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2.17 Palestinian Territory, Occupied

Challenges and Obstacles in Palestinian Libraries

Majed Khader

Introduction

This chapter provides readers with an understanding of the current situation of libraries in Palestine. It offers an overview of the challenges and obstacles facing Palestinian libraries in this information age of the twenty-first century. It deals with general barriers inhibiting libraries from flourishing and functioning like peer libraries elsewhere.

Difficulties were encountered during the research process of this article. One of these was the lack of published literature on the topic of research. Lefebvre-Danset, in her article about Palestinian libraries, noted that the sources of information are scarce.¹ In several cases, the author had to use and cite material written about the governing bodies or about parent institutions of these libraries. It is obvious that when parent organizations were facing difficulties, libraries serving the populations of these institutions or organizations were also affected. For Palestinian libraries, parent institutions/governing bodies include universities, city administrations, as well as international and local organizations.

Input from Palestinian librarians and library administrators in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for this article was sparse. Several emails were sent, but unfortunately not a single response was received. A major factor that helped contribute to this difficulty in communication was a direct result of the unstable situation in the area and the unfortunate internal dispute between the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Despite all of the barriers, the author was able to collect some data to use. Several databases with scholarly articles available via some of the common gateways such as *EBSCOhost* and *LexisNexis* were utilized in the research process. Information from authentic websites such as the CIA's *The World Factbook*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Palestinian Authority* website, and selected books and encyclopedias with information relating directly or indirectly to the subject of this article were also utilized. In addition to that, the author recently had the opportunity to visit some of the area's libraries. The

1 Francolse Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine," *IFLA Journal* 35(4) (2009): 323.

collections, services, technology, equipment, and facilities were among the things that were observed during the author's visit.

To acquaint or educate the novice reader of this article about Palestine, the article will start with brief background information on the geography, languages, religions, and historical qualities of the area, followed by a presentation of introductory data on Palestinian libraries. The next section will explain obstacles and challenges facing these libraries and will end with recommendations and suggestions on what the world community (especially library organizations), librarians, and information specialists may do to help improve the current status of the Palestinian libraries.

The main goal of this chapter is to present to readers, and those interested in international librarianship, information on the state of Palestinian libraries located in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Land

Palestine, a geographical name of rather loose application,² is a strip of land located to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. Ancient Greek, Latin, and Byzantine writers used Palaestina, Palaestina Prima to refer to the providence west of the Jordan Valley stretching from Mount Carmel in the north to Gaza in the south.³ This earliest name and geographic border still vastly applies to the area known now as Palestine. Thus, Palestine essentially has natural borders that include the Mediterranean Sea from the West, the Dead Sea and the Jordan River from the east, the Egyptian Sinai dessert and the Red Sea from the south, and the Syrian Golan Heights and the southern hills of Lebanon from the north.

Palestine today consists of three entities: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel. The West Bank is about 5,860 sq. km, the Gaza Strip is approximately 360 sq. km, and Israel is about 22,072 sq. km.⁴

Language

Two official languages, Arabic and Hebrew, and several other world languages including English and French are used for daily correspondence in this area. In

2 Robert A. Macalister, "Palestine," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edn.: 600.

3 Ilene Beatty, "The Land of Canaan," *From Haven to Conquest: Reading in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948*, ed. Walid Khalidi (Beirut: The Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1971): 3.

4 U. S. Government, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Arabic is the official language. It is also the common day-to-day language for correspondence and communication at the official and street levels.

In 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israeli military forces were in charge of the occupied territories until the signing of the 1993 OSLOW Accord between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Hebrew language was introduced in the occupied territories to carry out tasks that required military approval. In addition, Hebrew is the official language of Jewish settlers who live in the occupied territories. Several other popular world languages, mainly English and French, are spoken by many Palestinians, especially educated and business people. English, for example, is commonly spoken and taught in schools from elementary classes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁵

Religion

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are the three dominant religions practiced in Palestine. Eighty-seven percent of population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is Muslims. Christianity is practiced by 8.7% of the total population.⁶ Judaism is the religion practiced by the Jewish settlers who moved to live in the West Bank settlements. It is the official religion of West Bank Jewish settlers.

