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## **Increasing Female Participation in Municipal Elections via the use of Local Radio in Conflict-Affected Settings: The Case of the West Bank Municipal Elections 2017**

### **Abstract**

The 2017 West Bank Municipal elections were framed by locally-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Palestinian Authorities – albeit to a lesser extent – in terms of the desirability of increasing female participation in them in two particular ways: participation as representatives and participation as voters. Both aspects of participation were supported by extensive radio campaigns conducted by locally-based NGOs. The effectiveness of these campaigns and the approaches used form the basis of this article. Using a mixed methods approach consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data, it concludes that radio has endemic socio-technical advantages for reaching women, particularly in conflict-affected areas, and that broadcasting content aimed at women by women is essential in terms of increasing their representation and voting.

**Key words:** radio, women, NGOs, West Bank, elections, participation

Local and municipal elections were held in the West Bank on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017. 1,224,276 Palestinians were registered and the electoral lists, which according to election law must have a minimum 20% quota for women, were published a month in advance by the Central Elections Commission (CEC) (CEC, 2017). Voter turnout in these elections was considered low (53.4%) indicating frustration at the Palestinian Authority (PA) and political parties generally (CEC, 2017). Participation was similar to previous elections in 2012 and 2005 with little change in the gender distribution (42.8% of electors were women). This was despite extensive radio campaigns in 2017, the main aims of which were to increase the numbers of women as voters and candidates and the activity of women councillors once elected.

Official statistics are inconsistent from election to election because of inaccurate and incomparable data presentation and also because of changes in the numbers of electoral localities resulting from the deepening political divide between Gaza and the West Bank. In 2012, there were 1075 female candidates and 3343 male candidates but these figures are not available for 2017. Vague and incomplete statistics show that there were 3543 candidates in 2017 of whom at least 20% were women because of the quota system. Nonetheless, greater and more coordinated activity by women's NGOs could be discerned, particularly via radio, aimed at raising female participation in the elections. This article contributes to the field of both journalism and development studies by examining these radio campaigns and their contribution to female democratic participation in a conflict-affected area. It discusses their effectiveness in relation to women's NGOs' short and long-term objectives and, thus provides transferable insights into the use of radio and women's NGOs that can be used in other conflict-affected areas.

**The Technical and Socio-cultural Advantages of Local Radio in Conflict-Affected Settings**

Radio is broadly considered a ‘secondary medium’ and less important than other media (Fleming 2002:1; Berland 1990: 179; Chignell 2009: 99). Yet this view underestimates its principal advantage namely its capacity to reach a diversity of listeners in ubiquitous settings – listeners at home doing chores, in fields or offices working or, in the case of the West Bank, waiting in endless checkpoints.<sup>1</sup> This principal advantage can be divided into two categories: technical and socio-cultural.

First are its technical advantages including its affordability, portability (Hendy, 2000) and its extensive reach (Pease and Dennis, 1994) which help connect and inform developing or isolated regions. Emergency or disaster situations, for example, have been greatly aided by the development of ‘radios-in-a-box’ enabling digital audio production via laptops and digital audio editing software (UNESCO, 2017). Radio is easy-to-use and is accessible to old and young. It can be produced to be durable and able to withstand harsh environments and its lack of technical sophistication makes it particularly suitable for extreme environmental or conflict settings. Battery-operated, solar-powered and wind-up radios have changed the lives of populations living in such environments and educational and awareness-raising programmes have reached many, otherwise inaccessible, communities (Hartley, 2000; Hyden et al., 2002; Manyozo, 2012; Myers, 2008). That radio does not require a mains source of electricity, unlike television, is also beneficial particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) where extensive and ongoing power cuts prevail (Khoury, 2016). There is, therefore, a heavy reliance on radio sets and car radios, although interestingly radio can be increasingly received on mobile phones, a feature that is growing in significance in the OPT<sup>2</sup> where many radio stations – including those interviewed here – make their programmes available online through streaming services.

