **"We live in an eastern and conservative society, which prefer not to discuss sensitive issues. A journalist who writes about these subjects is considered rude and deviant, especially if she's a woman."**

A male journalist explained the reason for ignoring social issues: **"Society forbids us to talk about these issues, for reasons of self conservation. Homosexuals, for example, are rejected, and it's hard to write about them. People have threatened us in the past sating our newspaper is lowly and derogating. Maybe if I wrote for a non-ideology newspaper I would write about sex issues. But I refuse to write about homosexuality because that would be marketing it. I also think it is better not to write about 'family honor' murders, because it will encourage people to do it."**

Another journalist said: **"There are still fears. Our society is violent and journalists are being attacked. We see Jewish journalists writing about ministers and the prime minister and criticizing them, and they are not afraid that the prime minister's relatives will come to beat them. But in our society there are threats. Unfortunately, our society and our newspapers are not modern."**

F. The Challenges of Working with Jewish Society

One of the basic challenges facing Arab journalists is, naturally, their relations with the Jewish society, both with individuals and with the Official and unofficial establishment. There is a wide

gap between Arab journalists and Jewish society, a gap, which is often expressed in a lack of cooperation with Jewish society or in obstacles such as suspicion, racism, fear and disrespect, leading to the journalist's inability to acquire needed information.

One journalist talked about the general fears of working with Jewish society: **"Who is this Arab? They ridicule the Arab reporters. They hold prejudices, and think that we don't know anything and that we are unprofessional."**

Another journalist analyzed the attitude by the establishment and its official representatives: **"Government establishments disregard the Arab press and their reactions to the Hebrew press are much faster. They think, and perhaps they are right, that the Hebrew press' influence on the public and on the decision makers is much faster. They don't owe me anything, and they come to do an interview as a favor to me, or if they have some goal and they want to send a message to the Arab public. But in any other subject, they prefer to talk to the Hebrew press."**

Another journalist talked about the difficulties of working with the Israeli establishment and its representatives: **"It is hard to get information from these sources, and they still hold prejudices against us as Arabs. Sometimes they are surprised to hear that we have media outlets which discuss social and political problems. They think we are still ignorant."**

One female journalist explained the hardship of working with the establishment and its representatives: **"When you talk to an Army representative, it's like talking to the criminal who is responsible for the crime, and his logic is the 'logic of power'. If you ask exceptional questions, they refuse to answer, and they reject our use of different phrases. They patronize you**

and talk to you as if you are a first grade student and they are the professors."

A male journalist described his hardships and fears in working with Jewish society: **"I always feel patronized. Jews always think that the Arabs are strange creatures. Lately I conducted an interview with a political figure. When I asked a sensitive question he shut off the recording equipment and cursed me. Even when I asked the most humble questions I felt patronized. They always look at us from above, thinking we should be thankful they are talking to us."**

Some distinguish between different groups in the Jewish society and their cooperation with Arab journalists. A female journalist working for an international media outlet said: **"When covering religious society we face the same challenges as in all similar societies, but in the secular society the challenges are different. We have a big problem with the settlers in the occupied territories. It is very difficult to talk to them, and we must use a middleman. The settlers and the fundamentalists are the most difficult because of their beliefs. If they discover that I am an Arab journalist they stop cooperating. That is why we always use a middleman, to defend ourselves. We always use Jews who cooperate with us, to avoid problems."**

A male journalist described a different point of view: **"I think Jewish society is much more open for the media, compared to Arab society. When I work in Jewish society I never feel I'm representing an Arab newspaper. I encounter no problems. As a journalist carrying a camera all doors are opened to you. Maybe if I was a regular citizen I would feel different, they would show what they really think about me as an Arab, but the camera changes everything."**

Another journalist said: **"The problem is that sometimes they don't want to talk to us as Arabs, because they feel like they air their dirty laundry in front of us. When we want to cover an issue regarding the settlements, we get there and the dogs are threatening us and the men are carrying guns. We prefer not to go inside. There are differences. Sometimes we can discuss certain subjects with religious Jews, but no Ethiopian Jew will ever talk to an Arab station about his status in Israel, and it is difficult. Some groups are afraid to talk, like the Messianic Jews. They are Jews who believe that Jesus was the Messiah and they have suffered attacks in the past. But they refuse to talk, not because the reporter is Arab, but because they don't want to expose themselves."**

To clarify the picture, the journalists were asked about difficulties working in Hebrew. Only one reported language problems. 46% (12) of the journalists working in Jewish society said they encounter prejudices. 42% of them said they feel condescended upon by Jewish public, while 31% (8) said they feel as enemies of the Jewish public.