Brief History

Palestine is an historic area also known as the Holy Land. It is the Promised Land for the Jews, the birth place of Jesus Christ for Christians, and one of the holy sites for Muslims. It has a very rich and long history. It is known as one of the world's cradles of civilization.⁷ Archeological records date human remains found in the area to ca. 600,000–3,000 BC to the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Chalcolithic Periods.⁸ In addition, ancient Palestine was looked at as a passageway, corridor, and the sea outlet⁹ to the surrounding people, nations, and tribes including numerous Arabian nomadic tribes and tribesmen who were dwelling towards the Palestine east line. Several members of these Arabian tribes chose to settle and stay in Palestine.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Philip K. Hitti, *History of Syria* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971): 3.

8 Walid Khalidi, *All that Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1992): 571.

9 Beatty, "The Land of Canaan," 3.

It is believed that in the early Bronze Age, 3,000–2,000 BC, the Canaanites were the first people to arrive, settle, and set up their own independent government in Palestine.¹⁰ Later on from 2,000 BC – the birth of the Christian era, several other old nations, civilizations, governments, and tribes conquered and settled in Palestine, including the Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Ptolemies, Seleucids, Maccabees, and the Roman Empire emerged.¹¹

New inhabitants, and other nations and tribes continued to move in, invade, or conquer Palestine or part of it after the birth of the Christian era. Among the most influential powers that were part of Palestine's history were the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic State, and the Crusaders. However, the majority of the estimated 600,000 inhabitants were Arabs, either Muslims or Christians.¹²

An Overview of Palestinian Libraries and Archival Centers

Based on the data and reports published by the Palestinian Authority and independent researchers and scholars, approximately three hundred libraries were identified in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The known categories of these libraries are as follows.

Academic Libraries

Between the years 1930–2004, 49 academic institutions of higher education were founded in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹³ These institutions are categorized as: Traditional Universities, Open Education Universities, University Colleges, and Community Colleges. In terms of affiliation and financial support, these institutions were categorized as public, governmental, private, and UNRWA (United Nations).¹⁴ Many academic institutions were developed and upgraded from two year colleges to university status. Obviously, libraries are among the most important components of these institutions. The building size and condition, collections, and services provided by these libraries vary from one library to another. Affiliation, category, and institutional history are

10 Khalidi, *All that Remains*, 574. Beatty, "The Land of Canaan," 4.

11 Khalidi, *All that Remains*: 571.

12 Ian J. Bickerton, "Palestine," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 15 (1902): 605.

13 Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, <http://www.mohe.gov.ps/Uploads/admin/Matweyeh2010.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2009).

14 United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict," <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/FactFindingMission.htm> (accessed November 21, 2009).

some of the major factors that affect these institutions, followed by minor factors such as size, services, and the general condition of the institutional libraries.

Among the oldest and largest academic libraries in Palestine are Birzeit University Library, Al-Najah University Library in the West Bank, and the Islamic University Library and Al-Aqsa University Library in the Gaza Strip. The Al-Quds Open University was founded in 1991. This institution has the highest enrollment in comparison to other traditional institutions. The most recent report by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education indicates that Al-Quds Open University's enrollment has more than half of the total enrollment of all traditional universities combined. The Al-Quds Open University has small remote libraries linked to its regional campuses located at various sites in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For a complete list of Palestinian Higher Education Institutions, please see <http://www.mohe.gov.ps/Uploads/admin/Matweyeh2010.pdf>.

Public Libraries

Public libraries are not new in the Palestinian territories. Historic and large Palestinian cities such as Jerusalem and Nablus were known for their public libraries even before the Israeli occupation in 1967. In a recent report, 119 municipalities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip reported having public libraries.¹⁵ Besides Jerusalem and Nablus, many other Palestinian municipalities including Hebron, Gaza City, Jenin, Jericho, Qalqila, Rafah, Ramallah, and Tulkarm¹⁶ have public libraries.

In terms of support, finance, and affiliation, Palestinian public libraries can be categorized as municipalities' public libraries or NGO supported public libraries. Municipalities' public libraries are mainly funded by their local city tax funds, donations, grants, and some governmental assistance. The NGO-supported public libraries are functioning and operating from funds and materials donated from local as well as worldwide governmental charitable organizations (NGOs).

Private Libraries

As in some other parts of the world, a number of prominent Palestinian individuals and families started their own personal or family libraries. Initially, access to the collections of these kinds of libraries was restricted to family

15 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 323.