Second are its socio-cultural advantages; radio can target illiterate or orally-based cultures which may exist in marginalised communities, where vernacular languages are spoken. Numerous media platforms, especially TV or internet-based, are linguistically and economically inaccessible to many. For example, in many African states, local radio is widely used to overcome such obstacles, broadcasting in local, not colonial languages. They target specific communities and relevant issues, continuing the power of the oral medium rooted in their traditions (Girard, 2007; Jallof, 2011). Thus, local radio journalism has a community-building potential, encouraging listeners to participate in physical communities or communities of interests. Radio’s contribution as a development tool is also significant as listeners can gain access to news and information, become better informed and, through phone-ins, talk shows and discussions, gain opportunities to get their voices heard (Chignell, 2009; Hartley, 2000). This is reinforced by the intimate nature of radio (Shingler and Wieringa, 1998:114). NGOs interviewed for this study commented on the ‘usefulness’ of radio to target women, one of their main audiences, as they listen to it whilst doing the chores in this traditional and patriarchal society. In such societies, the intimacy created by radio enables women to seek information and advice on sensitive matters such as health, domestic

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<sup>1</sup> In January 2017, there were 98 fixed checkpoints in the West Bank, including 59 internal checkpoints (B’Tselem, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> A situation analogous to mobile phone use in Africa see Gilberts and Myers, 2012; Nassanga et al., 2013; Sullivan, 2011

violence, rape, and empowerment that are not easily sought from other platforms, such as television, which are often viewed in a mixed environment.

In combination, the technical and socio-cultural advantages of radio demonstrate that, far from being of secondary importance, radio is a principal and reliable media tool in conflict-affected zones particularly promoting community identity (Hendy 2000; Scannell 1992) and reaching marginalised groups. Also radio lends itself to use by NGOs in promoting awareness of and participation in election campaigns.

### **Understanding Local Radio in the Context of Interaction between Women and (women's) NGOs in the West Bank**

The background to this study are a) the complexities of the socio-political, local, regional and national factors in the region and b) the interminable internal power struggles between factions. As Parpart et al state (2002: 4), 'individual empowerment takes place within the structural constraints of institutions and discursive practices. Groups become empowered through collective action, but that action is enabled or constrained by the structures of power that they encounter'. The OPT is not a sovereign state<sup>3</sup> but remains under Israeli military occupation which, together with internal corruption and the quasi-authoritarian regime which emerged in the post-Oslo Accord years,<sup>4</sup> significantly and negatively affects its socio-economic and political life. The OPT do not have a free press to help educate and inform the public. (It is 135<sup>th</sup> of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2017)). Quasi-authoritarianism hinders journalism and the workings of local radio (and other media channels) which historically has played a crucial part in informing the public (McQuail, 1983). The political regime has not succeeded, however, in achieving total hegemony over civil society, suggesting that an element of democracy, propped up by a society widely considered to be pluralist, does exist. Indeed, social movements in the OPT have long been an integral part of the public sphere and seek to shape public opinion to a maximum to influence state decision-making. Supporting Taylor's claim that the public sphere is a central part of modern society despite often being 'suppressed or manipulated' (1995: 196), Palestinian civic society remains vibrant and continues to 'use different material and symbolic means to influence the political process' (Jamal, 2005). As a fundamental part of the public sphere –contrasting with many other conflict/post-conflict areas – NGOs in the OPT have developed and gained experience in instrumentalizing the media, particularly radio, without which skills they would be significantly weakened (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). Whether they include their communities in their output (Atton, 2001) or rely on traditional organisational structures (Forde, 1997), NGOs, as social movements, continue to provide an alternative to wide-ranging hegemonic discourses (Carpentier et al., 2003: 51). Alternative media have been extensively discussed (Forde et al., 2002; Howley, 2005; Meadows et al., 2007; Rodriguez, 2001; Tacchi et al., 2008) but are widely associated with social media whereby laypersons gain a voice in times of protest (Cottle, 2011). Yet they are also

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<sup>3</sup> It holds UN observer status but is not recognised as an independent state.

<sup>4</sup> The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 between Israel and the PLO, sought to end the conflict through territorial concessions and the creation of the PA. They established interim governance arrangements and a framework to smooth negotiations for a final treaty.

characterised as providing oppositional reporting in whatever form thus promoting active citizenship (Harcup, 2012).

