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## The PLO's political communication arena; Arafat and the struggle for media legitimacy

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### ABSTRACT

The Palestine Liberation Organization has been extensively studied and researched in a variety of disciplines and perspectives. However, little attention has been paid to its media and/or political communication strategies that went hand in hand with its political evolution and aims from 1969 to 1982, a period marked by flux and political uncertainty as well intensive PLO state-building processes. This paper seeks to partially fill the gap by addressing political communication not only as a fundamental political practice and strategy but also as an arena in which political elites compete to achieve media legitimacy and ensure support for their objectives and ideologies. Drawing on archival research of the PLO mass media platforms during the period under review, primary sources and interviews with former PLO media personnel, the paper begins with an overview of the PLO's investment in mass media institutions and other cultural genres before discussing its political communication strategy and its aims in the period from 1969 to 1982. The paper then addresses *how* the late PLO chairman Yasser Arafat actively competed in the political communication arena to achieve media legitimacy and secure public consent for the PLO's ideologies and aims. In doing so, the paper does not suggest Arafat achieved total domination of the political communication space nor that other guerrilla leaders, Arab and other actors did not compete in this arena. Rather, the approach emphasizes the relationship between political agency and structure during moments of flux and change, thus complementing dominant approaches in political communication research that focus on framing and discourse.

### The PLO's ascendancy: 1969 and 1982

The Palestine Liberation Organization was recognized formally as an independent Arab entity at the second Arab summit conference in Rabat in September 1964, ushering in a new and transformative phase in the history of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and the quest for statehood and rights. The summit also recommended that Ahmad al-Shuqairi be appointed as PLO chairman and entrusted with reaching out to the Palestinian people and Arab countries for the purpose of laying sound foundations for establishing a Palestinian entity, whose contours and

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shape were to be defined.<sup>1</sup> After the 1967 defeat, the Palestinian guerrilla organizations that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s gained control of the PLO and introduced new ideas into its charter, emphasizing Palestinian identity and national consciousness and embracing armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine. By 1969, the PLO had emerged as the chief contender for Palestinian representation, and by 1974, was accorded recognition by the Arab League as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and, by default, as the political structure speaking on their behalf. Over a short period of time, the PLO managed to gain increasing international recognition and support and rally a vast majority of Palestinians through communicating a dialectic of a Palestinian-centric common consciousness and the necessity of armed struggle.

The history of the Palestinian national (liberation) movement, its political elites and organizational structures, its relations with various Arab countries and its public goal to pursue armed struggle against Israel as the means to liberate Palestine have been the focus of numerous studies in the social sciences and humanities over the past few decades. Broadly speaking, the literature adopts several strands. One strand, represented by Middle Eastern specialists, which includes studies of Palestinian politics, identity and society, provides a valuable analysis of the maintenance of Palestinian national identity as well as the concomitant formations and transformations of the Palestinian national liberation movement.<sup>2</sup> The second strand considers the political evolution of the national movement, its make-up, its leaders and factions as well as the inter-relationship and conflicts between them. A third strand deals with questions of international terrorism and political violence and a fourth is concerned with the Palestinian national movement's relations with the United States, the former Soviet Union and other international entities during the Cold War period and beyond.

Much of this scholarship makes references to the PLO's media (commonly known as the Resistance Media), particularly the press in Lebanon and Jordan,<sup>3</sup> citing as well as using the movement's main print media platforms, such as *Filastinuna*, *Falastin al-Thawra* and *Shu'un Falastiniya*, as well as numerous leaflets and pamphlets for the analysis of the movement and its evolution. However, such scholarship broadly considers communication as epiphenomenal, rather than as central to revolutionary processes and politics. A notable exception is Paul Chamberlin's book 'The Global Offensive',<sup>4</sup> which addresses the PLO's public diplomacy moves on the international stage between 1967 and 1975 and the US response to these moves, Yaqub's work on Palestinian film during the revolutionary period film and Matar's on the Palestinian revolutionary aesthetic and Palestinian-centric discourses which defined the PLO's cultural activism during that period.<sup>5</sup> The lack of academic engagement with this

<sup>1</sup>First Arab Palestine Congress. National Covenant of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Jerusalem, 28 May 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Sayigh Yazid, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup>See Sayigh, 1997 and Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup>Chamberlin, 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018); Dina Matar, 'PLO Cultural Activism: Mediating Liberation Aesthetics in Revolutionary Contexts', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 2 (2018): 354–364.

important aspect of the PLO's evolution is surprising given the immense investment its elites and guerrilla leaders put into its mass media industry, particularly print, as well as in the public image of its chairman and Fatah leader, the late Yasser Arafat.

The PLO's investment of resources and technologies in institutions as well as public spaces was starkly evident in the period under study (1969–1982), marked by the establishment of an institutional infrastructure, including the exponential expansion in PLO mass media industry (print and radio) first in Jordan, where the PLO began to expand its bases until the 1970 war, and then Lebanon, which provided an important base for further mobilization and visibility until the expulsion of the PLO following the 1982 Israeli invasion. The PLO mass media in the period under consideration, commonly referred to as 'the Resistance Media', comprised numerous print publications produced centrally by the PLO and by the various guerrilla factions and Palestinian entities, such as unions, and specialist media concerned with different aspects of Palestinian lives and privately-owned media.

The period was also marked by the creative productivity and voluntary creative labour by diverse grassroots actors, intellectuals, writers and artists as well as members of the larger public, and punctured by transformative political developments, such as the 1967 defeat, the 1970 war in Jordan, the 1973 war, the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which led to a new phase in the Palestinian struggle. During this period, both the nature and impact of the PLO activism were remarkable, blending grassroots campaigns primarily aimed at rallying support among Palestinians in diverse geographical locations with institutional building aimed at bringing Palestinian factions and their operations together under central structures.