16 Erling Bergan, "Libraries in the West Bank and Gaza: Obstacles and Possibilities," IFLA Council and General Conference: Conference Proceedings, 2000, ERIC ED 450734, <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/170-172e.htm>: 5–7.

members, friends, neighbors, and visiting scholars. It wasn't until later that these libraries opened their doors to the general public. The Khalidi Family Library and the Ansari Public Library, both located in Jerusalem, are classic examples of private libraries in Palestine. The Khalidi Public Family Library was opened in 1900. The Ansari Public Library history goes back to 1959, but it was opened to the public in 1985.¹⁷

School Libraries

Palestine schools are categorized as public, private, and schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Ideally, libraries should be among the essential resources for each school. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the 2,276 schools in Palestine. It was reported that less than 40% of the governmental schools (public schools) have libraries.¹⁸ Private schools as well as UN supported schools (UNRWA) may be better off in regards to library services.¹⁹ This doesn't mean that these schools have perfect library resources, but at least students may have better access to library resources than their counterparts enrolled at public schools. For more information about Palestinian schools, please visit <http://www.mohe.gov.ps/ShowArticle.aspx?ID=335>.

Special Libraries

Bergan cited a survey that reports that there are more than 100 special libraries in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.²⁰ Lefebvre-Danset added that Palestinian special libraries are mostly very small religious or thematic units.²¹ Palestinian special libraries may fall into one of the following three categories based on support, association, and affiliation. One category is associated with local organizations, foundations, and civic services or political institutions such as Al-Haq Human Rights Organization Library, Women Studies Center Library, and the Arab Studies Society Library. The second category is affiliated with governmental or semi-governmental offices such as the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Library. The third category of Palestinian special libraries is the one that has connections or affiliations with religious establishments such as mosques and churches.

Examples of this third category of special libraries are Al-Aqsa Mosque Library and Bethlehem Bible College Library.

17 Bergan, "Libraries in the West Bank and Gaza": 4.

18 Ibid.: 12.

19 Ibid.: 13.

20 Ibid.: 8.

21 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 323.

Other Types of Libraries

The phrase “other types of libraries” may be misleading. These kinds of libraries could be added to the lists of public, school, private, or special libraries due to the nature of their collection and function. Such libraries include the Palestinian National Library, the Palestinian Digital Library, and the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) Libraries.

Problems and Challenges Facing Palestinian Libraries

Due to the complicated, unstable, unresolved, and long-lasting Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Palestinians as well as service oriented organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been suffering. Palestinian libraries and archival institutions have been struggling the most to meet their clients’ information needs. Most libraries have not developed much to improve their conditions and services from the short honeymoon period after the signing of the OSLO Accord in 1993. Palestinian librarians along with professional librarians from the international community who visited area libraries and assessed Palestinian libraries’ current situation reported disappointing news and data on the conditions of these libraries. Mr. Sami Batrawi, Head of the library directorate in Palestine, summarized the overall situation of Palestinian libraries by stating that “most of these libraries lack resources and facilities.”²² An American Library Association (ALA) delegation that visited the area on November 1997 reported that, “an inspection of several libraries revealed sparsely stocked collections, cramped reading rooms, woefully outdated reference books and few – and in some cases no – periodicals and microfilm readers.”²³ Hamilton and Bakken reported under-developed library infrastructure and other serious problems.²⁴ Lefebvre-Danset reported that very few Palestinian libraries meet international standards, most often suffering from the lack of dedicated buildings, equipment, professional skills, and especially funding.²⁵

Palestinian libraries are still in a dire and depressing situation. Based on the published literature, some of the major problems and obstacles facing Palestinian libraries include the following.

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- 22 Sami Batrawi, “Libraries in Palestine: The Library Directorate and its Role in Developing the Palestinian Libraries,” 2007, <http://librarians.ning.com/forum/topics/649152:Topic:4243> (accessed April 15, 2009): 2.
 - 23 Ron Chepesiuk, “Field Trip to Palestinian Libraries Yields Audience with Arafat,” *American Libraries* 29(1) (1998): 42.
 - 24 Stuart Hamilton and Frode Bakken, “Preliminary Report and Recommendations Form an IFLA / FAIFE-Mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” *Library Times International* (October 2007): 15.
 - 25 Lefebvre-Danset, “Libraries in Palestine”: 323.

