

# alhal

### Al-Hal in five paragraphs

- I am writing this column on behalf of the Editor in Chief, Nibal Thawabteh, who was blessed with a baby boy a few days ago.
- Al-Hal is overdoing the celebrations of itself! Will there be speakers and celebrations every ten issues?
- Al-Hal started as a newspaper that did not engage in flattery, and ended up as a newspaper that gives compliments to society, but is critical of its political, societal and economic authorities. Never mind!
- Al-Hal newspaper has maintained political analysis as its model, not solely for students but for all the press in general.
- The University administration was right to insist that students produce Al-Hal newspaper. This was a success, with substantial support from professionals.

Aref Hijawi - Director of Media Development Center – Birzeit University

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4 PAGES



#### Al Hal ... A model of bold journalism Khalil Hindi – President of Birzeit University

For a long time, Al Hal newspaper has been a source of pride for Birzeit University as a model of serious, bold, yet responsible, journalism. My personal admiration for Al Hal grew when it opened up space for students on its pages. However, I still look forward to it becoming a completely student-run newspaper, written, edited and designed by the students themselves, with its pioneers playing the role of guide to maintain the professionalism and excellence of Al Hal.



### A Special Issue

Ten years ago, Al-Hal was launched to chronicle the situation in language that does not deviate from the truth, does not take sides or oppose, that takes a two-fold view: one opinion and another opinion. At times it has thrived, and other times it has failed. Today it is issuing a special edition. Journalists and those involved in the press, the sons of Al-Hal, observe from a vantage point. They interpret the experience with the eyes of evaluators and researchers, discussing the reality of the media in Palestine and relevant related aspects, exhorting the Al-Hal experience with illustrations of the shortcomings to be avoided and successes to be enhanced. This all takes place under the umbrella of the ethics of a profession that genuinely seeks to become the fourth authority, away from the glare of that description or its symbolic meaning. Al-Hal looks back at its experiences, accompanied by a promise of ten more years to come of creativity, production and distinction.



# Memories from here and there



▣ Nibal Thawabteh

Ten years have passed. The Al-Hal seedling grew like a plant that the farmer knows will not survive. Actually, he did not want it to survive or to take life for more than four months until he had had the opportunity to say his piece. Nevertheless, the seedling did survive and we shared in its editions and stories, including the following selection:

### The will to emerge

The official Palestinian press is wrapped in coarse paper and people do not have the patience to open it. Put bluntly, our press is dull and, on top of that, is bit of a liar. When Al-Hal emerged as a "cute" newspaper that addressed the reader directly with no introductions, prefaces or caution, people liked it and waited for it. Some phrases were repeated often and were heard from so many sources that we even remember them by heart. They said about Al-Hal: "We look forward to it and read it from cover to cover". People also said: "We all read it, janitor to minister". This is the end of the first chapter.

### The beginning of the second chapter... endurance

Al-Hal has survived because something that benefits people endures. It was not hard to persuade the donors of its significance because it was clear. Al-Hal continued, and we knew that there would not only be four issues. This newspaper

was born to live. Its blood was not from our veins alone, but any journalist who wanted to publish a daring article that was censored by his editor-in-chief would pump his material to Al-Hal and await the reaction of officials and the public. Al-Hal's founding father and first editor-in-chief, Aref Hijawi, started the race. He wrote an article on al-aedeen (returnees) in the first issue, the pilot issue in which the newspaper took off. Everyone was talking about it: intellectuals, politicians and al-aedeen, who, obviously, were teased. The next day, the daily newspapers published two articles by two well-known writers criticizing Al-Hal and its editor, Aref. The snowball started to gather pace. It stopped at some issues and accelerated in speed at others, but it has never melted.

### The lesbian edition, Um Mazen and a phone that never stopped ringing

An early issue of Al-Hal published an interview with a woman called Zahra. She was the president of a Palestinian lesbian association. She said, "We exist and here is our address for those who wish to meet us". End of first shock!