The centrality of media to mobilization and participation as well as to the forging of political solidarities had been understood by PLO elites and guerrilla leaders aware of its role in other global anti-colonial and liberation movements at the time. As discussed elsewhere, the PLO mass media, along with other cultural output, helped construct a vision of what it means to be a Palestinian revolutionary and lay the roots for a Palestinian aesthetic national sensibility that cut across established cognitive geographies, and brought Palestinians into dialogue with radical groups around the world through local, regional and global channels of communication, contributing to what John Collins called a global Palestinian hypervisibility that coincided with the rise of organized Palestinian militant groups in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> However, even before the formation of the PLO, these leaders and actors disseminated their ideas and ideologies through rudimentary periodicals and leaflets produced at little cost by volunteers working underground in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on the PLO and Fatah media between 1965 and 1975, 'Abu Tha'er' (nom de guerre) writing in *Shu'un Falastiniya* (1973), noted that the PLO media was, 'first and foremost, an important tool to push mass revolutionary struggles towards their strategic aims through . . . mobilizing the masses, uncovering the plans of opponents and transmitting revolutionary experiences elsewhere to the fighters

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<sup>6</sup>John Collins, *Global Palestine* (London: Hurst, 2011).

<sup>7</sup>In 1972, the PLO began to expand its media industry in the occupied territories to mobilize the population behind it, marking what Amal Jamal called the beginning of the second stage in the experience of the Palestinian press under occupation, as the press was deemed a useful tool to reach the population. Two weekly newspapers, *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn), a weekly, began appearing in mid-April and *al-Sha'b* (The People) on 17 July 1972, with both adopting a clear national line espousing the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

and the people',<sup>8</sup> particularly because of the lack of news about the Palestinian revolution in Arab media at the time, which meant the leadership of the Fateh movement decided to invest in fresh voices and a new language.

By the standards of the time when 'national' mass media was generally thought of as comprising print media and radio (television came later to the Arab world), the PLO media industry was a phenomenon by itself, growing in resources, reach and significance as well as in its potential to create webs of political solidarity and extend pre-existing cultural networks and informal channels of communication among Palestinians in the diaspora and under Israel occupation. This paper uses the term the PLO mass media to refer to the media (press and radio) produced centrally by the PLO<sup>9</sup> while acknowledging that the mass media emerged and functioned within the same structural factors that defined and constrained the nature of the armed struggle and the aims of the revolution. As Sayigh notes in his seminal work *'Armed Struggle and the Search for State'*,

... the evolution of the Palestinian armed struggle was determined by three factors. First were the complex and all-important relations with Arab host countries ... the second main factor determining the evolution of Palestinian politics was the division between 'inside' and 'outside,' especially after the rest of mandate Palestine came under Israeli control in June 1967 ... the nature of the Palestinian leadership, and its politics, were the third main factor<sup>10</sup>

## **PLO's mass media**

Drawing on archival research of the PLO's mass media between 1969 and 1982, particularly the flagship periodical *Falastin al-Thawra*, memoirs, official publications and books in Arabic and interviews with former PLO media personnel, the paper suggests that the PLO political elites, particularly late chairman Yasser Arafat, sought to compete in the political communication arena within and outside of the territorial boundaries it found itself in. This competition went along hand in hand with public actions in local, regional and global political spheres, discussed amply elsewhere, as well as with a defined political communication strategy that was evident in the heavy attention to and investment in diverse media and cultural spaces to enhance its image, create a new visibility for the Palestinians and mediate a Palestinian-centric liberation aesthetic rooted in popular experiences of, and participation in, the 'Palestinian revolution'.

Indeed, what might be called a political communication strategy is evident in the early resolutions adopted by the Palestine National Council (parliament in exile)—the first concrete proposal for a political communication strategy was mooted at the same Palestine National Council meeting in 1964 which endorsed the establishment of the PLO. At that meeting, the PNC called for a comprehensive Palestinian media and communication strategy that 'aims at organising the tools to publicize the cause, in all parts of the world, including ... the publication of a newspaper or a magazine in foreign languages and the establishment of Palestinian offices to overseas media actions and locations chosen by the executive committee'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Abu Tha'er. *Sahafat Fatah wa al-Thawra, Shu'un Filastiniya*, 17, 64–77, 1973.

<sup>9</sup>Other guerrilla factions such as the PFLP and the DFLP produced their own print media as well as other publications that often contradicted or collided with the vision proposed by the PLO mainstream media, dominated by Fatah.

<sup>10</sup>Sayigh, 1997, 675–677.

<sup>11</sup>Yearbook of the Palestinian Problem. (Beirut, *Institute of Palestine Studies, 1965–1967*), 23.

The resolution also called for financial investment in diverse print media outlets and in a Palestinian radio station to mobilize Palestinian, Arab and global masses and attract attention to Palestinian rights and needs through disseminating news about Palestinians and guerrilla activity, particularly because of the scant coverage of Palestinian concerns and guerrilla news in Arab mass media at the time.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the PNC approved the establishment of Palestinian representative offices in various world capitals, such as Belgrade, the UN, Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi, to disseminate news and visions of the Palestinian revolution and to build the infrastructures for global advocacy in support of Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty. At its meeting in June 1965, the PNC requested that the PLO Executive Committee design and implement an institutional formal media and communication strategy to be implemented by PLO institutions and its representatives in Arab and overseas offices, particularly in Latin America, China, Africa and in Muslim-majority countries to ensure local and global support for the Palestinian struggle. The first PLO mission outside of the Arab region was established in China in 1965, only a year after the PLO's founding and before some Arab countries had formally recognized the organization as the official representative of the Palestinian people.