Lack of security and protection for libraries, archives, and archaeological and cultural heritage centers. This is one of the major problems that has been facing Palestinian libraries. Several reports were published documenting the security and protection issues. Julien Anfruns, President of The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) reported information on the recent destruction and damages that occurred in the Gaza Strip during the January 2009 Israeli attack. Anfruns²⁶ wrote that two municipal libraries in Amoghazi and in Juhur-el-Deek were completely destroyed and that the libraries of Islamic University and the Tal el-Hawa branch of the Al-Agsa University were severely damaged. Al-Houdalieh²⁷ reported looting of artifacts in the Safa village, 22 km northwest of Jerusalem. The International Responsibilities Task Force of the American Library Association's Social Responsibility Round Table published a report that includes a list of 33 facilities including university libraries, cultural centers, municipal libraries, government archival offices, human rights organization libraries, public institutions, cultural centers, etc. which were damaged or were target of destruction, looting, or vandalism.²⁸ Twiss indicated that this report does not pretend to be comprehensive.²⁹ Reported damage includes confiscation of computers, damage to windows and doors, destruction of books, CDs, tapes, equipment, and other educational materials, looting several libraries' contents, defacing maps of the Middle East, graffiti, and other forms of destruction.³⁰

Lack of an adequate number of professional staffing. Numbers of librarians with a professional library degree (MLS) or its equivalent are very limited in the country. During the past ten to 15 years, several reports on the status of Palestinian libraries pointed out this problem. Batrawi, for example, reported from a study carried out by a group of Palestinian librarians on the status of all Palestinian libraries (school, public, and university) serving the general public. The study shows that only 7% of those surveyed had an academic qualification.³¹ Bergan added that none of those answering to this study had a PhD in Library and Information Science.³² In support of the finding of this study, an ALA delegation which visited the area on November 1997 observed and

26 Julien Anfruns, "Cultural Heritage in Gaza Damaged in Great Danger," Blue Shield Organization, http://www.ecovast.ru/images/ICBS_Gaza.pdf (accessed April 18, 2009).

27 Saleh Al-Houdalieh, "The Destruction of Palestinian Archeological Heritage: Saffa Village as a Model," *Near Eastern Archeology* 69 (2006): 103.

28 Tom Twiss, "Damage to Palestinian Libraries and Archives During the Spring of 2002," International Responsibilities Task Force of the American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Roundtable, <http://www.pitt.edu/~ttwiss/irtf/palestinlibsdmg.html> (accessed April 21, 2009): 1-17.

29 Ibid.: 1.

30 Ibid.: 1-17.

31 Batrawi, "Libraries in Palestine": 2-13.

32 Bergan, "Libraries in the West Bank and Gaza": 13.

reported that the Islamic University in Gaza at time of the delegation visit had only three professional librarians to serve 6,000 students.³³

Lack of training and continuing education opportunities for professional librarians as well as for the support staff. Batrawi reported this deficiency in staff training. He also added that only 28% of the staff of the surveyed libraries had attended training courses in librarianship.³⁴

Lack of trained personnel in IT. Trained technicians help in all aspects of library technology including setting up computers, systems, equipment, and Teci rooms. Trained IT persons also help in the installation and running of databases and Internet services, fix minor equipment malfunctioning, and perform other tasks related to technology in libraries. But there are not many trained professionals in information technology in the country and it is affecting the progress of libraries.

Lack of current technology in libraries. Batrawi³⁵ reported undeveloped IT systems and almost non-existent use of IT in information centers. The IFLA/FAIFE World Report also mentioned this deficiency and indicated that Internet access for school and public libraries is below 20%.³⁶ In addition, Burgan's article on Palestinian libraries cited the 1996 study on Palestinian libraries that reported less than 4% of the responding libraries used a computer to handle their circulation, cataloging or searching.³⁷

Poor, out-of-date, and inadequate library resources. Lack of current and adequate library resources that serve users' information needs had been observed and reported in several reports. Batrawi indicated in his survey of all libraries serving the public library resources that were poor and inadequate.³⁸ Others such as the ALA delegation which visited the Palestinian territories reported that some of the reference books in one of the visited libraries were 20 to 30 years old and no recent editions or titles were available.³⁹