The second shock in the same issue, specifically in the lower left quarter of the front page, was our publication of a picture of the First Lady of Palestine, Um Mazen, for the first time in a Palestinian newspaper. Our brothers at the President's Office reproached us as if we had no right to do what we did. The result of these two shocks was innumerable telephone calls in support or to denounce us. We instigated an interaction that went on for days. Contact between the press and the public had occurred.

### Mobility and a press that promotes change ... and serves the poor

Our friend Tayseer al Tamimi was the Mufti at that time. He told Basma, a victim of common-law marriage in Palestine: "I wish I could help you, but it is a hopeless case". Al-Hal reported the following: In a poor family in a refugee camp, Basma was intimidated by her eldest brother into a clandestine marriage to a rich old married man. She had two boys and a girl. The man died and the rights of the children to a birth certificate



were buried with him. The result was a dead father and a mother who was still registered as single and did not, therefore, legally have children. Al-Hal published the story on the front page, and the snowball rolled. Feminist NGOs intervened, putting pressure on the Mufti to help. Basma obtained an ID and was registered as "married", with the names of her children also recorded in her ID. The life of the family was transformed and they were recorded in government records and admitted to schools.

### A minister ...and a court

We made a simple error that occurs nearly every day in the press. But our error was a "golden error", not because it was unprecedented, but because the conclusion was that it was a good thing, or "you may hate something although it is good for you". We hated it. A minister about whom all the country is aware, yet he carries on doing it all. The good thing that happened was that he set a precedent for the Palestinian press: A minister filing a lawsuit against a journalist! Lesson learned: Do not publish before you verify, and if you do publish, it can sometimes be for the best.

### Al-Hal distributors and preventive security...temporary ban

Here, a temporary ban does not mean 'mute', but 'I am dead with fear'. This is what happened before I learned to put my mobile on mute before I go to bed. One day, the phone rang at 5 am. The voice of the distributor came through: "I have been

detrained by the preventive security services and am now in jail. Let me go to hell, but you tell me, is this a Hamas newspaper?" I rubbed my eyes and said, "No".

The front page headline sounded ambiguous for someone who does not read the material itself. It did not say whether we are for or against Hamas. We are not for our brethren in Fatah or Hamas. We are for the truth and for the people. That day, senior officials intervened and released the distributor, who told me: "God's justice is the boundary between me and your job", and he resigned. To be fair to our dear distributors, they were repeatedly put in the position of halting the distribution of the newspaper, withdrawal of certain issues, threatened with weapons, etc. Eventually, they all resigned and we then learned another lesson: electronic publishing and distribution companies are more secure.

### An open end on a dead end road

Of course the story did not come to an end. The ball is tossing and rolling, albeit with different players. But who cares? It is the goal that matters. Al-Hal has scored many goals and will continue to do so. Ten years ago, we were not sure that would happen but that was what we dreamt of. Now we dream and are certain of it [coming true].

### The failures in the past three years

We cut back on press investigations. We lost marvelous writers. We reduced the number of printed copies. The story of Al-Hal website will not be related. Colleagues are familiar with the story and maybe one of them dares to tell it.

# Evaluation of Al-Hal coverage of gender issues



▣ Nahed Abu Tu'ima

Since its publication, Al-Hal newspaper has demonstrated high quality reporting and a unique vision within the media. Yet, was its media coverage of the images of men and women in the media landscape unique? Did it act as a platform for raising sensitive issues and contributing to changing the prevailing mentality regarding our roles, or at

least challenging it? To what extent did Al-Hal go beyond the traditional patterns that confine men in the circle of control and push women towards submission and self-denial, as various media outlets unwittingly do?

### Editorial policy

Al-Hal does not direct journalists and reporters on how to handle women's issue in a special manner. It has no written editorial policy on gender issues. However, Al-Hal is a proponent of women in its own way, through directly addressing sensitive issues such as the hijab (head scarf), lesbians in Palestine or common-law marriage.