Such resolutions were meant to broaden the political communication field to the regional and the global while also seeking to situate the Palestinian national movement as an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggle while opening opportunities for weapon sales and training of PLO cadres.<sup>13</sup> In *Reviving a Palestinian Power. The Diaspora and the Diplomatic Corps*, Hassan et al. (2021) suggest these tactics, what might be called the PLO's public diplomacy efforts, emerged as "[...] the PLO Political Bureau functioned as a quasi-ministry of foreign affairs representing the Palestinian people to governments around the world and in international organizations, with the aim of advancing the Palestinian political programme of return and restoration of rights."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, PLO offices and representatives played a key role in gaining the support of diaspora Palestinians and refugees behind its vision, as well as in building connections with the Palestinian people in diverse locations. Nabil Sha'ath, who served as the PLO's external media relations officer at the time, noted that the aim was to forge a strategic focus on liberation through armed struggle with the aim to establish an inclusive liberal non-sectarian state:

Our strategy was to approach people around the world as well as Jewish entities in the West. We worked on improving and strengthening association and the Afro-Asian relationship and supported the non-aligned movement ... We worked on creating an image and changing perceptions of Palestinians and attract the support and interest of the Palestinians in diaspora".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>In 1972, the PLO extend its political communication arena to the Occupied Territories, through supporting the publication of *al-Fajr* (The Dawn), a weekly which began appearing in mid-April and *al-Sha'b* (The People) on 17 July 1972, both of which adopted a clear national line espousing the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

<sup>13</sup>A broader discussion about the role of these representatives as actors in the political communication arena is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>14</sup>Zaha Hassan, Nadia Hijab, Ines Abdel Razek and Mona Younis, *Reviving a Palestinian Power. The Diaspora and the Diplomatic Corps*, *Al Shabaka*, 4 May 2021, Retrieved from: <https://al-shabaka.org/reports/reviving-a-palestinian-power-the-diaspora-and-the-diplomatic-corps/>

<sup>15</sup>Interview with author, London, 30 June 2021.

## Expanding the PLO political communication arena

Following the 1967 defeat and the 1968 Battle of Karama, the fourth PNC session significantly amended the PLO adopted in 1964 to emphasize the Palestinian character of the armed struggle and its significance for achieving liberation. A new PLO Executive Committee was constituted, led by Fatah, and Yasser Arafat was elected as the Chairman of the PLO in 1969, heralding a new era that saw the integration of official PLO structures with grassroots armed revolutionary parties in hybrid structures. The PNC also agreed the formation of an independent planning body bringing together Palestinian and Arab policy and media experts. This body was entrusted with devising a comprehensive plan for liberation in the political, economic, social and information realms and suggested the structure and membership of this body should remain secret and that all activities be held behind closed doors.

The reconstituted PLO Executive Committee approved the formation of a National Planning and Information Centre, which was eventually established in Beirut in 1970 comprising a political section, another section charged with the affairs of the occupied territories, a technical section, a library for information, an education and social section and a section in charge of international meetings and conferences. The centre published a limited circulation monthly newsletter called 'Strategic Issues' tasked with putting together a comprehensive short- and long-term plan for liberation activities across military, political, economic and information fronts (ibid), thus ensuring that communicative practices went hand in hand with political and military action. Along with the Palestine Research Centre (PRC) established by the PLO in Beirut in 1965, the centre produced studies on the history of the Palestinians, collected autobiographies and oversaw the launch of the monthly journal *Shu'un Filastiniya* as an intellectual sphere for Arab and Palestinian intellectuals, along with the periodical *The Palestinian Diary* and the newsletter *Israel Radio Broadcasts Monitor* first published in 1973.

In addition to its important work in documentation and evidence gathering, the PRC trained a generation of Palestinian and Arab thinkers, ranging from the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish to the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury, and the Syrian intellectuals Sadiq Jalal al-Azm and Burhan Ghalioun, whose studies appeared in the journal.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting on its output, Ahmed Khalidi,<sup>17</sup> who worked with the PLO press office in Beirut and the PLO News Agency Wafa, suggested the flurry of documentation was inextricably tied to the specificities of the Palestinian lived experiences and the specificities of the sites of media production: 'The Palestinian experience of liberation is unique and there is nothing like it. Beirut was the height of the revolution in which a quasi-state functioned and worked to maintain revolutionary outlooks. Revolution, however, changed over time and became institutionalised'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1972, the PNC endorsed the establishment of a PLO Unified Information Unit to control, design and implement a centralized media and communication strategy that all factions would adhere to and that would place all media and cultural output under one

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<sup>16</sup>The PRC complemented the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, a private institution established in 1963 and devoted exclusively to documentation, research, analysis, and publication on Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The IPS issued 11 serials in Arabic and seven in English and French all published in Lebanon.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with author, London, 10 August 2021.

<sup>18</sup>The PRC was the target of bombing operations between 1969 and 1983. In 1982, Israeli invading troops ransacked its offices and transported all contents to Israel.

department. The proposal was intended to help articulate a consistent and common language of revolution and liberation and agree a common communication and media strategy that would focus on Palestinian news and imagery and expand PLO offices abroad to counter Israeli information and propaganda campaigns. The unit was tasked with bringing all print output together under one umbrella, with the publication of the PLO mouthpiece *Filastin al-Thawra* and the launch of the PLO radio station *Sawt Filastin*, while overseeing new media institutions, such as Wafa and the Palestinian Cinema and Photography Organization (which took over Fateh's older Cinema and Photography Unit). The unit was headed by prominent Palestinian intellectual and activist Kamal Nasser who served from 1972 until his assassination in 1973, Majed abu Sharar who took over in 1973 till his assassination in 1981 and Ahmed Abdel-Rahman who took over in 1981.<sup>19</sup>

Such expanded spaces attracted diverse actors—political actors, writers, journalists, artists, poets, activists, and others—who sought to contribute to the production of the revolution's discourse and ideology in diverse creative output. However, differences about what the revolution entailed and what actions should be taken persisted in these diverse spaces, reflecting continued ideological differences within the PLO.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on the PLO media, Ghazi al-Khalili wrote that while the media suffered from fragmentation and lack of professionalism, it sought to reflect the conditions under which it emerged: 'Any critique of the media at the time must take into consideration its role as the media for national liberation . . . [] and should therefore be considered as the main tool for the struggle and the psychological battle against the enemy'.<sup>21</sup> Mohamed Krayyem further noted that the so-called Palestinian Resistance Media had specific features and characteristics in line with the nature of the revolution, focusing mostly on reporting military operations and supporting armed struggle:

... [but] despite attempts to inform the Palestinian people about theoretical studies about revolution and resistance, the media prioritized the gun over thought ... as such, it was chaotic, of little use and with no accuracy and truth as some papers would talk about defeat as victory which led to mental setbacks at the first military setback of the resistance.<sup>22</sup>

### Political communication—arena for competition over media legitimacy

Brian McNair defines political communication as 'purposeful communication about politics', by a variety of actors (including the mass media, politicians, and pressure groups), political organizations (party and non-party), and the audience or citizenry.<sup>23</sup> Given the origins of the political communication field in propaganda and media effects research, much of the existing research remains bounded by a *problem-solving approach*<sup>24</sup> that is

<sup>19</sup>Israel carried out targeted assassinations against many actors in the PLO's media and cultural departments, acts that can be discussed as violent interventions to compete in the political communication arena, which it continues till today through silencing Palestinian voices.

<sup>20</sup>Such practices prompted Kamal Nasser, the first head of the unified information unit, to send a memorandum to the members of the executive committee demanding they do not give briefings except through the unified unit, which prompted the DFLP to openly criticize what it called a dictatorial unit dominated by one faction.

<sup>21</sup>Ghazi Al-Khalil, 'Sahafat al-Muqawama fi 'Ashr Sanawat', *Shu'un Filastiniya* 41/42 (1975): 508–509.

<sup>22</sup>Mohamed Krayyem, *Sahafat al-Muqawam al-Filastiniya bil Shatat*. *Samed*, (Volume 102), 34, 1995

<sup>23</sup>Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2008, 4–5).

<sup>24</sup>Paul Lazarfield, 'Some Notes on the relationship between Radio and the Press', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 1941.



mostly concerned with causality, or cause and effect. As such, many studies have been concerned with *who* says *what* to *whom* and with what effect, *what* is being said in formal political spheres, as well as with news framing and media discourses. In contemporary political communication studies and given the expansion in media platforms and spaces, there is increasing concern with the ‘mediatization’ of politics, a concept that captures how media in all its forms have become more and more pervasive in politics and how a media logic involving diverse actors and media has increasingly replaced a political logic as the basis of political communication.

In their seminal work, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky<sup>25</sup> drew attention to the media/politics nexus by focusing on the role of the media in legitimizing the ideas of the most powerful social actors and for securing consent for their actions. For them, the role of the media does not emerge from an active ‘conspiracy’ between newsmakers and political elites or dominant forces, but rather naturally, because of market forces. In short, this role is not ‘accomplished by crude intervention, but by editors’ and working journalists’ internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution’s policy.<sup>26</sup> Other studies have considered the media/politics nexus through the concept and practice of propaganda, that broadly refers to deliberate and calculated practices intended to deceive, manipulate the masses, and influence the opinions and actions of individuals and groups to reach determined aims.<sup>27</sup> Jacques Ellul, however, complicated this common meaning of propaganda, classifying it as being political and/or sociological, where the former is strategic and tactical, and the latter is a means to penetrate society as whole and engage every member in the society’s ideological culture.<sup>28</sup> Ellul also identified a different type of propaganda which he called a propaganda of subversion/agitation led by “a party seeking to destroy the government of established order. It seeks rebellion or war . . . (and) aims at making the individual participate in his society in every way . . . it is a long-term propaganda that seeks to . . . reshape (the individual’s) thoughts and behaviour in terms of the social setting.”<sup>29</sup> Gerhard von Glahn took Ellul’s proposal of propaganda as subversive further to suggest the term liberation propaganda conducted by foreign governments in support of local revolutionary forces.<sup>30</sup> Propaganda has often been used uncritically in the scant discussions of the PLO media. Despite their relevance, propaganda does not take account of political elites’ agency nor the agency of the intended recipients of propagandist and/or agitational discourse.<sup>31</sup>

Specifically discussing the dynamics between political elites and the mass media in conflict situations, Gadi Wolfsfeld<sup>32</sup> proposed that the relationship could be best addressed as a struggle over the media spheres, thus raising questions on who gains access to the media and which ‘media frames’—the social, cultural and political meanings

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<sup>25</sup>Edward Herman and Naom Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent* (London: Vintage, 1994/2008)

<sup>26</sup>Herman and Chomsky, 2008, XI

<sup>27</sup>Thompson

<sup>28</sup>Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Vintage books, 1965/1973)

<sup>29</sup>Ellul, 62–71

<sup>30</sup>Gerhard von Glahn. ‘The case for legal control of ‘liberation propaganda’ *Law and Contemporary Problems*, International Control of Propaganda (Summer), 1996, pp. 553–588.

<sup>31</sup>However, these approaches do not take account of political elites’ agency nor the agency of the recipients of propagandist frames and discourses.

<sup>32</sup>Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and political conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

and representations that the media give to social and political concerns and events—become dominant and normalized. In his model, Wolfsfeld suggested that the relationship between the media and political actors (antagonists) can be described as a form of ‘competitive symbiosis’, a relationship based on the exchange of news for publicity, whereby high status and a high level of organization and resources increase the ability of an antagonist to produce newsworthy events, thus giving the more powerful antagonists enormous advantages over the weaker ones in the political communication arena. His argument is particularly relevant in addressing the struggle over the media in asymmetric conflicts, such as the extended struggle between Palestinians, as the challengers, and Israel, as the settler-colonial power, a discussion beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>33</sup>

