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Final Report of International Internship Grant-West Bank-Summer 2007

With the help of the Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Internship Grant, I was able to spend the summer of 2007 in the West Bank, working to produce a documentary about the Ma'an Television and Radio Network. Based in Bethlehem, Ma'an is the Palestinian Territories' only major media content provider that is free from official political or religious affiliation. The documentary, *Live From Bethlehem* focuses on Ma'an's struggle to remain independent in such a volatile environment. Our approach was multi-faceted, looking at the station from an institutional perspective, as well as on the level of individual employees.

Most of my summer was spent following the people who make Ma'an run. I spent weeks with Amira Hanania, a twenty-six year old journalist, radio-host and documentary producer, as well as the mother of 3 year-old twins. I followed her as she covered breaking news, edited feature stories and made surprise calls to delinquent European Union officials during her radio call-in show. I waited with her at checkpoints, drank her husband's experimental cocktails and stood in as various super-villains while Ricardo and Michael (the twins) took turns being Spider-Man. I was able to see first hand the challenges she faced as a Palestinian, as a woman and as a journalist who refuses to compromise her professional ideals and ethics.

I sat in the office of Nassar Laham, chief editor of Ma'an's News Agency and one of the region's most respected journalists. From Nassar I learned that, at least for his

generation, the line between journalism and activism is blurred as a matter of perceived ethical necessity. For him, a water shortage in Nablus is not a story to report, but instead a problem to solve. His investigation of the matter was only useful in so far as it played a role in the solution.

For days on end I pointed my camera at Muhammed Fawzi, who was busy pointing his own. Muhammed and I exchanged lighting techniques and talked about what it means to be objective with camera. The answer, we concluded fairly quickly, is 'not much.' He took great joy in going out an assignment with Fadi Tanas, a Ma'an photographer who happens to be a Christian, and myself. "A Muslim, a Christian and Jew go to Ramallah," he would start. But the joke didn't have or need a punch line.

As for the money I received from the grant, the vast majority was spent on travel and lodging, although a few dollars did go to buying fruit snacks for Ricardo and Michael. The results of the project are in still in progress, as the documentary is undergoing post-production. In the meantime, however, please visit www.livefrombethlehem.com for photographs, video and information on the individuals discussed above. I'm greatly appreciative for the opportunity provided for me by the Jenson family and Global Studies. My summer project has proven a great experience in terms of creative, academic and personal growth. In addition to working on the documentary, I have pursued an academic study of Ma'an and notions of independence in Palestinian media and have plans to make this part of a dissertation project.