### Extent of participation by female journalists

A review of the extent of participation by female journalists in Al-Hal shows that it is growing. The past four years 2010-2014 show that professional female journalists and students wrote 59 articles in 2010. The number totaled 107 in 2011, equivalent to 30% of the total publication. This percentage increased in 2012 to 41% of articles written by female journalists.

The high participation rate can be explained by the fact that female students in the media department at Birzeit University are in the majority. It may also be concluded that Al-Hal newspaper gives more space for contributions by female students compared with other monthly newspapers.

It must be highlighted that Al-Hal does not specialize in women's issues, but articles addressing women's issues constituted at best 33% of the total issues published in 2012. A total of 15 topics were related to women's issues in 2010.

The substantial participation by female journalists on Al-Hal pages does not necessarily mean that it addresses women's issues. They contributed 72% of total published materials in issue 109 of 2014. We can see an increase in female journalists in both art and feminist journalism, versus a declining number of female journalists in economic, financial and scientific journalism. Women's issues do not have to dominate what female journalists write, but they do constitute a substantive part of a journalist's attention and concern. That is to say that

women's issues may not be a top priority in the strategic vision of Al-Hal, but gender mainstreaming from a holistic perspective reflects positively on women's issues and role in the first place and leads towards safe, balanced and integrated coverage of all topics from a gender perspective.

### Recommendations

Revise Al-Hal distribution policy because it does not reach the female community. Adopt media messages that reinforce concepts of partnership and equality through in-depth discussions.

Draft a written editorial policy for dissemination to journalists to enhance gender perspectives in all media coverage.

Train new reporters and cartoonists on good models for safe coverage of women's issues with regard to family violence, including pictures and cartoons.

Allocate a special column on the experiences and pictures of women who tried and made a difference on campus or externally to highlight their promising opportunities and lives.

Encourage journalists to address women's issues in an appropriate manner.



# A Sick Press for Sick People



✦ Aref Hijjawi

One hundred and fifty years ago, a London newspaper sent its correspondent to Liverpool to report on news from passengers arriving on board ships from the New World. A ship from Canada anchored and its passengers disembarked, heading to horse carriages. A number of press reporters mingled with them, talking and asking questions. That evening, the correspondents sat in a pub, as was their custom, each busy writing a news story or report for his newspaper. Our correspondent sat there dejectedly because he had not come across anything worth reporting. Finally, he grabbed his pen and started to make up a story: the story of Mrs. Adams, who he claimed to have met on the dock with her husband. This woman had worked for a while cleaning houses in Liverpool while her husband was seeking a living in Canada. When she stopped receiving letters from him, she sailed to Canada herself and looked for him for months until she found him living homeless on the street. She initiated a new life of hard work with him until they accumulated a large fortune. Now Mrs. Adams was coming home to Liverpool with her husband for a visit before returning to Canada in two weeks time on board Ship X. This false report impressed the Editor-in-Chief and it was published on the front page, to the

delight of the correspondent. Then the Editor-in-Chief said that he had sent a telegraph to the correspondent in Canada to meet and conduct an interview with the couple once they arrived back and to ask them about the time they had spent in Liverpool. The deceitful correspondent was hoist by his own lies and day after day, he waited for disaster to occur. One morning, the newspaper published an extended investigative report by its correspondent in Canada, including an interesting dialogue with the Adams. While the newspaper correspondent in England had lied in inventing the Adams, the correspondent in Canada also resorted to lies when he could not find the couple on board and had reinvented them again.

We wish our journalism consisted of lies as this would be better than the boring news now published. Our press was unable to mimic the lies, menaces and exaggerations of the tabloid press, nor has it acted as a serious press that publishes in-depth analysis. At its best, our press remains a parrot-like transmitter of the news agencies. At worst, it publishes articles resurrected from the graves of the fifties. Between the best and worst, a local item of news that does not smell of news may creep in. And here comes Facebook to compensate for all the triviality that we may have missed. The educated will tell you about a bizarre event even before the ignorant do. If you are doubtful about what they tell you, they will swear to God that they saw it on Facebook.