Weak and poor infrastructure of library association.⁴⁰ A strong and well-structured national library organization provides guidance, leadership, expertise on several vital issues of concern to the profession, to professional librarians, and to libraries in general. In addition, a national library organization could help with initiating policies, codes of ethics, standards, professional meetings, etc. The Palestinian Library Association is very young, established in 1995, and still in the structuring process. But due to restrictions on assembly

33 R. N. Sharma, "American Librarians Visit Gaza Strip," *ACRL News* 59, number 1 (January 1998): 27.

34 Batrawi, "Libraries in Palestine": 2.

35 Ibid.: 2.

36 IFLA / FAIFE World Report 2007, "Palestine," <http://archive.ifla.org/faife/report/98%20IFLA-FAIFE%202007%20CR%20-%20Palestine.pdf>: 303.

37 Bergan, "Libraries in the West Bank and Palestine": 13.

38 Batrawi, "Libraries in Palestine": 2.

39 Sharma, "American librarians visit Gaza Strip": 27.

40 IFLA / FAIFE World Report 2007: 303.

and movement imposed by Israel, it is difficult for this association to flourish and play a major role in the development of libraries.⁴¹

Insufficient, small buildings or inadequate facilities. The ALA delegation of the American librarians which visited libraries under the jurisdictions of the Palestinian Authority in 1998 reported that none of the institutions (libraries) have adequate library facilities.⁴² In addition, a 1996 study on Palestinian libraries indicated that more than half of the libraries had less than fifty square meters to spread their activities.⁴³ A majority of the libraries have seen no major upgrades to buildings and facilities since these two reports. Lefebvre-Danset added that renovation and modification of libraries, especially the one within East Jerusalem, is prohibited.⁴⁴

Lack of freedom of movement between cities and districts in the area. This might sound like a political issue, but it has a major impact on library services and functionality. Lefebvre-Danset commented on this matter of the freedom of movement by indicating that Palestine is a territory, or more exactly three territories – the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem but isolated from each other and encircled by high walls and impassable barriers.⁴⁵ Therefore, students, library employers, and citizens cannot move freely from one area to another due to many obstacles. In addition, the Gaza Strip has been isolated from the rest of the Palestinian Authority's territories and under siege from the rest of the world for more than three years now. Interlibrary loan service, training, using library resources for research projects and class assignments, circulation of materials, and other library services and functionality have been affected by such lack of freedom to travel around the area. Daoud Zatari, President of the Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU), and Aiman Soltan wrote, "Since 28 September 2000, comprehensive and internal closure and siege has been progressively imposed by Israel on the Palestinian territories. This isolates Palestinian cities from each other, and restricts the movement of students, staff and others. This creates serious obstacles for universities and their management, limiting academic development and hindering the exchange of resources between local higher education institutions."⁴⁶ In addition to the report by Zatari and Soltan, Bergan wrote, "that the restrictions and checkpoints introduced since Oslo-process started are more numerous than ever."⁴⁷ No one can leave or enter the Strip (some exceptions may apply to diplomatic envoys). *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published several

41 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 323.

42 Sharma, "American librarians visit Gaza Strip": 27.

43 Bergan, "Libraries in the West Bank and Palestine": 50.

44 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 324.

45 Ibid.: 322.

46 Daoud Zatari and Aiman Soltan, "Challenges Facing Higher Education Development in Palestine," <http://www.eaie.org/pdf/F4/art5.pdf> (accessed June 5, 2009).

47 Bergan, "Libraries in Palestine": 9.

reports on such restrictions including the report on the blocking of hundreds of students from traveling to foreign universities,⁴⁸ an article titled “Report Assails Israeli Policy That Keeps Palestinian Students From Leaving Gaza,”⁴⁹ and a report about a deportation of a student because she was from the Gaza Strip.⁵⁰

Lack of access to essential library materials, including books and journals due to censorship. Bergan testifies to this by stating, “Through the years, many Israeli Military Orders banning specific book titles have been issued. The list reached at one point Kafkaesque proportions, when titles like George Orwell’s *1984* appeared on one of the sixty lists of prohibited books that included more than 1,600 titles.”⁵¹ Bergan added that there have been many reports on breaches of human rights, censorship by closing down newspapers, radio stations, and TV-stations that are too critical.⁵² In addition, before and after the Oslo Accord, any materials or goods including books, coming in or going out of the West Bank have to go first through Israeli checkpoints.