In this paper, I address political communication as an arena characterized by competition among diverse political (and non-political) actors to achieve media legitimacy, a term broadly defined and understood in terms of its aims, that is securing the media and public consent for actions, ideologies and aims, or political communication strategies.<sup>34</sup> Legitimacy is an overused concept in the literature on politics and power, but it is difficult to assess with any precision. As such, legitimacy has often been addressed through its causality (cause and effect) in the political sphere—that is as the real and observable consequences of political actions and practices, including discursive and symbolic practices deployed to cement political power and engender a belief that existing political institutions and leaders are the most appropriate ones in society.<sup>35</sup> Legitimacy has also been broadly addressed as the public’s consent to, or acceptance of, political domination<sup>36</sup> and, as such, has been often conflated with the Gramscian concept of hegemony which explains the role of signs, ideas and images in the production of dominant understandings that are perceived as natural and commonsensical in everyday lives.<sup>37</sup> Stuart Hall notes that in social theory hegemony has been taken to refer to “what the world is or how it works, for all practical purposes,<sup>38</sup> or the ways in which signs, practices, images and relations—drawn from a historically-situated cultural field come to be taken for granted ‘as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it’.<sup>39</sup> Broadly drawing on these approaches, the concept media legitimacy<sup>40</sup> proposed here refers to political elites’ aim to

<sup>33</sup>It is worth noting that Israel has consistently sought to compete in the PLO’s political communication arena through counter-narratives as well as discriminatory, exclusivist and, importantly, violent practices that included targeted assassination of Palestinian intellectuals and PLO leaders and imprisoning many activists and eminent persons.

<sup>34</sup>Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, ‘Uses and Gratifications Research’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37, no. 4 (1973/1974): 509–52. Paul Schlesinger, ‘Rethinking the sociology of journalism, source strategies and the limits of media centrism’, in M. Ferguson (ed.), *Public Communication: The New Imperatives* (London: Sage, 1993).

<sup>35</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960). The use of the term revolves around the liberal Weberian understandings of popular opinion or consensual belief. Weber’s account of legitimacy tends to hover between claims to legitimacy and belief in legitimacy and the ideal types of legitimate authority which he uses to classify different modes of rule. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, Claus Mueller, *The politics of communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>37</sup>See Antonio Gramsci’s *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell, Smith (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1971) for a definition of what hegemony means. Interestingly, Gramsci does not offer a single meaning of what hegemony means, but the common understanding in contemporary social theory sees it as reflecting the broad consensus about its meaning in political and social lives.

<sup>38</sup>Stuart Hall, ‘The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists’, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1977), 14.

<sup>39</sup>John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff. *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Volume 1, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991), 94.

<sup>40</sup>For a broader discussion, see Tamir Sheafer, ‘Charismatic skill and media legitimacy: An actor-centered approach to understanding the political communication competition’, *Communication Research* 5no. 28 (2001): 711–736.

achieve consensus, understood as the media's as well as the general public's taken-for-granted acceptance of cultural and ideological framings<sup>41</sup> proposed by and acted on by political elites competing in the political communication arena. Analytically speaking, the term media legitimacy offers us an optic through which to address the resources and the skills political elites utilize to 'successfully' compete in the political communication arena.

### Political elites and media legitimacy

Any analysis of the PLO's political communication as an arena for competition over media legitimacy must consider *how* politically relevant elites, such as the former chairman Yasser Arafat, competed in this arena and which skills they used to compete, thus taking into consideration the relationship between agency and institutional and organizational structures within which such elites operate. In his seminal work on political elites in the Middle East, Volker Perthes defines politically relevant elites as 'those people in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision-making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of "national interests") and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues'.<sup>42</sup>

In seeking to ensure public consent of decision-making, strategies and political discourse, politically relevant elites, this paper suggests, constantly compete in the political communication arena to achieve media legitimacy—that is accessing the media and securing the media and public consent of their ideologies and actions. For elites to compete successfully in this arena, they need to have knowledge of the arena's rules of the game—that is the rules that determine what news is interesting and valuable, and what matters to intended audiences in particular contexts—along with a deep understanding of socio-historically significant cultural values and discourses, what Atef al-Shaer has called a culture of communication. A culture of communication, according to him, refers to the 'communicated compendium of religious, historical, literary and mythological references used by a community as valid tropes . . . and, as such, are acted upon and treated as having authenticity'.<sup>43</sup> Put differently, a culture of communication refers to discourses, rhetoric and symbols that political leaders deploy to win support for themselves, bring constituencies together as collectives and produce political power.

Political scientist Tamir Sheafer suggests that, to achieve media legitimacy, actors competing in the political communication arena rely on two general sets of resources—the first is the actor's *charismatic communication skills* understood as the 'demonstrated skills, performance and talent that are pertinent to the main arena in which he, or she operate',<sup>44</sup> and the second is the actor's *political standing and centrality*,<sup>45</sup> which refer to

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<sup>41</sup>Cultural framing refers to the use of frames that resonate with culture or in other words that are central to what Atef al-Shaer has called cultures of communication as a core term that addresses societal values—mainly values that are socio-historically accumulated and which recur in the macro ideological sphere within which a culture is situated. In other words, a culture of communication can be described as involving intentional processes of enactments and reactions. See Atef Alshaer, 'Towards a Theory of Culture and Communication', *The Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 1, no. 2 (2008): 101–121.

<sup>42</sup>Volker Perthes, *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (London: Lynn Reiner, 2004), 5.

<sup>43</sup>Atef AlShaer. Towards a Theory of Culture of Communication: The Fixed and the Dynamic in Hamas, 2008.

<sup>44</sup>Sheafer, 'Charismatic skill and media legitimacy: An Actor-Centred Approach to Understanding the Political Communication Competition', *Communication Research* 28, no. 6 (December 2001): 711–736.

<sup>45</sup>T. Sheafer, 2001.

the position of the political elites in organizational and institutional structures.<sup>46</sup> While there is little confusion of what political standing and centrality mean, the term charismatic communication skills is much more complex to define, particularly because it can be confused with charisma<sup>47</sup> or charismatic leadership. As such, this paper proposes that the term 'charismatic communication skills' can be taken to refer to a political actor's agency in provoking a 'charismatic response', or the intended recipients' consent of ideological discourses and frames during certain socio-political contexts.<sup>48</sup> Such a charismatic response, however, cannot be achieved without the active mediation and remediation of political actors to construct their image and political persona, actions that underline the dynamics between agency (of the political elite) and the structures within which they operate, including the media.