The paper press may survive for a few more decades, not only after we who are accustomed to holding a newspaper in our hands are deceased, but also because paper producers and farmers who plant forests will invent things to sustain newspapers for some time. Another reason is the inability of modern technology—so far—to address the deficiency of the abstract in human beings, who still want to hold things in their hands. Nevertheless, the paper press is not a means for raising the awareness of people. If it dies,

we will not shed a tear. Another defect to add to the parrot-like transmission from news agencies and the publication of shallow articles, is the babbling and the abandoning of core issues for trash. In denouncing our newspapers, it suffices to say that students are writing a newspaper that outweighs all the others in journalistic terms. It resembles Moses Baton, a newspaper that was meant to be a model, and was so, and which the journalistic community failed to live up to.

Global newspapers have soared the skies of freedom and plunged into the swamps of triviality. Between one extreme and the other, these clouds poured the benefits of a wealth of criticism and enlightenment for the readers. But newspapers in the Arab world cannot escape from underneath the cloak of the Sultan. Even if they did succeed, their fingers would contract from the cold and they will seize any chance of an opening in this cloak to return to its warmth again.

As the advertisements are the best thing in these newspapers, what do you think of them? While this is the case, the prevailing evil is when the advertiser takes control. He sends his advertisement and its fee together with another ad that he wants the newspaper to publish as news.

They say that the press in our country is sick. We say that the country is sick.

In the quiver, two more arrows remain: One aimed at the government and the other at the people.

To the government: Press freedom is the top priority and industry is the second. Can we publish judicial rulings issued against the corrupt? Answer: Do any judicial rulings against them even exist? There has only been a cover up. Has the state media been successful? If not, why does it carry on? Is it successful in promoting the government? It is a failure even in this regard. It is a joke. Would the private media conform in the absence of freedom? The answer is NO.

To the people: My dear people, the population

growth rate in Denmark is one-third of a percent. In Jordan, it is over three percent. That is to say, bluntly, that the Jordanian population is increasing ten times more than that of the Danes. We are growing ten times more than them, so are our economies growing at the same rate? Are our industry and agriculture growing annually ten times more than that of European countries? Or do we import Lurpak, Fiat, perfumes, cigarettes and everything from them? This people who are so adept at reproduction are also brilliant at complaining and cursing colonization. Our human surplus is crushing us. No one dares to say: "Take the bloody contraceptive pill!"

An Arab living in Germany made me laugh when he said that one of them goes wearing his bushy beard to collect the child allowance from the post office for his eight children. Yet, when a policeman hands out a ticket, this man curses the Crusaders.

We think in a strange way and mix the past with the present. To the best of your knowledge, the hatred between the British and the French is in the past. They still bear a grudge against each other today, but they do not rail about it at every moment. Rather, they coexist and cooperate. Does the West love us? Of course not, and we do not love it. The West is the cause of a few of our problems, just as we are behind some of their problems. But our intricate problems are really made by ourselves. Thus, the solution is in our hands and not theirs, and certainly not through explosive vests. The animosity between China and Japan was not born today. It has been simmering on a low light. Yet each country is progressing and advancing without referring continuously to the ancient past.

China has a worse story than ours with Western colonization. Suffice to say that Britain launched two wars against China because it banned imports of opium.

To the Arab people I say that the problem is not the media: The problem is you.

# Social investigative reporting: what journalists do not write



✦ Saleh Masharqah

The dilemma I am discussing is the role of the editor in the media and how he manages the editing cocktail. Who is he affiliated to: the public or the authority? What forms, themes, thoughts or values does he provide to audiences and readers? Is he entrusted with the daily production of knowledge like the intellectuals, or is he a subordinate employee on the margins of social capital? Where did I fail as a resident editor with students? What did I ruin in the minds of the young colleagues?