G. Financial Challenges and Work Conditions

The greatest challenge facing Arab journalists is their financial situation. This hurdle intensifies when their financial situation is considered together with their strong efforts in performing their job under many other obstacles. There is also a gap between the journalist's self perception and respect for their profession and the humiliating attitudes by the owners of media enterprises. The interviews clearly revealed that the majority of journalists work more hours in a week than average. A wide majority of the participants, 87%, said they work over regular hours, 35% of

them don't have their own computer at work, 39% don't have their own desk, and 22% don't have their own phone in the office. 45% of them don't get social benefits from their workplace. When asked about their wages, the journalists said they earn 3,200-9,000 NIS for a full-time position. Most of them work more than the average number of weekly hours. When asked about their level of satisfaction with their salaries, 67% said they are not satisfied, and 7% said they are somewhat satisfied. 62% want a higher salary, and 16% said they can't be promoted in their current workplace. 35% feel stable at their positions, and 74% said their paid work hours are not enough time in which to fulfill their duties and they stay overtime without getting paid. 48% of the journalists feel they don't have enough financial means to perform journalistic investigations.

A large majority of the journalists feels they are independent in their job. 51% said they are highly independent and 42% said they are averagely independent. Only two people felt they are a little independent. This data raises questions regarding the lack of independency, since most journalists testified in other parts of this study that the owners, in private or partisan media enterprises, limit the discourse and interfere with the contents based on their views and interests. We can see that the journalists' independence is limited to the frame defined by the owners or the managers, as reflected here in the next quotations: **"There is independence and freedom in choosing and phrasing the headlines and the news, but they stop the minute the news relate to the owner's interests."**

A female journalist said: **"They interfere whenever their interests might be damaged. In politics, they forbid the use of specific terms. In social subjects, they try to avoid certain issues. In finance they won't publish news about certain companies because of interests, and even in sports they try**

not to hurt the public's feelings so we won't lose readers." Another female journalist said: **"I can't say when exactly they would interfere, but there's no doubt that the owner has first say on everything."**

Another female journalist said: **"The owner interferes whenever there is a danger for his personal interests. He can reject articles or change phrases."** A journalist who has worked in a partisan newspaper for a long time said: **"The owners, their entourages and their friends interfere many times. Even party people who are not journalists try to interfere. They are trying to bring the partisan hierarchy into the newspaper."**

Some presented a different view: **"There are no omissions and there are only a few interventions. The editors must supervise."**

We also address the issue of journalistic independence in questions regarding interventions by owners and editors. 45% of the participants said no one interferes with their work. Only 29% (9) said they feel many or an average number of interventions.

We've seen that most journalists don't feel stable in their positions, a fact which may cause tension and a lack of independence in decision-making and creates dependency upon the bosses. These tensions negatively impact the journalist's level of independence and the amount of respect shown to journalists. The quotes we bring next all describe an inherent tension in Arab press, which forces the journalists to make considerations that are counter to journalism's basic values, such as freedom of the press, objective reporting, ethics, professional coverage and the public's right to know.

One journalist said: **"There is no stability in the press."** And

another added: **"You are never safe. There is always the fear you'll be fired. Even if you fulfill your obligations, you feel you could be fired based for some minor reason. The owner knows that the labor market is full of people who want to work and he can hire them instead of you and pay them even lower salaries!"** Another said: **"Fear - there is fear, because I'm a rebellious person, I argue with the owners and managers, and we fight over concepts. I've been punished a few times because of my actions. They want to restrain me. My run-ins with management have led them to doubt me, so I don't feel safe."**

A female journalist said: **"I feel some stability. But in this profession we are never safe."** Another male journalist explained the reasons for these feelings by pointing to the owners' characteristics: **"There is never personal safety in the Arab press. You are always a hostage of the owner's temperament. Especially in the private press they can fire people easily."** And another said: **"There is no stability because the newspaper might be closed at any point. The financial situation prevents any chance of stability."**

The lack of stability leads to a common practice of journalists working more than one job. 35.5% of the participants said they work for more than one media outlet. 40% said they are not sure their workplace will assist them if they are injured, attacked or sued in court. 75% said that their workplace does not offer any courses or classes to improve their skills.