No politically relevant elite (actor) can achieve complete control over the political communication arena.<sup>49</sup> And no political communication arena can be described as uniform or uncontested—in fact, in the period under discussion, the PLO political communication arena was open to contestations by other Palestinian leaders<sup>50</sup> as well as Arab and Israeli actors.<sup>51</sup> While acknowledging these complexities, this paper limits itself to discussing the ways in which the most relevant political actor in the PLO, its former chairman Yasser Arafat, competed in the PLO political communication arena to achieve media legitimacy while underscoring the dynamics between his agency and media institutions.

### Yasser Arafat- the key actor in the PLO's political communication arena

Under Yasser Arafat's leadership, the PLO won broad international recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and support for its national rights. Indeed, the literature shows that Arafat managed to transform the PLO from being a tool of Arab governments in the 1960s to a guerrilla movement and then a national institution.<sup>52</sup> In the period 1982 to 1969, Arafat dominated the Palestinian national movement, a fact that Yezid Sayigh implicitly suggests relates to Arafat's leadership style as the outcome result of deepening bureaucratization [that] facilitated political management and propelled statist transformation, but the particular mode of centralization owed more to the unique role of Arafat, who strove to concentrate to key means of control in his hands.<sup>53</sup> As he writes:

<sup>46</sup>In the case of the PLO, this is a discourse that sought to ensure that intended audiences participated in the revolutionary process, felt included in it, and shared in the design of the revolution's broad strategic aims and ideology.

<sup>47</sup>Max Weber defined charismatic authority as resting on a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. For Weber, charismatic authority emerges from a process of validation that exceeds regular forms of interaction and attraction between a leader and his followers. As Weber noted: If [charismatic authority] is not to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, but to take on the character of a permanent relationship . . . it is necessary for the character of charismatic authority to become radically changed. Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in *natu nascendi*. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both.

<sup>48</sup>Ruth Wallis, 'The social construction of charisma', *Social Compass* 29, no. 1 (1984): 25–39.

<sup>49</sup>Phillip Schlesinger, 1993.

<sup>50</sup>In fact, other guerrilla leaders, such as the PFLP's George Habash and the DFLP's Nayef Hawatmeh also competed in the political communication arena through their own media, such as al-Hadaf and al-Hurriya, the mouthpieces of the PFLP and the DFLP, respectively, which this author also assessed during the period under control.

<sup>51</sup>For example, the leader of the PFLP

<sup>52</sup>Nicholas Parsons, 'The Palestinian Liberation Organization', in J. Peters and D. Newman (eds.) *the Routledge Handbook of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 223–232.

<sup>53</sup>Sayigh, 461.

The fact that the Palestinian movement was able to accommodate ... marked discrepancies between rhetoric and reality, slogans and capabilities, and nationalist myths and social requirements, without undergoing radical changes of structure or leadership reveals the extent to which the latter had successfully entrenched itself ... Above all, the armed struggle provided the central theme and practice around which Palestinian nation-building took place, and laid the basis for state-building by driving elite formation and militarisation and allowing political legitimisation.<sup>54</sup>

Arafat's control of the PLO leadership structure has been discussed in different ways and with divergent views. Some scholars suggest that Arafat was able to dominate Palestinian national politics through various means, including the practice of encouraging parallel agencies and departments in all spheres, all of which required central funding and resources.<sup>55</sup> Others note Arafat's authoritarian tendency to control decision making and the political communication arena particularly in the period 1969 to 1982. Reflecting on this tendency, Nabil Sha'ath noted that 'Arafat was central to the PLO and the Palestinian decision making. Everything came to him. He wanted to approve all strategies before they were communicated. He understood the importance of representation and voice'.<sup>56</sup> In his memoirs, Ziad Abdel-Fattah, the founding editor of the PLO news agency Wafa who worked closely with Arafat, concurs: 'Arafat did not accept opposition, not in the sense that those working close with him consented to his viewpoints, but in the sense that those who had no opinion or who opposed him were not completely trusted by him ... This might be confusing and contradictory but ... [it is because] Palestinians needed a symbol and this symbol had to be given some support and standing'.<sup>57</sup>

Writing about Arafat's legacy after his death in 2004, Mamdouh Nofal, who had intimate knowledge of the PLO leader and the organization, suggested it was Arafat's political persona and his personal 'charisma' that helped him bring Palestinians together and maintain his position of power.<sup>58</sup> As he writes, "Arafat had charisma and a gift for establishing personal relations with the rank and file among the guerrillas. This won him their loyalty and consolidated his leadership. He soon emerged as the paramount leader of the resistance, with the leaders of the other movements deferring to him. As a leader, he was decisive and could change course quickly as the circumstances required and not look back."<sup>59</sup>

Jabrawi and Pearlman, drawing on Weber, too, refer to what they suggest was Arafat's charismatic authority which became the ultimate, effective source of legitimate domination, particularly because he 'won the loyalty of a large portion of Palestinians on the basis of his historic prestige as the reviver of the national liberation struggle and father of the national family. According to them, Arafat broadened his charismatic legitimacy by meeting vast numbers of Palestinians face-to-face, representing Palestinians before the world, and tirelessly defending the nationalist cause'.<sup>60</sup> However, others disagree. Klein, for example, argues that while Arafat was certainly an icon for the Palestinians, in particular,

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<sup>54</sup>Sayigh, 1997, 665.

<sup>55</sup>Sayigh, 1997.

<sup>56</sup>Interview with author, 20 June 2021.

<sup>57</sup>Ziad Abdel-Fattah, *Warak Harir*. (Ramallah: Al-Ru'a publishing, date of publication unknown), 127.

<sup>58</sup>Mamdouh Nofal, 'Yasir Arafat, the Political Player: A Mixed Legacy', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 2, (2006): 23–37.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ahmad Jabrawi and Wendy Pearlman (2007). Struggle in a Post-Charisma Transition: Rethinking Palestinian Politics after Arafat. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4 (2006): 6–21.