Outdated and under-funded library education, and a lack of knowledge of current library practices elsewhere in the world.⁵³ Definitely, the lack of sufficient budgets for libraries and restriction on the freedom of movement in and out of the Palestinians territories are the main causes of this problem.

Insufficient/reduced budget. Two factors affecting budget shortage in Palestine in general and libraries in particular are world financial crises and the hold on Palestinian tax revenue by the Israeli government. International aid and international donors including world government and non-governmental donors are the backbone of the Palestinian budget. The economy worldwide is not in good shape due to recession and inflation. Thus, donors have been postponing or decreasing their commitment of support to the Palestinian Authority as well as to civic service agencies. In addition, Israel holds hundreds of millions of dollars of Palestinian tax revenues.⁵⁴ Palestinian libraries, like other government and service oriented institutions, are suffering. Therefore, there is not enough money to pay for new materials, journal subscriptions, new equipment, or to rebuild destroyed libraries.

48 *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 22, 2009.

49 *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 29, 2009.

50 *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 29, 2009.

51 Bergan, “Libraries in Palestine”: 10.

52 Ibid.: 10.

53 Hamilton and Bakken, “Preliminary Report and Recommendations from an IFLA / FAIFE-Mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories”: 15.

54 Isabel Kershner, “Israel to Transfer Funds from Taxes to Aid Abbas,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2007: 9+, 62, *EBSCOhost* (accessed June 24, 2009), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=28207330&site=ehost-live>.

Recommendations

Previously cited obstacles blocking the way of progress for Palestinian libraries and archival centers will not be resolved overnight. A number of relief ideas, including notions that were proposed by several professionals who visited devastated Palestinian libraries could be taken into consideration. It is very important and urgent to ease travel restrictions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It will help students, employees, and citizens to travel freely to libraries for their research needs. At present, the restrictions on travel in the West Bank and the closure of the Gaza Strip are hurting libraries and their users badly. Students are not able to use the library faculties and services to fulfill their educational requirements. Libraries need new books, journals, multimedia, and computers for access to databases. Many library buildings need to be renovated to accommodate new technology. Lifting travel restrictions will certainly help to move forward.

Hamilton and Bakken also brought up the factor of restriction in an article by indicating that communication between library professionals in the West Bank and Gaza is extremely restricted, limited only to telephone and email, and communication between library professionals in the West Bank is profoundly affected by restrictions on freedom of movement.⁵⁵

It was reported in the literature that in one year only, 33 libraries and archival centers were targets of damage, destruction, or the ransacking of building holdings.⁵⁶ During the most recent war on Gaza, the library on the main campus of Al-Aqsa University in Gaza City was badly damaged by Israeli tank fire.⁵⁷ This type of activity is very harmful to the students, faculty, and other users. There are international laws safeguarding properties, belongings of libraries and archaeological sites which have not been implemented in Palestine. Al-Houdalieh made reference to the local and international laws that should be enforced including, "the Hague Convention of 1954 and the UNESCO/ICOMS conventions and principals."⁵⁸ Destruction, looting, and vandalism by Israel military forces and settlers in the Palestinian territories "to force Palestinians out of home land documents"⁵⁹ is not new. Amit added "looting was common both during and following the 1948 war and is mentioned frequently in the contemporary documents."⁶⁰ It is important to safeguard all archives and libraries for future generations.

55 Hamilton and Bakken, "Preliminary Report and Recommendations from an IFLA / FAIFE-Mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories": 15.

56 Twiss, "Damage to Palestinian Libraries and Archives During the Spring of 2002": 1-17.

57 Matthew Kalman, "Colleges in Gaza Reopen but Face more Than \$20 Million in Repairs": 2.

58 Ibid.: 103.

59 Ruether, "Destruction of hope goal of Israeli rampage: Vandalism part of systematic effort to force Palestinians out of homelands": 16.

60 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 325.

In the age of information of the twenty-first century, it is important to build internal professional networks because it will benefit local libraries in many ways including resource sharing and links with international professional and intercultural networks.⁶¹

Palestine is a very poor country and money is needed to rebuild destroyed libraries, maintain existing buildings, replace stolen or confiscated materials, purchase new materials, pay for new services, and even employee salaries. The world community is very helpful and donates money but it is not enough and more financial help is needed to improve libraries.