A female journalist said: **"We work over time but we don't get paid."** And another female said: **"I work as an editor, but when I write a report or a research for the newspaper I don't get expenses. They say it's because of the difficult financial situation. The relations with the public and my**

desire to write help me go on." A male journalist said: **"There are no journalist investigations. Investigations take time and work, and the owners won't allow it."** When asked if he works on investigations, one of the journalists working for a partisan newspaper said: **"No. We talk on the phone instead of investigating. Things are presented briefly and unprofessionally."**

To summarize, we can say that most Arab journalists get wages lower than the average wage, and lower that they deserve or expect. Most journalists also said they don't perform investigations, and if they do, no one pays their expenses.

These are the explanations given by journalists for the low wages:

"No one respects the reporters. The main goal of journalism is to make money. They are a special sector with no supervision. If you are deterred by the work conditions they send you away. Thousands of people are looking for jobs and willing to work for even less, and they even hire people who didn't graduate."

"The journalists succumb, accept their minimal work conditions and are willing to work like that and limit their demands. The press is like a market, they are looking for the cheapest, not for the best."

"The Arab businessmen's ugly mind. They only think about profits, but they get the reverse affect: Hungry journalists are doing a bad job."

"The media owners think writing is an easy task, and there is no need to pay for it. No need to pay for someone who writes a weekly column, because he writes pointless

things. There is a strange contradiction in the partisan press. You are buying content, so why won't you pay it? The writers spread the party propaganda and contribute to the organization, so why not to pay them? The contradiction is strong and based on personal gaps. Even when they pay, they pay the minimum."

"They hire an unprofessional person for the job, who is ready to work for a quarter of your salary and brings in a lot of news. Nothing matters, as long as he has a camera and a car. This affects your life as well, because the owner tells you: 'Someone else is willing to work for a lower wage.'"

Some of the journalists believe there is no solution for the problem of low wages. One of them said: **"There is no solution because the situation is determined by the economy, which relates to society. Unfortunately, the Arab society has a weak economy; they depend on the market and they aren't independent nor will be independent any time soon. However, when a few strong media outlets compete with each other, it can help to improve the journalists' work conditions and the financial situation. Journalists should also establish a union and push for legislation and lawsuits. NGO's should support the journalists and provide protection."**

Someone else said: **"We must establish an organization to assist journalists when they are fired or their rights are violated."** And another agreed: **"We must get together as a union or an association, and fight."**

H. Political and Security Challenges

The study has revealed that Arab journalists face political and security challenges because of their ethnic identity, or because they work for Arab organizations. The unique status of Arab journalists forces most of them to avoid dealing with security issues due to the subject's sensitivity and their fear of a conflict with the security forces, as well as the difficulties in getting information. We also discovered that the security forces, and especially the police, treat Arab journalists with suspicion and discrimination, which limits their ability to do perform their job freely. Arab journalists feel unequal and disenfranchised. A female journalist said that she and others in her workplace avoid security issues: **"I cover many issues related to police, such as crime, murders and accidents. Usually we avoid security issues, because my boss doesn't want to discuss them."**

A male journalist added: **"It is difficult to get information. The police do not cooperate with us. For example, when they demolish houses they won't allow me to go into the scene, even though others, who cooperate with the police, get in and get information. Sometimes they prevent me from covering certain aspects. I'm scared because they tried to hurt me, and we are always watched closely."**

Another journalist talked about the complicated cooperation with security forces, and distinguished between the police and the army: **"In quiet periods, we get no information from within the army. Even if we turn to them and ask to talk with them, they refuse. I think it is because we are an Arab establishment. They don't hate us, we are simply not important for them. We are not like some Jewish journalists, who can cause an officer to be fired and replaced. They see**

us as part of the enemy. They fear us and therefore ignore us. No Arab journalist ever gets information from the army. The police are different. They cooperate and give us information on murders, theft and so on."