“neither his leadership nor personality could be defined as charismatic. Rather, it was after he died that Arafat’s leadership was seen as heroic, putting aside his mistakes and weaknesses.<sup>61</sup>

Regardless of the divergent views, Arafat’s leadership cannot be discussed without alluding to the PLO’s hierarchical style of governance that also was reflected in the PLO’s mass media where most information flowed vertically (from the top down) rather than horizontally.<sup>62</sup> As the co-founding leader of the largest Palestinian political formation, Fatah and as the chairman of the PLO Executive Committee since 1969 and in his role as PLO Chairman, Arafat instrumentalized this style of governance in his relations with the PLO media, leaving his mark on styles of authority, modes of organization and structures that have endured since his passing in 2004. Arafat was the final arbiter in decision-making, a pattern of control he began in the period under discussion and that continued to characterize his performance even after the Oslo Accords. Indeed, while Arafat consulted regularly with PLO leaders and close aides within Fatah, which he also led, he reserved decisions on genuinely important matters to himself, including formulating fundamental approaches and practical action plans, thus ensuring the consent of his senior advisors and teams with his plans. In assessing these traits, Nofal writes that ‘Arafat’s one-man rule, or the deep flaws of the successive Oslo agreements that soon became apparent. But despite the growing disenchantment and criticism, Arafat remained to a surprising extent immune to direct criticism, as if he were above the fray. This was probably largely due to the extent to which he and the movement had become intertwined, the way he had come to be seen as symbolizing the Palestinian struggle. But there were other reasons as well. He was a manipulator of the first order, especially when it came to internal struggles’.<sup>63</sup>

### **Arafat’s charismatic communication skills**

The story of Arafat’s ascension to the top of the decision-making pyramid of the PLO is that of a self-made, hard-working, ambitious and committed man who was as devoted to his religion, Islam, as well as to achieving self-determination to the Palestinians. From his early political career as the founder of Fatah, the largest guerrilla group in the PLO, to his death, Arafat actively instrumentalized his political standing, his intimate knowledge of the political communication rules of the game and his rhetorical capabilities to compete in the PLO political communication arena. In fact, Arafat constantly sought to gain access to the PLO mass media and insisted on linking the media directly linked to ‘the Office of the President’,<sup>64</sup> ensuring the PLO’s mass media’s mediation and remediation of his political persona as the symbol of Palestinian nationalism, struggle and resistance.

In order to achieve media legitimacy, Arafat not only maintained daily communication links with the media, but also with his intended audiences. Arafat constantly used the PLO mass media platforms, including the main periodical *Falastin al-Thawra*, Wafa news agency and *Sawt Falastin* (radio) to speak directly to the Palestinians. His mode of

<sup>61</sup>Menachin Klein, ‘Arafat as a Palestinian Icon’, *Palestine-Israel Journal* 11, no. 4 (2005).

<sup>62</sup>For a thorough discussion of these structures, see Sayigh, *The Search for State*, 1997.

<sup>63</sup>Mamdouh. Nofal, ‘Yasir Arafat, the Political Player: A Mixed Legacy’, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 23–37

<sup>64</sup>Nofal, 2006.

communication combined formal and informal modes of address and came in the form of regular radio addresses as well as regular columns under the title: 'A letter to the Palestinian and Arab masses by brother *abu Ammar* (his nom de guerre)' and signed by the statement 'it is a Revolution until Victory, your brother abu Ammar'. At the same time, Arafat cultivated close links with regional and international media—he met with local, regional and foreign journalists to give his opinion and views on events. He read, or had someone read to him, what was written in the main Arab, foreign and Israeli media and passed on requests to the PLO representatives abroad. He had the habit of greeting journalists with a hug and kisses—a form of greeting that became associated with him and which some commentators interpreted as his way of resolving differences and averting conflict with those opposed to him or finding fault with his behaviour, but it was also meant to strengthen his relationship with the media through using interpersonal communication.

In addition, he used the media to send declarations and statements marking special occasions and commemorative events for the Palestinians, beginning these with a call to 'our comrades on the long road, our steadfast revolutionary people and our heroes in the trenches of the revolution', thus interpellating his audiences as a 'Palestinian national revolutionary collective'. Arafat penned a regular editorial/commentary in the PLO periodical *Falastin al-Thawra* with the title 'The Leader of the Revolution', reminding his intended recipients of his political standing and his position. But he also sought to construct an 'image of presence' that has endured despite criticism of his and the PLO's failure to achieve the aim of liberation and self-determination for the Palestinian people (and the one he clearly relished) is that of him as the pre-eminent Palestinian guerrilla fighter, the grizzled, scruffy-bearded guerrilla in olive-green military fatigues and his trademark Palestinian head scarf, carefully folded in the elongated diamond shape of what was once Palestine.

Importantly, Arafat used his extensive knowledge of the political communication arena's rules of the game to achieve media legitimacy—he understood news and what made a story due to extensive experience as a media actor. Before the PLO was formed, Arafat was one of many activist underground journalists who founded the guerrilla movements and their media—he was the co-founder with Khalil al-Wazir of the Fatah crude magazine *Filastinuna* which began to appear in 1958 and in which he wrote articles about the plight of the Palestinians and the right of return, thus using the magazine as the first channel for communication with the Palestinian refugees and the diaspora. His media involvement continued and he remained the behind-the-scenes editor in chief of the PLO's mouthpiece *Falastin al-thawra* and the final arbiter of what was said in the main editorial—in fact, as Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, the editor of *Falastin al-Thawra* in the period under discussion said, Arafat read most editorials before these went to press.<sup>65</sup>

Arafat used his rhetorical skills to ensure public and media consensus, routinely invoking politically and culturally meaningful language and tropes, interspersed with Koranic verses and the prophet's sayings to mobilize support and achieve legitimacy. He often went off script, using vernacular rather than classical Arabic, deploying affective language that resonated with ordinary people while articulating their sense of self, national identity and already-felt grievances. There is no doubt that Arafat's ability to