The Palestinian Library and Information Association and the Palestinian Library and Information Consortium are functioning but more international community financial support is needed to uplift them. These organizations will serve as the backbone for all Palestinian libraries. Financial help and professional guidance from leading library associations and rich countries will help the library associations of Palestine to conduct seminars, workshops, training, and buy equipment for all libraries.

The Palestinian National Library and the Palestinian Digital Library, two newly born entities need guidance and directions from their counterparts such as the Library of Congress, the British Library and OCLC. These two institutions also need financial support to buy materials, and equipment and even pay the salaries of their staff.

It is important for students of library and information science in Palestine to study abroad to learn the latest library techniques and approaches.⁶² Joint efforts will bring hope to professionals and library users.⁶³ Such team spirit will bring hope to professionals and their clients. Despite all the challenges and calamities that the Palestinians have been facing, professional human resources are one of their greatest strengths. In his statement to the Delegation of American Librarians, President Arafat stated that, "We are the highest educated people in the Arab world.... out of 1, 000 people eighteen have Master's and or Ph.D. degrees."⁶⁴ Opportunities and support are what professional Palestinians need to be among the world's main contributors to the well of humanities. Some world libraries have already started helping and guiding libraries in Palestine but more help is needed. For example, Birzeit University Library in Palestine and Tromsø University and Telemark College Libraries in Norway have decided to work together on an Open Repository Project. This partnership, "will give global access to doctoral and master thesis and scientific

61 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 325.

62 Hamilton and Bakken, "Preliminary Report and Recommendations from an IFLA / FAIFE-Mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories": 15.

63 Lefebvre-Danset, "Libraries in Palestine": 331.

64 Sharma, "American Librarians Visit Gaza Strip": 28.

publications produced at Birzeit.”⁶⁵ This unique project should help all parties involved. Birzeit would have its own Master’s Thesis and doctoral dissertation database. Norwegian students would be able to broaden their research resources by accessing research related to their area of specialty and conducted by their peers from the international community.

Exchange of librarians will give an opportunity to Palestine libraries to work and learn from foreign librarians to improve services, collections, and technology in their libraries and foreign librarians will learn more about libraries in Palestine. Elturk, a U.S. librarian who visited the region, proposed considering an adoption and the establishing of brother and sister libraries.⁶⁶ Adoption is different than an exchange program. It is a commitment from one party towards the other who is in need of such support.

In the United States and in many other countries, librarians evaluate their library collection periodically. Due to the evaluation process, many useful weeded resources could be recycled and used by libraries in the developing nations including Palestine. In fact, the enrichment of Palestinian library resources was called for by many professional experts who visited Palestinian libraries and testified to the need for improvements to meet minimum standards. Sharma, Chair of the ALA delegation who visited the Palestinian territories wrote, “the delegation firmly believes that Gaza Strip/West Bank institutions need books, journals, technology, and proper guidance to develop their libraries.”⁶⁷ Sharma added that some of the reference materials are 30–40 years old and no recent additions or titles are available.⁶⁸ Other international librarians including Elturk, Bergan, and this author have noticed this terrible condition of Palestinian library collections.

To meet accreditation and international standards, Palestinian libraries are in desperate need of new publications and new library technology. Recycled materials will enrich the collections. Supporting Palestinian libraries, especially academic libraries, with newer publications, or by granting them access to scholarly databases and journal subscriptions will definitely improve services. An upgrade to these libraries’ computers and systems is also needed. Such an upgrade will improve services for the benefit of all. When the main library at Birzeit University switched to a freely available Open Source Software (OSS), their old computers as well as the new computers started to perform. This upgrade brought a new lease of life to the library and created a

65 EIFLE.net, “Open Repository in Birzeit University: Palestine-Norway Partnership,” http://www.eifl.net/cps/sections/services/eifl-oa/oa-news/2008_09_11_open-repository-in (accessed July 7, 2009): 1.

66 Ghada Elturk, “Palestinian Libraries: Little Pieces of Heaven in Hell,” *Progressive Librarian* 21 (2003): 1–5, http://libr.org/pl/21_Elturk.html (accessed April 15, 2009).