Many journalists talked about gag orders which are published occasionally with no evident reason, sometimes after the issues had already been published. It seems there is fear concerning this issue, which causes journalists to avoid the subject as a whole. A journalist working for an electronic media said: **"Gag orders bind the journalists. There is a problem when a journalist publishes something and later a gag order is being issued. The information sources in this issue are limited. The only source is the spokesman who gives the Sate's version. He says whatever he chooses, answers very few questions and avoids some of them."**

Another journalist added: **"There are many gag orders. If we try to obtain answers no one cooperate with us, and we get patronized by the security forces. It's hard to get information like that."**

A female journalist described an important aspect of the cooperation with police, saying that the police check out names of journalists writing about these issues in Arab newspapers or in websites: **"You must be very careful. When I get information from a security source I always ask a few times: 'Are you sure?' I'm afraid to write something about security or crime issues that would cause trouble. There is censorship. They call us and ask us who wrote specific news. Once I wrote about events in Silwan, and I got a call from the *Shabak*. A woman told me that my report was false; the police didn't attack, the Palestinians threw stones; and I can't use the term 'occupation', I should write 'police'. They forced us to**

change certain phrases."

Another female journalist talked about the hardship of working with the official version and having to stick to it even when there are contradicting evidences: **"It is difficult to report the Israeli version, which contradicts what really happened. We must present both sides and the gap can be pretty wide."**

Another journalist said: **"We only write briefly on this issue, partly because of our work conditions. We also do no investigations like the Hebrew press. I never investigate certain issues or security sources. We only write from the outside, we write what we find in the Hebrew press. We only add commentaries. This is a no man's land for us, far away from us."**

A female journalist working for an international organization discussed her challenges in working with security issues and about censorship: **"Gag orders can be a problem. If they're only partial, we never know exactly what information we can publish, and whether or not we will be subjected to censorship if we publish certain details. These issues are sensitive and must be handled with care. We hesitate whether or not to publish because we are scared of the security forces, and thus we are limited. The censorship is always there."**
A female journalist working for a satellite channel added another important aspect: the security forces often see Arab reporters as part of the enemy, and treat them as such: **"Yes, the problem is they treat me like an enemy of Israel, and therefore they are afraid of me. This is a security question. Some organizations tried to break down this barrier, but it turned out that the information given was useless. The problem is they see me first as Arab-Palestinian and only then as journalist, and therefore I'm part of the enemy and**

they are afraid to talk to me. This is a big problem. I can't get to the information sources in security issues, so I have to barter. I trade information for information. There is a group of Jewish journalists who wants a connection with us, so they can understand what's going on. I give them my information and in return I get theirs, but in the end I might find that this information is neither sensitive nor important. There is a special dialectic. Security sources may give you certain information if you prove you can keep a secret, even when you don't have to. I would prefer publishing news I didn't get from an 'official Israeli source', but there are some things you can't write about, like the nuclear issue. By agreeing to take part in the political game, you agree not to talk about those things. For example, during the war in Lebanon I didn't publish anything besides the missiles that hit Arab towns. I didn't write about hitting close to sensitive places, but an army representative called me five or six times every day and warned me not to write about it. In the end, we were pressured but the information was published by the Hebrew press even with a map. They wouldn't reproach Jewish journalists but they pour their wrath on us."

Another journalist told us about direct and indirect threats by representatives of the security forces: **"As journalist I have legal obligations and liability. When I talk to the police spokesman he threatens me indirectly and says: 'be careful with this issue, don't go near it, because of its sensitivity', and I must be careful. The gag orders are a complex problem and they interfere with the freedom of the press. They are relevant for all journalists, but Arab journalists are scrutinized more closely. A Hebrew website can publish sensitive information without being sued, but if I do the same, I might get arrested."**

68% of the participants, who cover security issues, felt

discriminated by army and official agencies. 41% of those covering security issues testified they were subjected to physical and verbal violence: **"Of course I was subjected to violence when I covered the destruction of houses in the south. I was banished from the scene, beaten, and my recording film was taken. Sometimes these things get to the court."**

And another said: **"I was subjected to violence during the events in Jerusalem and in al-Aqsa Intifada. I documented everything. I encountered violence, threats and scorn."**

Another journalist said: **"I encountered physical and verbal violence several times. I was beaten during demonstrations. Journalists were attacked on purpose. During the annual demonstration in memory of al-Aqsa Intifada they hit us and threw tear gas, and then we were questioned. They didn't question us as journalists, but as Arab civilians who pose a security threat, only because we covered these events. I was questioned by the *Shabak* more than three times. They were trying to scare me and prevent me from performing my job freely."**