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<sup>65</sup>Personal communication with author, 14 September 2016.

compete in the arena can be attributed largely to his position at the top of the PLO's institutional structure and there is no doubt that he used his political standing to establish personal relations with the media as well as with the rank and file among the Palestinian guerrilla fighters helped him win their loyalty and consolidated his leadership.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, as Nabil Amro, one of the founders and editors of clandestine radio stations as well as the radio station *Sawt Falastin*, writes: 'Arafat had the ability to connect to and link the main cadres [and Palestinian people] in all places to himself. He survived several crises which can be explained by his personal skills . . . to the extent that he became the symbol of all Palestinians'.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion: news opportunity structures/constraints

Without doubt, the PLO's political communication as a space for struggle over media legitimacy cannot be discussed outside of the specific historical period revolutionary fervour (1969–1982) and its potential. Several studies have identified how PLO elites, like other movement leaders, strategized the specific socio-historical contexts to appeal to potential followers and provoke large-scale popular mobilization, highlighting both rational and opportunistic decision-making processes behind political action. The contexts coincided with a global context that saw a plethora of liberation movements across the globe, adopting Leninist models of revolutionary organizing were popular as they seemed to have worked in other international contexts. Socialism (in its radical rather than reformist articulation) was adopted by several Palestinian movements.

In the period between 1969 and 1982, socio-political contexts were transitional and/or episodic, but they nevertheless provided what could be called news opportunities for Arafat to intervene in the political communication arena, allowing him to drive the news agenda and secure media legitimacy as well as domination of the public sphere. One of the most important of these opportunities was the 1968 battle of Karameh which offered the PLO the space to transition from dependence on Arab states to a strategy focused on developing a collective Palestinian effort to wage a people's war. In fact, after the battle, the PLO enlisted thousands of young Palestinians, Arabs and other international recruits in its armed struggle. Other moments came in 1969 when Palestinian refugee camps overcame the control of the Lebanese security forces and began developing their own civic institutions, and a third was the 1970 war in Jordan, known as Black September. Perhaps the most important was in 1974 when Arafat was invited to the United Nations as the representative of the Palestinian to deliver his most famous speech which has been talked of as one of his major successes, overshadowing any military gains.

News opportunity structures, this paper suggests, can be understood through the optic of liminality, understood as a temporality characterized by a breakdown of traditional lines of authority but also by its potential for emancipatory projects, which were the key markers of the revolutionary period in the PLO's history. Victor Turner first applied the term to study rituals and rites in unexpected and unpredictable situation. Turner notes that a liminal society is characterized by initial destruction followed by confusion and fear;

<sup>66</sup>Nofal, 2006:24.

<sup>67</sup>Nabil Amro, *Fatah fi marhalat al-salam*, al-hayat newspaper, London, 1993.



it encompasses a breakdown in social order and a state of transitory being.<sup>68</sup> The concept of liminality can be used, therefore, to unravel how events can generate a huge transformation at the societal and creative levels. In liminal conditions, such as uprisings, revolutions and war, subjects become removed from the 'familiar space, the routine temporal order, or the structures of moral obligations and social ties ... [and] ... enter a liminal time/space ... [in which] the transgression of norms and conventions becomes possible',<sup>69</sup> social markers disappear and subjects, differentiated along gender, sexual, ethnic, religious or racial lines, can imagine themselves as equal.

The period 1969 to 1982 can be understood as a liminal period defined by intense creativity and investment in the media as well as by the breakdown and contestations of norms, arguably offering Yasser Arafat, as the most relevant PLO political actor, the perfect news opportunity to compete in the political communication arena to achieve media legitimacy in the political communication arena. But it was also a period marked by profound structural constraints. Most notable of these constraints was the absence of a secure geographic base: Palestinians had to function from outside historic Palestine and were always severely constrained by the domestic factors within them. Second, as the Palestinian political system was pluralist in its movement, party, and ideological composition, creating a cohesive national diplomatic line was always a challenge, especially when it came to fateful decisions—such as negotiated settlements—on which there was no consensus. Following the departure of the PLO from Lebanon, Arafat's ability to compete in the political communication arena became more difficult, particularly given the near collapse of the PLO media and its fragmentation following the departure from Lebanon in 1982 and the signing of the Oslo agreement. In addition, since 1993 and the signing of the Oslo peace agreements, the PLO's ability to compete in the political communication arena was severely restricted by the asymmetrical conflict it found itself in and by Israel's settler-colonial dominant system of control that has exacerbated internal divisions and fragmentations in the media and in the political communication sphere.

The PLO's political communication as an arena for competition over power and as a strategic practice did not evolve into a comprehensive and consistent strategy based on 'developing a set of comprehensive messages and planning a series of symbolic events and photo opportunities to reinforce them' in sharp contrast with other similar movements in the region, such as the Islamic revolutionary movement in Iran and Hizbullah in Lebanon. It is not the intention here to go into a comparative analysis of these movements, nor to address the discrepancies in detail, but to note the profound structural constraints within which the PLO emerged and grew, alluded to briefly above. These constraints and their repercussions on Palestinian civil society and political cultures as well as on the PLO media institutions been discussed elsewhere.

A more detailed analysis of the PLO political communication arena, this paper concedes, must also consider the political communication arenas and strategies of Arab countries that hosted it as well as Israel's and how Arab and Israeli political elites also sought to compete in the PLO arena. In the digital age, what might be termed the Palestinian political communication arena cannot only focus on the political elites but

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<sup>68</sup>Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962).

<sup>69</sup>Guobin Yang, 'The Liminal Effects of Social Movements: Red Guards and the Transformation of Identity', *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 3 (2000): 379–406.

must also take into account grassroots competition for legitimacy as well, which is beyond the scope of this paper, which has limited itself to discussing the dynamics of communication in contexts of flux and revolution which reflect contestation and redefinition of the community.

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