Manipulating His Majesty, the public  
One hundred years ago, following the French Revolution, philosopher Gustave Le Bon cursed the masses in his book. Following the Arab Spring, this book is back on the shelves. "There is a need to curse the public," an Arab media professor told me at a conference. Of course, these are not wise words by my friend. Quite

the opposite: There are now one hundred years of communication theories that praise the public and instate it as a Goddess of Knowledge. This occurred during the Arab Spring when the media was captivated by the flow of the masses, and when a clash took place between two interconnected groups: journalists who led the public and a public led by journalists. We should treat ourselves with greater respect, neither being led nor leading. Instead, we should guide the raging masses with daily information that enables them to form an opinion, dilute blind loyalty to ideologies or religions, by offering awareness daily in the form of information and commentaries that encourage tolerance and the ability to negotiate history without a crisis.

Some years ago, I asked my student Mohammad Murrar to write a newspaper report on tolerance among those fasting in Birzeit University and those who were not. We chose secular speakers and hardliners. We also brought in the voices of third parties who belong to both groups but are more tolerant and dress up their opinions with language, aesthetics and awareness. We produced a report that transported readers to an arena where they could put aside their fundamentalist views and employ their minds, awareness and motivations to form an opinion rather than hunkering down behind their old barricade.

One year ago, I encouraged a number of female students to discuss the hijab (head scarf) issue. We wrote a report about seven types of hijab at Birzeit University representing seven Palestinian political factions who change the form of women's hijab to

match their political nature. This issue evolved until Wafa' Saleh came out with the title The Growing Phenomenon of Taking Off the Hijab at Birzeit University. Facebook readers became agitated, railing and attacking the concept in the report, which received over 15 shares and triggered such a debate that I worried about the village girl who had written the report. I followed the debate during my night shift at the newspaper and imagined the fist fight that would break out among students on campus the next day. So, I got up early and looked at the comments on Facebook, culminating in conclusions like: "This is the work of journalists". I did not know whether this was a sarcastic comment or whether it implied that journalists are entrusted with evoking cognitive debate. I favored the second meaning and was so happy that I went to the University walking on air. The idea of the report was successful, the boldness of the young journalist had succeeded, and the public thrived on the debate. Thus, the concept of taking off the hijab had escaped from the control of both the public and journalists to a safe refuge from which I have no idea where it may lead. This experiment finished safely and will surely proceed to a better reality than where it stands now.

The conclusion with regard to the public: We should maneuver the public carefully, neither viewing them through the fascist and racist eyes of Le Bon and hypnotizing them via the media, nor treating them with impartiality and objectivity as many have advocated. We should not become entrenched in the classification of arguments, but, rather, lean towards in-

depth journalism. Do not expect an end to the process. Just stand at the edges of the masses with something useful to say, and also provide the opposite view, pro and against, to safeguard the debate without anticipating its end: the masses may reach an opinion or not. In essence, this process is about production, not about results.

## Social investigative reporting

It is true that since I started training students at Al-Hal newspaper, I have my own axe to grind with the Palestinian press, working quietly to produce a diverse array of news through social investigative reporting. However, I am not content with the percentage of only 33.4% that we achieved in 2014. This percentage should be increased, although it is higher than the percentage of reports on political news material and other items.

## Media and digital education

We have been successful in the indicator that I have been working on since the beginning of the year, namely taking care of the journalistic practices of journalists, the latest developments in the profession, media and digital education, investigative journalism, misleading advertisements, consumer journalism, hashtag management, electronic piracy, education and social networking. In figures, this indicator scored 10.5%, a percentage that can be increased in the future. I say we succeeded because the local media does not address these news trends. The local media engages in technical production, but does not examine, analyze or assess the sociology of electronic commodities.