Arab journalists face many problems when they try to interview army officers, while most of them succeeded in interviewing political leaders. 64% of those who tried succeeded in interviewing political leaders and officials outside of the security forces, and 25% said they succeeded only after major efforts. One of them said: **"I succeed, but it was hard and I had to use schemes."** And another said: **"Yes, but the government officials don't care about the Arab society, because they know we won't vote for them during elections."**

Journalists emphasized the difficulty in acquiring information from official sources, and said that the official organizations are

not solely responsible for it. A journalist working for a central media outlet said: **"Cooperation with the state is determined by both sides. On one hand, the Arab press has failed; there are no journalists which specialize in security issues and investigate them, because the owners' main interest is to make money. On the other hand, there is no respect for Arab journalism and for Arabs in general. If we ask the ministry of education for information, they will give us; but other ministries ignore us. If we were Jews it might be different."**

Another said: **"Some issues are very hard to get information on. No doubt there's a problem with security issues. I remember an incident that happened during a press conference in Lebanon War. I was the only Arab journalist there. They warned the spokesman that I was there, and he was extremely cautious in his words."**

Another journalist compared official sources' attitudes towards Arabs and Jews: **"We feel that they prefer the Hebrew press over us. They get the information first and only then we get it."**

Most participants (68%) said they don't trust the police as an information source. 22% of them presented a more complicated answer: They differentiated criminal information, which is reliable by police, from security or political information, which is dictated to police by the *Shabak* and security forces. One journalist said: **"In most cases their information is inaccurate. It depends on the circumstances. For example, some issues are considered ethnic. Years ago I was present at the March of Return on *Nakba* day and saw what had happened. The police's version I heard in the media was completely false. They blamed the demonstrators for trying to clash, while actually the other side was the one to attack first. Also,**

when policemen killed a young Arab, they said that his relatives attacked them in court, but I was there and it never happened."

Another female journalist said: "I never trust them as a main source; I use the police's information only as a background and an addition to the news. The police wants us want to pass on the information they choose and I only do what I have to."

Another criminal reporter said he doesn't trust police's information: "When talking about ethnic issues, the police have their version ready in advance. I remember that in the last demonstration in Marun a-Ras area, near the Lebanese border, I got a call from a feminist activist who told me that the radio station *Reshet Bet* announced eight people were arrested in a violent clash. I told her that the demonstration hasn't begun yet, but the scenario was prepared in advance by the police. I am present at the scene and I know exactly what is happening, but I have to deliver the police's version, even though I know it's false. The same thing happens with events concerning the Arab public, and with news concerning violence between Arabs and Jews. The police inform us that an Arab attacked a Jew because of an ethnic dispute, but when Jews attack Arabs because of the ethnic dispute, it is considered criminal by police, even though the attacked Arabs heard many racist curses."

I. **A summary of the hardships and challenges facing journalists in the journalists' own words:**

1. "**The ethnic challenge. I don't feel free, my freedom is impaired. As a citizen your rights are deprived. It influences journalists as part of the public. We suffer like everyone else from the events and the attacks. We are limited because of security and political reasons. Arab journalists aren't as free as their Jewish equivalents, even if they have million journalists' certificates.**"

2. "**A brief coverage of issues due to lack of information. You never bring the whole picture, that's why the work is unprofessional. And there are no specialty fields for journalists - everyone is covering everything and it affects the press' level.**"

3. "**The financial problem and the relations with the owners are felt daily. Every day we go to work and suffer from these problems, while security issues only bother us occasionally.**"

4. "**The religious and national challenge (portrayed above) force journalists to obey. As a female journalist in a conservative society I am limited by these issues. Women are oppressed by religion. Our beliefs and customs don't match our current situation and we must re-educate our people.**"

5. "**Our work conditions. In addition to the social limitations, there is a fear of talking about corruption, for example. We are scared to tell the truth because it might offense someone and cause them to threaten me. That is why I avoid important issues or present them only briefly and superficially.**"

6. "The financial hardship. For me and for most journalists this is always the issue which affects productivity and limits the profession. Some journalists just got of high school and want to save some money before university. Most people in this age aren't educated enough, which makes for an unprofessional and un-criticizing press. That is why the level is low, because without criticism there's no development. We must improve the financial conditions to encourage journalist to work."