Women in the OPT increasingly face challenges regarding participation in active political life as many do not have the education, social means or support to become democratically engaged within this patriarchal society. Despite the active role Palestinian women's movements have played in socio-economic life, women have been absent from elections and decision-making with a few notable exceptions. Widely citing UNSCR 1325 (UNSC2000, point 8c), NGOs, which numbered 2100 in the West Bank and 899 in Gaza in 2009 (ICNL, 2015), strive to change this situation stating that the inclusion of women in decision-making makes a substantial difference (Farr, 2011). The situation regarding Palestine's women's movement is regionally unique. It has long been active and has traditionally had a strong, societal reach both geographically and regarding class (Hasso, 2005; Jamal, 2015). Its pre-1948 grassroots origins were in charitable organisations, then shifting to mass mobilisation as it campaigned against the occupation, and particularly the Oslo Accords, and to raise women's status in the community and improve their daily living conditions, leaving them little time or effort for politics as their focus was elsewhere (Farr, 2011; Hasso, 2005; Hilterman, 1991; Jad, 2004; Peteet, 1991). Post-Oslo, the emphasis was on state-building and prioritising legislation and the creation of institutions, still within a context of occupation. Foreign aid agencies, which were crucial for women's NGOs' finances, detached themselves from political movements resulting in many of these NGOs becoming depoliticised and professionalised to secure funding (Hammami, 1995). Women's movements weakened (Jamal, 2015) as their role shifted from their grassroots origins and female empowerment to a more economic role and to providing services not available from the authorities yet required by society (health, training, education, and workshops). Thus, a polarisation emerged between those women's NGOs which received funding by 'playing the game' and those which did not. Nonetheless, contemporary women's NGOs still provide an alternative voice and campaign for gender equality and women's empowerment. The mission statement of the Association of Women Committees for Social Work (AWCSW) (2017), for example, states it aims to 'promote the social, educational, economical, and political development of Palestinian women [...] raise the legal awareness of women [and] promote their participation in decision-making processes'. Awareness-raising during elections was one of their main objectives.

Election campaigning, however, foregrounded the NGOs' political affiliations generally, questioning their 'non-governmental' definition, proving problematic in their fight against procedural issues, and rendering them vulnerable to pressure from the political authorities they were campaigning against (Challand, 2009). Some NGOs (women's and general NGOs) still have strong associations with political parties from which they receive funding. Their independence and integrity, particularly when their campaigns involve elections, can therefore be compromised. AWCSW, a recipient of finance from Fatah, the West Bank's leading political party, acknowledged the difficulties it encountered during the election campaign. It was campaigning vigorously to increase women's quota on the electoral lists from 20% to 30% and was thus actively challenging government policy. According to its director (AWCSW, 2016), it was facing pressure from the authorities and imminent closure because of threats that funding would be withdrawn because of this campaign. NGOs are also

widely supported by donations from international NGOs as part of their democracy promotion programmes and much work in partnership with international development agencies such as UNRWA, UNICEF and UNDP. Such associations also undermine the NGOs' independence and illustrate how the domestic affairs of the OPT can be exposed to the influence of donors and the foreign policies of the donors' respective countries (Challand, 2009; Sienkiewicz, 2012).

Whatever their affiliation, NGOs still depend on radio as amplifiers for their advocacy campaigns and to raise awareness of their programmes (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). If NGOs' activities are not on radio they are certainly not reaching their desired target groups (underrepresented groups and women in particular). This failure restricts their capacity to pursue forms of alternative social and political messaging (Downing, 1984; Forde, 1997, Willems, 2015). Such failure to 'provide access to the media for these groups on these groups' terms' (Atton, 2001: 11) would mean that alternative messages did not go beyond 'acceptable topics', and that NGOs would not be able to provide a space to counter conventional representations and the use of 'mainstream' sources (Atton and Hamilton 2009: 1, Hirst 2009). Although this article focuses on commercial, rather than community or 'amateur' radio stations (Atton, 2001; 2009), the analysis deals with NGOs, and their attempts at providing alternative forms of messaging against a background of state-run and widely-censored media. Thus, it attempts to correct the situation that while 'there is no shortage of writing on the movements themselves, their media are largely untouched' (Atton, 2001). The article does so by examining how the various characteristics of (women's) NGOs and radio can be brought together to the benefit of conflict-affected societies during election campaigns by raising awareness and influencing women's political participation and deliberation.

## **Method**

A mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative data<sup>5</sup> to focus on the 'different dimensions of the same phenomenon' (Das, 1983:311) was used. The study employed content analysis and interviews, a combination of approaches which allows 'triangulation, and provide[s] greater validity of findings' (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2008: 8). The content analysis, which preceded the interviews following Creswell's 'sequential explanatory design' (2009: 223), used three data sources – spots (which are paid for advertisements used on commercial radio lasting 30-75 seconds), programmes and semi-structured interviews – with the first two generated from content analyses of local radio output. The following research questions investigated how NGOs attempted to increase female participation in West Bank elections using local radio:

- RQ1 What constraints and challenges did the NGOs face as they pursued their election-related campaigns?
- RQ2 Which campaign areas were of most importance to NGOs?
- RQ3 Which practices and procedures did the NGOs use to convey their message?
- RQ4 What levels of success did they expect and in what timeframe?