## Between storytelling and reporting a story



Sam Bahour\*

Every culture has stories, whether for entertainment, education, cultural preservation, or instilling moral values. Many times, stories address more than one goal simultaneously. These stories are sometimes repeated so often in a family or community that they take on the characteristics of a fairy tale, but not without retaining a hint of the underlying truths. The life cycle of a story from fact to fiction is a discussion for another time, but let's bear in mind that when a story's main medium of travel is oral, a mix of fact, improvisation and embellishment are usually present in the final result.

News, on the other hand, is a special form of storytelling. News is an industry based on multiple professions working in tandem to produce news stories that inevitably and regrettably are filtered through a particular lens in the service of a particular set of values. Moreover, the news biz in today's high-speed and hyper-connected digital world is more specialized than ever with deeply embedded, mutually competing agendas, whether the media sector wants to admit this or not. Objectivity in journalism is a relic of past times, rarely found and often not even sought in the production and presentation of today's news offerings.

News is to storytelling what olives are to consumers. The final product, be it a plump green olive or a crisp, well-written news story, on the surface looks great, but looks are only part of the picture. For a tasty olive to reach our table, it takes a community working in concert; each stage of the olive's life cycle requires its own professional expertise. The farmer plants the trees, not too close together, fertilizes them, and prunes them after every harvest. The olive pickers carry the brunt of the work, stripping every branch of its yield, sifting them of leaves, and bagging them for milling. Milling is done by other professionals who receive whole olives and transform them to a golden oil. Post-harvest, the olive tree is pruned. This is an age-old art, which no two farmers will do identically. Pruning aims to maximize light penetration and air circulation inside the canopy, reduces pests and diseases, prevents aging of the canopy, and eliminates dead wood. Each stage has its practitioners, each

depending on the prior stage to be able to apply their skills to pass the baton on to the next stage. If any stage is mishandled, the olive may still look and feel like an olive, or olive oil, but to a trained eye or tongue, weaknesses in the process are fully apparent.

Like the olive process, so goes the news process. A story happens. A trained journalist is paid to cover it. During news gathering, important pieces of information are collected as well as irrelevant data or unverifiable tidbits. A good journalist will sift out much of what is erroneous or irrelevant in the story, after which the baton is passed to an editor. Like the olive tree pruner, the editor is seeking to shed maximum light on the story while dispensing with the unverifiable tidbits. Sources are then verified and facts are checked. Only after this process is executed can a story move on to an entirely new stage, that of publishing and distribution. This brief portrayal of the process clearly illustrates that the life cycle of a story is just that, a cycle, during which every professional is meant to apply his or her skills to pass on the story to the consumer in the most informative (dare I say objective) way possible (despite the corporate influence on how and what gets reported and the systemic decline in objectivity in our era).

So what does this all have to do with Palestine and our dissemination of our news stories? A lot.

Before we make the jump to the global community, let's briefly reflect on our own domestic news market. With very few exceptions, the process is broken. Like the olive, stories emerge as news, but for any observant consumer of news, much remains to be desired from our mainstream news outlets. Not to dwell on the deficiencies in the system, but how many times is opinion passed on as news, or advertising presented as a news story? How many corporate or public figures draft their own stories and have them published as is, grammatical mistakes and all? Worse yet, how many journalists are on payrolls other than that of their news outlet employer, in order to promote a particular person, company, or political track? This is not the time to evaluate these shortcomings, but let us acknowledge that they exist and make sure we understand that they present a serious obstacle to the advent of a much more demanding and unapologetic global news market.

### Back to storytelling

In oppressed communities, such as ours, stories play a crucial role in transmitting from one generation to the next a people's history, as well as the history of their struggle for freedom. We do storytelling well.

Recently the Danish House in Palestine showed a new critically acclaimed English (with Arabic subtitles) documentary by filmmaker Mahdi Fleifel titled, "A World

Not Ours". When Mahdi was nine years old, he moved to Denmark with his parents. Growing up, he went back to his Ein el-Helweh Refugee Camp every summer, the refugee camp in southern Lebanon where his grandfather, uncle and best friend all still lived along with 70,000 other Palestinian refugees. Based on a wealth of personal recordings, family archives, and historic footage, the film portrays three generations living in exile and gives an intimate, often humorous, view of the utter emptiness dominating their daily lives.