7. "The security challenge and the violence in society are the biggest problems. It bothers me that I can't write about the issues I want. So is the issue of the crime families, which is very difficult to write about."

8. "The control by the newspaper's owner; society's control; money control; things which limit us. A few bad media outlets conceived some concepts and we are following them. The biggest obstacle is that journalists must work according to the owners' interests and policies; they are not free to write about many important issues. The newspaper owner acts like the head of any other business, unlike the Hebrew press; they pay more attention to the readers."

9. "The biggest challenge in my opinion is the structure of our Arab society, which is very difficult to change, or even impossible. I'm talking about the tribal and familial structure of every village. The familial structure is closed and I can't oppose it because I'm one against the whole society and I'm weaker. If I encounter this issue, my life might be in danger. There is the difficulty of the Israeli authority; you feel you are paying a heavy price as an Arab with a vocation in this country. But the hardest thing is to address the internal problems. You can't change them

because you can't address them or even dream about it."

10. "The social and financial challenges are the most important. The financial situation prevents you from performing investigations and doing your job fully due to the lack of resources, thus preventing you from addressing important issues. The social situation also prevents us from addressing important issues. The public's sensitivity and fear of violence also prevent you from addressing important issues which should be addressed."

11. "The social challenge. We want society to be more accepting and open so we can discuss issues like we should. There is a problem with the press: how can we improve it so we can reach society and improve it? One thing relates to the other. It's unclear whether the press can build society and develop it, or whether society is developing on its own and we are only one of it sources. I'm not sure what the right answer is. We have to define it and decide whether or not we are partners. The agenda of a journalist from the Naqab (the south) is different from those of journalists from the triangle, from the north or from the center. There are always hardships and conflicts. You always work on the most basic level of existence, not on luxuries. I try to bring optimist news, for example, on education, on successes; a female student who got her PhD degree, for example. That way we encourage education. But the basic concern is our struggle for survival."

12. "There is very little chance of promotion for Arab journalists, a fact which worries journalists who don't want to work as field reporters all their life. The biggest challenge is financial; the weakening of journalists by the establishment and the society."

Discussion

The data presented in the study revealed that there are a number of factors, which impact and influence the work of Arab journalists. Our initial assumption was that there is a link between the Arab journalists' professional level and their self-perception and the between the material, functional, social and political conditions of their work. The data collected in this study proves that this linkage exists and from the journalists' point of view has a deep influence on the media's products. Generally we can say that most journalists work for insufficient wages and are limited by the financial interests of private media owners and by the political interests of partisan media managers. Journalists' social benefits, which influence their ability to perform their job properly, are also impaired, and they are not enough to encourage professional work in the media. Off course, some of these problems exist in the sectors of the Israeli press as well, but the journalists describe their situation as vastly different from that of the Hebrew press. These differences rise to the level that the context in which journalists function has a negative effect on their content and professionalism.

The interviews clearly show that freedom of press and the journalists' independence are similar for journalists working in the private and partisan press. Editors and owners frequently interfere and undermine journalists' status as important cultural and professional agents. Editors and owners often reject information or news reported by journalists or forbid interviews with specific people because of their direct interests or their political, social or financial agenda. This unprofessional practice, which is widely common in the local media, limits journalists and enhances the negative influence of the external hardships they

face. Arab journalists are part of the Arab-Palestinian minority, which is fighting a constant state of political, social and cultural exhaustion and marginalization. These factors are reflected in their level of freedom as journalists. The data collected here suggests that Arab journalists are in a state of distress in dealings with the Israeli political and security forces; they do not have access to information or ability to interview important figures, unlike their Jewish colleagues.

The study suggests that journalists accept the structural conditions forced upon them. One reason may be their lack of choice, especially in the case of young journalists with no previous experience. Another reason may be the journalist's lack of awareness of journalism's importance, sometimes due to their lack of professional education. There is a correlation between structural conditions of the journalists' work, as reflected in the interviews, and between the incapability described by the journalists themselves in their self-criticism. The study suggests that this correlation is the main reason for the current limitations and deterioration of Arab press. Furthermore, even the less-critic journalists agree that this correlation is responsible for the low professional status and the common level of content in most Arab media outlets.