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<sup>5</sup> See Clark et al., 2008: 363.

### *Data and data collection*

Data for the first two sources (spots and programmes) drew on a larger project examining local radio involvement in NGO activities in conflict-affected settings. Six commercial, rather than state-owned, radio stations in four West Bank towns (Ajyal, Raya FM, 24FM in Ramallah; Bethlehem 2000 in Bethlehem; Radio Nagham in Qalqilya; and Al-Balad in Jenin) were selected because of their size, geographical location, reach and their level of NGO cooperation. They provided the researchers with their ‘NGO-related’ data monthly. ‘NGO-related’ meant output sponsored by NGOs, or broader discussion programmes organised by NGOs or involving their representatives as experts. Data was filtered manually to only include output related to the forthcoming elections. The analysis period was January-December 2016.

For the content analysis, each spot or programme was selected as a unit of analysis and was coded based on style, genre, target audience, actors, length, frequency and the NGO involved. 174 spots were analysed. 32% of the 174 spots’ content specifically related to women (for details, see Heywood, 2018) and slightly over 20% of these were election-related. Eight hours and ten minutes’ programme time dedicated to women-related subjects was also analysed. The broadcasts were aired primarily by eighteen OPT-based NGOs, the majority were women's NGOs such as the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), AWCSW, and the Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development (PWWSD), a few were more general or youth NGOs.

### *Spots and programmes*

The data comprised spots, produced by, or on behalf of the NGOs, and programmes. Advertisers or campaigners determine how frequently and when spots are broadcast. Spots do not carry excessive amounts of information and the lack of airtime can be problematic because donors often require their name to be aired too. The spots were generally broadcast three times a day, seven days a week for three months. Many were repeated on several stations. Spots are more prolific than programmes because of seasonal adjustments (programmes are broadcast less frequently during Ramadan, for example), and also cost (spots are shorter and cheaper to produce). Spots are also easier to organise as many programmes are increasingly adopting new novel formats to attract audiences (panels, shows recorded on-location, and open-mic events). Election-related spots and programmes were concentrated in the summer of 2016 in the lead-up to the planned voting date (October 2016).

Programmes comprise several episodes, each lasting forty-five to sixty minutes focusing on a particular theme – here, the elections – covering areas such as the elections’ impact on local development, women and youth, election law and procedures, participation, transparency, and the role of civic institutions. Dedicated discussion programmes provided extra time for supporting information and examples. Whilst experts were used to substantiate criticism against authorities and give weight to campaigns for changes in the law, laypersons were also invited on to shows to make the task of being elected believable and therefore achievable.

The semi-structured interviews were grounded in the quantitative and qualitative results from the content analysis in order to explore and elaborate these findings (Creswell,

2009) and determine the NGOs' strategies for the election campaign and their use of radio. The interview questions supported the main research questions to determine the impact of NGO's use of radio on women's participation in the West Bank elections. Representatives were asked about their experience with the chosen radio station(s); their use of other media; their media budget; competition from other NGOs; radio's reluctance to cover certain subjects; preferences for certain genres of spots; the information to be conveyed; and the way they monitored the efficacy of media campaigns. The interviewees ranged from management to junior positions and were questioned jointly and/or separately. They also included representatives from NGOs' media departments, thus some interviewees were professionally trained journalists and some were outside mainstream media (Atton, 2001). NGOs were selected because they actively used the chosen radio stations for their output, not because of their size or location.

### **Findings: Campaign Areas and Women's Participation in the Elections**

#### *Women as Representatives*

The women's NGO's campaign areas during the elections and their use of radio were part of their long-term strategies and were planned in advance and presented to the population and specific groups in spots. Others were chosen by the radio stations who invited NGOs and other representatives to speak, thus allowing a wider range of opinions. This format demonstrated an interesting element of democracy, of both radio and the regime, as representatives for and against the government – men and women, elected and candidates, NGOs, ministers and advocates – appeared on programmes. Invitees were relatively outspoken with their criticism illustrating that although radio is widely censored, it presents a free forum for discussion and for alternative voices to be heard. Although this format may be welcomed by audiences, it revealed more to the listener than the participants (NGOs or guests) may have wanted to disclose, for example, the limited power of the Ministry for Women's Affairs (MWA) or the attitude of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) towards women. This may undermine confidence in newly-formed decision-making bodies, particularly in less developed conflict-zones, yet preventing this happening would mean greater censorship and a further curtailing of freedom of expression.