Mahdi's story is a real one, heavy with real characters and, real places and brutal glimpses into our real tragedy. Other artists among us, like writer Fida Jiryis, tell our people's stories in a fictional and lighter way, but with an underlying factual setting that anyone familiar with the reality immediately picks up on. Fida is from the Palestinian village of Fassouta, near the border with Lebanon. Her Arabic short stories, titled *Hayatuna* (Our Small Life) and *Al-Khawaja* (The Gentleman), depict daily life in her village in the Galilee, which could be a village anywhere in the world. With wit, humor and an always present sense of reality, Fida brings Palestinian villagers and their daily trials and tribulations to life in a light, comic setting. Fida is one of our storytellers, and like most storytellers, one with a purpose. Hers is apparently to humanize a demonized and battered people, while entertaining the reader along the way.

Another profound effort to transmit our narrative is the Arabic book, *The Barbwire*, by ex-prisoner Esmat Mansour, who spent 20 years of his life imprisoned by the Israeli occupation. Esmat is from Deir Jireer in the West Bank. In this book he depicts Gaza, a place where he has never set foot. His entire portrayal of Gaza is through what he learned while engaging with fellow prisoners from Gaza. Gazans who read the book have noted that he was able to describe the reality of Gaza better than those living in it. Sadly, the book has yet to be translated into English or other languages in order to appeal to a much larger audience. The language barrier is a very substantial obstacle to transmitting our narrative more widely.

I, along with two American colleagues, also had an encounter with trying to transmit the Palestinian people's narrative. The timing was after the First Gulf War in 1991. My target was a Western audience. My vehicle was oral history. We set out to collect and transmit a sample collection of our entire people's story—those under military occupation, those in Israel, refugees and those in the Diaspora. The result was a book entitled, *Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians*. My co-editors were Staughton Lynd, a noted U.S. labor historian, civil rights activist and author, and his wife, Alice Lynd, the editor of *We Won't Go: Personal Accounts of War Objectors*. We not only collected

the stories of persons from different walks of life, but also professionally edited them—sifting the olives from the leaves—and meticulously corroborated what we recorded with independent references. Thus, the book is footnoted extensively and, as such, the stories carry much more legitimacy from the reader's standpoint. Testimonials such as late, former Smithsonian Institution historian Alixa Naff's gave us the satisfaction of knowing that we had contributed to a larger calling; Naff wrote that *HOMELAND* was "...riveting and moving...an invaluable resource for the study of both the social history of the Palestinians and their struggle for their homeland."

Narratives have many ways to reach a wider audience. News is only one of them.

### The news machine

Not being a journalist or media professional, I hesitate to lay out the mechanics of what needs to happen to convert our people's stories into news, and not just our people's stories about our struggle for freedom and independence, but our people's story about everything under the sun, about who we are, how we live and love, how we experience life's challenges, how we deal with tragedy, how we grow our food, dance, enjoy music, and the list goes on.

If we are to enter a global news market, which churns at an amazingly fast pace and is saturated with hyper competition, we must be able to differentiate between our stories and our news. When something newsworthy is identified, we must invest every imaginable effort to tell it in a way that connects to the average reader, through a timely human story, one stripped of any embellishment, exaggeration, or falsehood: well researched, well written, well edited, and distributed professionally; this last task being increasingly challenging given the plethora of media platforms available today.

Bottom line: despite our deep desire for a more objective and less commercialized sector, we have no choice but to learn the media industry, invest in the skills and institutions required, and play its game if we want our stories to be told. The alternative is to keep pressing the send button to thousands of unknown emails and sleeping a long night thinking that we made an impact on the world, whereas in reality we merely tapped the tip of our forefinger against the Enter button on our keyboard.

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