The study also suggests that social factors, especially religious and social customs, traditions and rituals, are issues, which significantly limits the journalists' abilities. Journalists stressed they can't write about these issues because their workplaces are unwilling to support them against society or against a violent reaction by society members. Violence is a common and widely spread practice which puts Arab society as a whole in distress. This financial, physical and verbal violence threatens most sectors of society.

The Challenges to Journalistic Professionalism

The data shows us that journalists are one of the most threatened sectors in Arab society. Journalists report news on an array of topics and therefore suffer criticism and even violence by groups that were not portrayed in a positive light. The obvious examples are reports about crime families or about murders based on "family honor". Most journalists recognize this situation and stay silent on these issues in order to avoid conflicts, especially since they know that they will not be defended by anyone, including the police, if they are attacked.

The study suggests that many of the Arab journalists also avoid reporting on security issues. Some of them stated clearly that they avoid these issues because of the issues' sensitivity or because they are afraid of violating military orders, which will expose them to liability. We've seen there is a difference between the journalists' work with the police and with other security forces. Many journalists covering criminal issues trust the police, the most important internal security force, as a source for important and reliable information on these issues. Thus the police are an important source for journalists' work, but journalists complain that the police underestimate them and put obstacles in their way such as not giving the needed information in time. We've also seen that some journalists disregard information given by the police because of a biased attitude, reflected in the way and timing of releasing information, when talking about events in Arab society. We have learnt that several journalists were approached by police in request to give information to the police during certain events, such as houses demolitions and political encounters, in return for early notice and information by the police. Journalists have also reported the difficulties in obtaining information from other security forces and in interviewing high army officers.

The study revealed a wide gap, even a rift, between the work

conditions in the local media compared with those in satellite TV channels. This gap is expressed in both pay scales and in work methods. Journalists working for satellite channels have a significantly broader range of freedoms compared to those working for local media. It seems both groups suffer from similar limitations regarding their relations with political and security organizations. Journalists working for satellite channels reported that security forces treat them differently than Israeli and foreign reporters. We have seen that the journalists' identity determines the establishment's attitudes towards them, and therefore it is harder for Arab journalists to function properly in their job. Some journalists working for satellite channels said that Israeli society and establishment view Arab journalists as the enemy and limit their access to critic information.

Recap and Main Conclusions:

1. Educational and professional statistics points to the fact that journalists are considered a status group with a shared consciousness.

2. Most journalists see journalism as a moral vocation, but practical conditions prevent them from performing at a professional level.

3. Arab journalists struggle with issues concerning the Israeli society, especially when these issues pertain to security and the state.

4. Arab journalists don't trust the police as an information source and therefore are hesitant to join in cooperation with them. Some journalists have been approached by the police and asked to deliver information in return for a "scoop".

5. The Israeli security forces frequently threaten Arab journalists, especially when they publish news related to political and security topics without prior coordination with the authorities.

6. Financial conditions of most journalists won't allow them to perform their job professionally. The journalists' average wage is lower than the average wage in Israel.

7. Journalists describe a gloomy picture of Arab commercial journalism, which are transforming into advertisement brochures.

8. Although the political partisan press is different from the

commercial press and has ideological commitments, its professional level is disappointing.

9. Most journalists' don't blame their difficult work conditions for the general level of the profession, but attribute it to other factors.

10. Media owners tend to hire young journalists lacking knowledge or experience, a fact which is reflected in the deteriorating professional level of Arab journalism.

11. Private and partisan owners tend to interfere with journalists' work and reject certain subjects or interviews due to conflicts with their financial or political interests.

12. Most journalists described similar hardships and challenges, a point, which proves the link between their work conditions and the professional level of Arab media (Although journalists themselves do not connect between the two).

13. Journalists are afraid to address issues of crime and murder fearing pressures, threats or violent responses.

14. Social, cultural and religious boundaries limit journalists' freedom and cause them to avoid reporting on these issues, even when segments of society, such as women or children, are having their rights violated.

Recommendations:

1. Financial work conditions should be improved.

2. The editorial and content departments should be separated from the management boards to reduce the owner's influence on the press' contents.

3. Journalists should attend professional courses to improve their knowledge and professional level.

4. The public should be educated on the importance of journalism and its role in society. Education on this issue will increase the public's trust in journalists and assist them in accessing information, thus insuring social transparency.

5. Journalists should unionize to insure their financial and social rights.

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