Radio's democratising role was key for women's NGOs' campaigns, particularly regarding raising women's minimum 20% quota on electoral lists. As Alqadi, a female candidate in the Jericho elections, stated in support of this campaign (*Your vote is your decision*, 2016) women are half of the population and are therefore not a marginalised community. As part of the proportional representation system, there is the added complication that, according to the Electoral Law, article 5,

The representation of women is not less than one woman in:

1. The first three names in the list
2. The next four names that follow
3. Each five names that follow

(CEC, 2017).



This allocation of female candidates on the electoral list was perceived by many men as being discriminatory because, they argued, it favoured female candidates, who they alleged did not have the intention or support to be active councillors or politicians. Nominating women was also criticised by many as a sign of weakness – ‘only weak parties accept being represented by a woman, strong parties [...] won’t accept a woman representing them’.

Many nominate women just to complete the lists as, according to electoral law, the electoral list won’t be accepted for a municipality unless it includes three women. So they bring in any women and what they then do is weak. (*Your vote is your decision*, 2016).

Radio addressed the equally problematic issue of genuinely politically motivated women being sidelined in favour of women nominated because they were from strong families or tribes and who, in turn, accepted that men exercised natural political authority. Such women, in short, were mere tokens. Trying to raise awareness of this, one woman-to-woman dialogue states in an AWCSW spot during the quota-raising campaign, ‘it’s clear the rich families and political parties will win. What can we do?’ Strong women wanting to be elected and become active encounter difficulties if they are not from a powerful tribe; it is the tribe which is elected not the individual.

The resultant lack of active female participation once elected is now being targeted by those elected women who are active. Women’s NGOs use radio in two ways: to speak directly to ‘less active’ female councillors to encourage them to do their job; and to invite active female councillors on radio to speak about their roles and thus reach out to the less active female councillors. The ‘active’ councillors are involved in campaigns run by women’s NGOs to visit the ‘non-active’ group to galvanise them into participating more. Radio thus acts a mobilising tool reaching audiences to empower them on various levels (Forde et al, 2009; Meadows, 2007).

Women’s NGO’s campaigns also focused on the unequal representation of females on the actual electoral lists. Often, photographs of male candidates are shown on the list, but flowers or other images are used to represent female candidates. Women’s names are also frequently not used; instead female candidates are ‘the wife/mother/sister of (male relative)’. According to the women’s NGOs, female candidates are thus anonymised and disempowered, leaving voters uncertain who they are voting for as they cannot identify them visually or by name. Innovative campaigning was used here by the women’s NGOs. Flash mobs, a relatively new concept in the OPT, were organised in major cities in which male and female actors participated with the latter wearing symbolic masks, which they then removed dramatically to reveal their identity and ‘de-anonymise’ themselves (see AWCSW, 2016a for images and further details). A collaboration of women’s NGOs organised these events targeting both decision-makers and the community and inviting them to take women’s participation in the upcoming elections seriously, and declaring that women’s right to stand is guaranteed by law. These women’s NGOs used radio to circulate information about the times and whereabouts of these flash mobs. Without this amplification, the event would have had significantly less impact. Radio proved to be a particularly useful and relevant platform here because of its ability not only to specifically target women but also to invite listeners to

imagine a little-known concept, represented here by the flash mobs (Starkey and Crisell, 2009). Here, rather than creating an intimate speaker-listener bond, the aim was to encourage listeners to come and discover this new event – the flash mobs – in person. Imagination is a powerful sense stimulated by radio which enables listeners to ‘ornament any radio broadcast’ with appropriate visuals (Douglas, 1999). Television campaigns would have been less effective as the on-screen visuals would have had a negative impact on the audience’s imagination.

Despite the radio spots raising curiosity evidenced by large crowds that responded to them, the campaign did not receive a warm reception from all quarters as many of those attending the flash mobs voiced conservative views, reinforced by religious slogans, such as, ‘why let women take a position of leadership?’ According to AWCSW (2016), female dancers and actors in the flash mobs had their banners torn down and were met with verbal abuse from male onlookers chanting ‘*eib*’ (shame).