67 Sharma, “American Librarians Visit Gaza Strip”: 28.

68 Ibid.: 27.

high-speed network that pleased staff and astonished students.⁶⁹ Dr. Ghanem, Head of the Electrical and Computer System Engineering department at Birzeit University testified to this fact by saying, “OSS stimulates local innovation and transfer of knowledge by providing Palestinian software developers with the opportunity to contribute to the global OSS community, as well as OSS systems and applications.”⁷⁰

Dr. Moain Sadeq, Director of the Department of Palestinian Antiquities of Gaza, issued an appeal a few years ago for the establishment of a library or library collections on ancient Near Eastern studies to serve the information needs of archeological studies students at the local universities. In his appeal, Dr. Sadeq indicated that creating such collections, “would greatly advance the intellectual life of both students and scholars living and working in Gaza.”⁷¹ This type of initiative from foreign librarians will certainly help libraries in Palestine to grow and improve.

The country needs more library schools to train professional librarians with first-hand knowledge and experience in information technology database structure, digitization, technical services, acquisitions, library management, and reference.⁷² It will help Palestinian libraries to hire professional librarians with proper academic credentials. Elturk is of the view that it is important to have a good list of professional contacts in the country to move forward, plan and implement the suggested path to improve libraries and librarianship. She wrote, “Establishing contacts with the Palestinian libraries and communicate via these contacts when opportunities arise to help.”⁷³ Such contacts will facilitate communication, convey and report on accomplishments and needs, and serve as area resource persons.

To overcome the closure, roadblocks, siege, and the rigorous movement restrictions frequently imposed by Israel on Palestinians of the occupied territories and the Gaza Strip, e-learning is an alternative. Libraries of all kinds, including academic libraries could be the ideal institutions to take leadership in this area. Several articles on e-learning in Palestine including the ones by Abuziz on “Needs and Context of ODL at the Palestinian Institutions,”⁷⁴ and Shraim and Khlaif on “An E-Learning Approach to Secondary Education

69 IFAP, “IFAP Success Stories: Open Source Software Brings a New Lease of Life to Libraries in Palestine,” <http://www.unesco-ci.org/cgi-in/ifapstories/page.cgi?g=Detailed%2F22html;d=1> (accessed July 22, 2009): 1.

70 Ibid.: 1.

71 Moain Sadeq, “An Appeal to Establish a Library for Ancient and Near Eastern Studies in Gaza,” *American Schools of Oriental Research Newsletter* 54(1) (Spring 2004): 13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 29, 2009).

72 Hamilton and Bakken, “Preliminary Report and Recommendations from an IFLA / FAIFE-Mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories”: 16.

73 Elturk, “Palestinian Libraries”: 4.

74 Abuzir, Yousef. Needs and context of ODL at the Palestinian institutions. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*; Winter2010, 11(4).

in Palestine: Opportunities and Challenges,”⁷⁵ addressed e-learning in the Palestinian territories with emphasis on challenges and opportunities. It is an opportunity for libraries to take the lead in this area and accept the responsibilities to operate such a service because it will help to communicate better with library users and help them in their research needs.

Conclusion

It is the responsibility of all who believe in social justice for everyone to stand with the rights of the Palestinian people to receive what citizens from the neighboring countries are receiving with regard to library services. Many of the more than ten million Palestinians, half of whom are within what was known as Historic Palestine, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and inside Israel⁷⁶ cannot wait to see their rights, including the freedom to read, reinstated. Dina Matar’s book “What it Means to be a Palestinian,” and Ata Qaymari’s article on the terrible condition of education in East Jerusalem,⁷⁷ are a few from the thousands of resources that describes the crucial situation of libraries in the Palestinian Territories.

The Palestinian library community, librarians, staff, and library users are always appreciative of individuals, organizations, or government entities who understand their legitimate information needs. The list of these valid needs is always on the rise due to the depressed political and economic situation in the Palestinian territories. Some of these needs include: protecting and upgrading library buildings and facilities, availability of up-to-date technological equipment, staff training, collection development, and library services in the twentyfirst century. The Palestinian library community and even the general Palestinian public are optimistic about a bright future for their libraries in the information age with the support from the world library community.

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75 Shraim and Khlaif on An E-Learning Approach To Secondary Education In Palestine: Opportunities and Challenges. *Information Technology for Development* 16(3) (2010).

76 Matar, Dina. What It Means to be Palestinian, xii, 2011.

77 Qaymari, Ata. “Education In East Jerusalem.” *Palestine-Israel Journal Of Politics, Economics & Culture* 17.1/2 (2011).

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