The way in which radio was used here to encourage and support these activities demonstrates its ability to empower audiences and foster ‘active citizenry’, promoting democratic processes (Forde et al, 2009). The women’s NGOs achieved this by focusing on specific areas of inequality and working in collaboration rather than diluting attention more broadly. They appeared resigned to the fact that, in all probability, they would not achieve their aims in the short term, for example, increasing the quota for female representatives from 20% to 30%, but that their long-term awareness-raising goals were worth pursuing.

### *Women and Voting*

Educating the population about their rights to vote, and how and where to do so, proved fundamental to the women’s NGOs’ campaign. They achieved this through radio (and some television) spots and by being invited to speak on programmes, which they in turn sponsored with spots to raise their own profile. Commercial radio proved a popular option for the women’s NGOs because it is a cheap form of dissemination compared with the television and has a good reach. According to PWWDS, there is greater freedom on commercial radio to be critical of decision-makers and it is less biased than the state radio and television which are known for their partisan broadcasts.

The women’s NGOs worked in collaboration, rather than in opposition, to promote their overall campaign in contrast with the 2006 elections when efforts were wasted and campaigns were duplicated because of the lack of inter-organisational coordination (Qazzazz, 2007). This collaboration had fifteen partners throughout the West Bank, some being from radio, some being women’s NGOs meaning that donor funding could now be streamlined. Several women’s NGOs placed the same spot on multiple radio stations (Heywood, 2018) but they also promoted the activities of other women’s NGOs. AWCSW, for example, promoted the flash mobs organised by PWWSD as their interests coincided.

Years of experience of using radio as an amplifier have culminated in women’s NGOs broadcasting a wide range of spots. The NGOs have learnt how to appropriate radio to suit their needs and agenda and help empower their audiences (Meadows et al, 2007). The style of spot reflects their target audiences with AWCSW stating that it is difficult to make short messages effective. It declared a preference for sketches between two or more people but, whatever the format, the main information, such as helpline numbers or web addresses, had

to be basic and clear. The brevity of spots is exacerbated by the inclusion of donors' information. More than half of the shorter spots, for example those lasting 39 seconds, is reserved for donor information. Indeed, in one 28-second spot, seventeen seconds was dedicated to the sponsors' names leaving only eleven seconds for the actual message. The result was something of a monologue by a woman. This prevented the women's NGOs' preferred approach of a mix of male/female, female/female dialogues which they deemed important, especially the former, as men could be portrayed to be encouraging women to vote as well as be voted for, thus giving their approval and permission. Women's NGOs therefore also targeted men as an audience through in these male/female dialogues; this was important as such women's rights may not otherwise be brought to the attention of men who, more often than not, are the dominant, and decision-making figures in society.

Reinforcing radios' alternative role, many of the spots incorporate a militaristic tone, 'voting is your right and duty – so rise up', reflecting Palestinian women's fight against the occupation and for their own freedom, with key phrases, such as 'Palestinian women, the makers of difference,' being repeated throughout spots. In addition to the women's NGOs using jingles and repeated background music in their spots as alerts, they also draw on varying registers of language to ensure accessibility. PWWSD (2016), for example, include the local language of villages. This approach also exploits the 'pure sound' feature of radio which requires listeners to use their imagination, which can be more powerful than seeing who is speaking (Dubber, 2013). Using vernacular, listeners can associate with the speaker, build sound pictures (Arnheim, 1933; Sieveking, 1934) and thus be part of a united, imagined community.

Despite NGO's confidence that these approaches work, it is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of election-related radio spots that are broadcast, in many cases, to all of the West Bank. This is because wholesale audience surveys are not systematically conducted by radio stations although some have been conducted on a smaller scale by NGOs. Many women's NGOs, for their domestic violence campaigns, rely on numbers ringing helplines following the broadcast of a particular spot to measure its effectiveness. NGOs, according to WCLAC (2016), are therefore 'hesitant to broadcast things through local radio stations because we aren't sure whether these radios or these spots are going to reach the people we want'.

Not just women's NGOs were promoting women's participation and, similarly, women's radios were not just targeting women but had a broader influence through many communities (Forde et al, 2009). PWWSD, a women's NGO, which has a weekly programme on women's radio Nisaa FM, stated that men listen too:

*Do men listen?* Yes, just last Wednesday we did an open wave on the election and there were phone calls and some were from men.

*Were they positive?* Not about the elections no, they rang to discuss the decision to cancel the elections; they were angry about that and wanted the elections to be held when planned, on 8 October [2016]. So they were participating with the guests in the studio and it was a good conversation actually (PWWSD, 2016).

The point here is that within a patriarchal society where a tribal system dominates aspects of cultural life, men also need to be targeted because often their permission or encouragement is needed to enable women to vote, let alone to be a candidate. More widely, male decision-makers in positions of formal authority are also a necessary target audience. AWCSW stated it strategically exploits state radio and television (although not included in this study) to exert pressure on the male dominated authorities. One example relating to the elections concerns its campaign to raise the quota of women representatives from 20% to 30%.<sup>6</sup> It bought airtime on state radio to broadcast spots on this campaign which conflicts with government policy. By getting the state radio's agreement to air these spots, AWCSW aimed to gain indirect approval from the authorities to the changes proposed in the broadcasts. The purpose behind these spots was not primarily to inform the public (commercial radio would be used for this) but to pressure the government to support its campaign. AWCSW also has a strategy to target young people. Although candidates have to be twenty-five to stand, voters have to be eighteen. The women's NGOs, through radio, are therefore encouraging young voters to become politically active in order to challenge heads of local councils who may be over seventy 'who simply get re-elected, and do nothing for their community' (AWCSW, 2016).

More specifically regarding male decision-makers in positions of formal authority, women's NGOs are perceived, correctly, by many ministries, to be critical and influential forces with the potential to undermine their status and privileges. Indeed, as Yolla Alatrash Khair, Director of An-Najdah Association and councillor at Beit Sahour Municipality stated, 'there is no political will in the Legislative Council or at higher political levels in ministries to achieve equality for women as human beings. This would require a social revolution' (*Your vote is your decision*, 2016). However, not all decision-makers are reluctant to work with women's NGOs, one naturally enough is the MWA, created in 2003. This Ministry praises their work, recognises flaws and limitations in the laws and, rather than perceiving NGOs to be a form of opposition, works collaboratively with them to form strategies and action plans. To make changes, the MWA recognises the need for media support and, in 2016, created a triangular network working with radio and women's NGOs, mainly to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1325, endorsed by Presidential law in 2005. This network will be used to target the discrimination against which women's NGOs campaign generally, not just with regard to the elections.

References to, and criticism of existing electoral legislation were made on both radio spots and programmes with women's and general NGOs using the additional time in the latter – through invited experts and guests – to suggest amendments. Because commercial radio is perceived to be less biased than state radio and television, the women's NGOs used it as an alternative voice to comment on the inefficiency of the laws and the effects of the shortcomings and limitations, providing considerable insight into societal challenges and tensions. They achieved this by informing listeners, shaping their opinions and general awareness-raising, but also by receiving their comments and thoughts through phone-ins, to take them, in this case, to the MWA for possible implementation or introduce them via the latter Ministry to other more powerful ones. This freedom to criticise on radio should not be overstated though given that, following the suspension of the October 2016 elections, the

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<sup>6</sup> Despite extensive campaigning, quota changes were not made in the May 2017 elections.

media, including radio, were restricted on the content of their broadcasts. The case of Palestinian state TV is instructional. Any dissent would be viewed as acting against the very authorities that fund and direct it and (in Orwellian fashion) any criticism of the suspension was also censored. As one PWWSD employee wryly stated:

Now we can only talk about female empowerment and politics generally with no specific reference to elections. But it's easier on radio, we can directly say 'we want elections and for women to be elected and that you can vote for a woman' (PWWSD, 2016).

Further exacerbating the problem of formal censorship is informal culturally-inspired censorship. Here the radio stations which 'have the same culture as the community' (Radaydeh, 2016), that is, the same norms and values as their patriarchal audience, dilute, distort and negate messages both from the NGOs and the MWA. Consequently, the MWA, in collaboration with women's NGOs, is now re-educating not only communities but also the radio stations it uses as the platform to reach them. It reiterates that the messages it communicates via radio should not primarily target women who are aware of the situation but rather men as, 'if you want to change the culture of the people you shouldn't work with just women. The main target group is men, because they are controlling our lives' (MWA, 2016). Using radio, which they recognise to be an empowering tool (Forde et al, 2009) and particularly suitable to reach their audience, the Ministry is therefore reinforcing and giving credence to campaigns and is adopting a leadership role in society in one section of government which had traditionally been the domain of women's NGOs.

However, despite this new endeavour, the MWA is not naïve and acknowledges difficulties in getting policies and programmes approved. They have succeeded in institutionalising gender units in some Ministries, yet others claim to have already achieved gender equality, quoting the high number of female secretaries they have as proof, thus reflecting the discrimination which permeates this society. Regarding the election, it was adamant that campaigning for procedural changes – increasing women's quotas for example – is the responsibility of the CEC and NGOs generally. However much they support these moves through appearances on radio, they cannot initiate them. Their ongoing need to use radio as an amplifier also highlights this Ministry's lack of power and perceptions of it as a pressure group without actual authority (*Your vote is your decision*, 2016). Women's NGOs and MWA therefore faces seemingly insurmountable problems in changing opinions and raising awareness, especially as the attitudes which prevail in radio replicate those of the society they want to change. A major tool which the NGOs could use to implement changes regarding the needs of women in society is itself weakened by patriarchy. Despite occupying an established and strong position in society, women's NGOs, to which the MWA as the decision-making body is turning for support, are reliant on media to amplify their message which, in turn, are beset with the same problems. Possibilities of women's NGOs and radio making changes during these elections appeared slim in the short term, as the decision-making body which could help them is not in a position of strength and defers to others regarding decisions.

## **Conclusion**

### *Particular findings regarding women and local radio in the West Bank*

This article is important as it demonstrates radio's particular effectiveness as an empowering tool to reach individual women and to be used by groups of women as producers (women's NGOs) to reach and mobilise these women. Firstly, radio reaches individual women in myriad and diverse settings; it does not require that women stop doing whatever they are doing to attend to the radio since the activity of listening can be undertaken ubiquitously, as part of the domestic routine (Tacchi, 2009). Correspondingly it provides for a logical use of precious time devoted to other tasks. The article shows how radio permits women to gain information on sensitive issues privately or in the company of other women. Speaker listener bonds can be easily established and used to serve social and political purposes. The listener's imagination is stimulated not stunted and images which are more powerful than seeing who is speaking are formed – all of which are particular features of radio not available on other media platforms.

Secondly, radio can be used by groups of women (women's NGOs and Ministries) which occupy a less dominant position in such societies to amplify their messages – offering audiences an alternative to a wide range of hegemonic discourses – because it is cheap and effective and, because it has democratising potential (phone-ins, etc.). Despite censorship, it can be used to encourage criticism against those negatively shaping women's lives. To make radio attractive to listeners, various formats (spots and programmes) can be used strategically. Content can also be carefully selected; female actors 'appear' on spots and use local language encouraging listeners to identify with the associated message. Similarly, male actors are used to catch the attention of men in society so that their influence over women may be shaped.

### *Technical and socio-cultural characteristics of radio in conflict-affected areas*

The article highlights the key technical and socio-cultural characteristics of radio, contrasting with other media channels, making it particularly suitable to reach women in conflict-affected areas. Physically, radio is robust, cheap, durable, and does not require a mains source of electricity. Socio-culturally radio can reach socially or geographically marginalised groups since it is both economically affordable and linguistically adaptable to minority languages and dialects (in ways in which internet-provided media is not). Not only can local radio, here commercial radio, serve marginalised audiences, but audiences can mobilise and appropriate media to suit their needs. Radio can be used as an essential source of information and dialogue over large geographical diverse areas, as either a form of alternative media, uniting communities or as vehicle giving a representational voice to marginalised or isolated groups who would otherwise be unheard.

Over time the socio-cultural characteristics of radio mature as the experience of women's NGOs in the West bank reveals. The long-standing collaboration of women's NGOs with some donors and sponsors has led to a relationship of greater equality where the excessive demands of donors and sponsors have been moderated. Donor and sponsor information has evolved into patterns of co-existence whereby subject matter hitherto regarded as controversial is not 'crowded out.' The significance of this cannot be understated. Women's NGOs do not use radio in isolation but as a growing and useful part of an overall

media package. Indeed, radio's usefulness in the West Bank was recognised by being included as part of a triangular network involving women's NGOs and the MWA. In other words, women's NGOs have gained experience in instrumentalizing radio (which manifests the characteristics of this patriarchal society) to promote awareness of their campaigns and to pressure decision-makers into supporting their campaigns. Radio's characteristics (ubiquity, intimacy, affordability and so on) make it effective in reaching women generally and, as shown here, during elections. Although there needs to be more efficient ways of measuring this effectiveness, women's NGOs in the West Bank are aware that they are playing a long game and that, in this particular societal setting, awareness-raising is essential to the achievement of highly selected specific goals like increasing local female participation in elections. In either awareness raising and/or the achievement of specific goals, radio plays and will continue to play a significant part.

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